



Integral Research Center  
Advancing Integrative Research  
for Planetary Flourishing

# INTRODUCTION: On the Deep Need for Integrative Metatheory in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century

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Forthcoming in Bhaskar, R., Esbjörn-Hargens, S., Hedlund, N., and Hartwig, M. (eds.): *Metatheory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century: Critical Realism and Integral Theory in Dialogue*. London: Routledge, 2015.

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## 1. Introduction: Toward a free-flourishing planetary society in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century is a radically new era, unprecedented in human geo-history, marked by deep and complexly interrelated global crises: ecological, economic, political, moral, and existential, to name but some of pertinence. These complex problems or crises present extraordinary dangers and pitfalls, as well as great opportunities and potentials. Due to their profound interdependencies and feedback loops, these complex and intractable crises can best be understood as a singular socio-ecological crisis, or what we call the *metacrisis* (see below). Clearly, this metacrisis is the most complex and urgent challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. It is a ubiquitous, real-world phenomenon, whose unprecedented complexity profoundly transcends the boundaries of our traditional academic disciplines and specialized research methodologies. Indeed, the metacrisis is a complex, multifaceted totality or “laminated system”(R. Bhaskar, Frank, Georg



Høyer, Næss, & Parker, 2010) which is far more complex than can adequately be addressed by piecemeal, mono-disciplinary approaches and methodologically restricted research programs. Such approaches fail to account for all its facets and their dynamic, non-linear interrelationships and are therefore incapable of providing adequate holistic accounts of the metacrisis.

In this context, comprehensive and sophisticated *integrative* frameworks are needed for three main reasons. First, complex 21<sup>st</sup>-century problems and the metacrisis at large demand frameworks that go beyond the proliferating fragmentation of knowledge and ‘grasp the big-picture’; that is, support us to effectively account for the intricate multidimensionality and dynamism of the metacrisis, foster coordination and integration across disciplinary boundaries and knowledge domains, and ultimately help generate transformative praxis that can optimize the conditions for planetary flourishing. Second, integrative metatheory can serve a crucial emancipatory function by helping us to identify the real causes of social pathology, oppression, and alienation. Third, to resolve the metacrisis we need to expand the purview of our vision and imagination to develop ideas about what human beings are capable of and what are the conditions for their universal free flourishing; and metatheory is well placed to assist with this by articulating an integrated descriptive, normative, and aesthetic vision of a concrete utopian, eudaimonic world and a coherent program for global transformation in the coming decades. Without such a vision we cannot even ‘see’ what kind of planetary society is possible. The world itself – what Bhaskar (1993/2008) refers to as alethic truth, the reality principle and axiological necessity – seems to be demanding transformation to new intellectual formations and structures of consciousness that can support new modes of praxis and engagement, apt for our contemporary context. Such formations can not only avert biocatastrophe but also actualize the world’s evolutionary potentials and profound opportunities for human development and spiritual maturation on the way to the emergence of a freely flourishing Earth community.<sup>2</sup>

In this way, integrative metatheory can contribute to a ‘lifeworld transformation’ wherein illusory or demi-real modes of thinking and acting are shed and a deeper understanding of who we are as a species, our *raison d’être*, and our place in the field of nature is cultivated. The way we understand ourselves in the world powerfully informs how we relate to and shape the world in and through the activities that reproduce or transform our social structures. That is, metatheories tend to undergird our collective modes of thought and vision around which we organize our societies. Metatheories can be viewed as the formalized intellectual expression and rationalization and/or reconstruction of larger cultural worldviews<sup>3</sup> that are in resonance with social structures. They begin as micro-level cultural phenomena that often function as blueprints for more diffuse meso- and macro-level worldviews and social structures. Therefore, apt metatheories—these new intellectual formations—are of paramount



concern if we are likewise to help birth the new cultural and social formations demanded by the planetary moment. As Charles Taylor (2004) has argued, a careful study of history reveals that often what began as ‘theories’ held by a few eventually come to profoundly inform and shape the social imaginary, first amongst intellectual elites and then in the public sphere and society at large.<sup>4</sup> In this way, one can argue that the history of socially influential ideas – metatheories and metanarratives – has tended to be a primary and disproportionate driver in the trajectory of cultural history as a whole. Thus, if we are seeking deliberate transformation of our worldview and social formation to address our complex problems, the level of metatheory appears to be a powerful leverage point.

Yet, while there are some countervailing trends (see section 3), much of the contemporary academy remains hypnotized by either the hyper-analytic, hyper-specialized, fragmented gaze of late modernity, or the sliding scale of postmodern relativism and its antipathy to integrated knowledge and meta-level understanding. Together these two orientations offer inadequate understanding(s) of our many complex problems and their root causes, let alone the socio-ecological crisis at large. Without being able to adequately illumine such root causes, the academy remains largely impotent to address and help transform them. This point is underscored by the fact that, to date, the dominant metatheories of modernity, such as positivism, have not only failed to alter fundamental trajectories of human-induced ecological degradation (Biermann et al., 2012; IPCC, 2014) but are in fact deeply implicated as underlying causal forces contributing to such trends, as has been widely argued by philosophers and social theorists alike (R. Bhaskar, 2002/2012, ch. 2; Wilber, 1995).

This book therefore takes a fresh look at the role of metatheory in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Throughout the volume, we showcase a variety of perspectives on what metatheory is, and what it ought to become to adequately grasp and address the unique and urgent context of our planetary moment. Our aim is to help ignite the potentials of integrative metatheory as an emancipatory, visionary, and transformational force vis-à-vis our complex 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges. We try to make the case that metatheory in the appropriate form provides indispensable intellectual scaffolding for the crucial psychological, cultural, and social transformations demanded by a world in metacrisis.

We do this through, first, reflection on the role and function of metatheory in geo-historical context; and, second, the development of metatheory through an exploratory-dialogical encounter between what are arguably amongst the most sophisticated contemporary metatheories, *critical realism* and *integral theory* (and to some extent *complex thought*).<sup>5</sup> The book brings together a number of voices that we feel collectively forge a bold new mosaic vision on the role of metatheory in supporting planetary flourishing in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Indeed, it is a key intention of this book to



embolden our collective movement toward such a free-flourishing planetary society in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.

In the remainder of this introduction we circle back on the state of the world in more detail and review various concepts of our complex problems, and briefly highlight what an integrative metatheoretical lens can bring to their understanding. This is followed by a discussion of metatheory in which we review various definitions on the way to offering an overarching, integrative meta-definition, which we call *metatheory 2.0*. Metatheory 2.0 stands in contrast with metatheory 1.0, which is associated with the integrative monism of modernity (see section 3). We then delineate some of the key criteria for such integrative metatheory apt for deployment in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century global context, and situate this relative to metatheories of the past. Finally, we provide a historical overview of dialogical encounter between critical realism and integral theory in which this anthology and its companion volume (R. Bhaskar, Esbjörn-Hargens, Sean, Hedlund, Nick, Hartwig, Mervyn, forthcoming, 2016) were forged, before summarizing each chapter in the book.

## 2. Hypercomplexity, wicked problems, and the metacrisis

A scientific review of the state of the world reveals a planet undergoing rapid and potentially catastrophic changes, many of which are or may become irreversible. The balance of the great biogeochemical cycles of the Earth system have been disrupted by human activities, perhaps most notably the carbon and nitrogen cycles. The former has led to changes in the global climate system and destabilized the generally favorable conditions that we have enjoyed over the past 10,000 years of the Holocene epoch. At the time of writing, we have exceeded a concentration of 400ppm CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and are on a warming trajectory that is more rapid and intense than some of the ‘worst case’ projective scenario models of years past (IPCC, 2000, 2014). Climate change means in the first instance an increasing onslaught of extreme weather events (hurricanes and typhoons, tornadoes, floods, droughts, wildfires, etc.) (IPCC, 2014), which are already destroying lives, impacting communities, and undermining humanity’s capacity to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century and beyond. Unchecked burning of fossil fuels and deforestation practices will only increase this undermining of the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing until critical thresholds are crossed and we start to experience systems collapse (whether on an economic, social, or ecological level). In addition to climate change and other biogeochemical disruptions, we have critically contaminated much of the planet’s water, air, and soil. Moreover, we are undergoing a human-driven loss of species known as the Sixth Extinction, unparalleled since the time of the Dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Other key (interrelated) concerns include topsoil loss, deforestation, ocean acidification and plastification, overfishing and the collapse of aquatic ecosystems, bioaccumulation of



toxins (which threaten primarily mammals at the top of the food chain, namely, us humans), endocrine disruption, depletion of ground water and crucial fossil aquifers, and desertification<sup>6</sup> – and all this while more than seven billion humans continue to reproduce and consume natural resources at exponentially increasing rates.

On the social plane, widespread poverty, starvation, income and wealth inequality, and social injustice – along with problems with health and obesity - persist. Corporate power has corrupted politics in many so-called advanced democracies, to the point where they are teetering on the edge of oligarchy (as appears to be the case in the United States). The media, which is supposed to be the Fourth Estate in a functional democracy, has been consolidated and corporatized. There is a widespread mood of existential alienation, disenchantment, anomie, and mental disorder. And there is widespread disagreement in the public sphere about the status of these complex issues and how best to respond to them.

The emergent global context, scale, and profound interdependency of many of the aforementioned ecological and social problems has led theorists to coin a range of neologisms to underline their novelty and urgency. According to Scharmer (2009), many of these issues can better be conceptualized as “hypercomplex problems”. Such problems are characterized by the following three features: *dynamic complexity* (defined by cause and effect being distant in space and time); *social complexity* (defined by divergent and often conflicting interests, cultures, and worldviews among diverse stakeholders); and *emerging complexity* (defined by disruptive patterns of innovation and change in situations in which the future cannot be predicted and addressed by the patterns of the past).

Other theorists, such as Hulme (2009), use the term ‘wicked problems’ in an attempt to illuminate the novel and dynamic qualities of complexity associated with many of our 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges, such as climate change. The notion of “wicked problems”, introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973), was used originally in social planning to describe a problem that is resistant to simple resolution due to the complex, open-systemic interdependencies of its multiple natural and social facets as they dynamically morph, reconfigure into emergent relational networks, and feedback on each other in complex, non-linear ways. The term ‘wicked’ is used, not in the sense of evil or any other normative judgment, but rather to refer to resistance to simple resolution. Moreover, because of such complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems, much like Hercules found in trying to slay the Hydra, according to the ancient Greek myth.

Due in part to their intricate interdependencies and networked feedback loops, while many of the aforementioned distinct problems could be understood as ‘wicked’ or ‘hyper-complex’ in their own right, we believe they can be more adequately



understood together as a complex multiplicity or crisis that is more than the sum of its parts. Edgar Morin (1999) refers to this multiplicity of interconnected wicked or hypercomplex problems as the “poly-crisis.” The poly-crisis is marked by an emergent and unprecedented level of human impact on the very structure of the Earth system that some authors refer to as the *Anthropocene*.<sup>7</sup>

Our own preferred term for this complex multiplicity is “metacrisis”. This is in part because for us it is not just a poly-crisis in the sense that it is multifaceted or there are many interconnected objective or “exterior” crises or wicked problems occurring (e.g., political, economic, and ecological). These interconnected crises are also situated in a(n) (inter)subjective context of “interior” meaning making (semiosis), construal and response that includes philosophical, scientific, religious, existential, worldview, and psychospiritual dimensions that are essential to include in an adequate understanding of the complex dynamics in play in order to facilitate more effective responses. In other words, what distinguishes the metacrisis from the poly-crisis is that, while the latter highlights that there are many different crises occurring simultaneously and recognizes that many of these are interconnected, the former goes a step further and uses integrative metatheoretical frameworks and distinctions to reveal the subjective as well as objective, semiotic as well as “material”, “interior” as well as “exterior” dynamics in play.<sup>8</sup> Whereas poly refers to ‘many’ crises and their objective interconnection, meta refers in addition to their higher-order unity as a complex totality or singularity that includes human construals and interventions and the possibility of a more adequate metaview that grasps real future possibilities. Meta implies an overarching unity or identity that holds and operates on the differences in their subjective as well as objective complexity. The notion of the metacrisis thus challenges the idea of an exclusively technological set of solutions to our global challenges. Because, in a context of generalized power<sub>2</sub> (power-over) relations both construals and responses will be contested, resolution of the metacrisis will involve among other things ‘hermeneutic hegemonic/counter-hegemonic struggles’ (R. Bhaskar, 1993/2008, pp. 62, our emphasis). Metatheory is needed inter alia to orient and support the coordination of these struggles globally. Its metaview offers an integrated perspective of the human subject in relation to the world. Without it, we can’t even ‘see’ the poly-crisis, let alone construe it adequately or relate to it effectively; with it, new realities and leverage points for impact are highlighted. Metatheories have co-evolved or co-emerged with the metacrisis. On the one hand the metacrisis demands and in part drives the emergence of integrative metatheory. On the other hand integrative metatheories allow one to see and engage the metacrisis in its full holistic complexity. They thus present us with unprecedented opportunities for helping to effect a transition to a new sustainable form of life. They can help empower us to make it through the collective rite of passage that the metacrisis necessitates.





As mentioned above, critical realism, integral theory, and complex thought are arguably among the most sophisticated contemporary integrative metatheories. We feel that all three can learn from each other in profound ways and so become more robust and powerful for addressing the global moment, both individually and collectively. This volume is all about advancing this strategic vision – building concrete utopian vistas and *phronesis* or situated power-aware *practical wisdom* (R. Bhaskar, 1993/2008; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Tyfield, 2015, forthcoming) and compelling, realistic theories and practices of transition and transformation that operate from and toward real future possibilities.

### 3. Metatheory and the Emergence of Integrated Knowledge

There are many important approaches that have contributed to the integration of knowledge in the face of widespread disciplinary and methodological fragmentation emerging across the planet. These include inter-, multi-, cross- trans-, and post-disciplinarity, post-normal science, mixed methods approaches (R. Bhaskar, 1993/2008, p. 62our emphasis; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011); developmental action-inquiry (Torbert, 1991, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2004); action research (Chandler, 2003; P. Reason, Bradbury, H., 2001; P. Reason, Torbert, William., 2001); systemic intervention (Midgley, 2001); integrated assessment modeling (Parson, 1995); team science (Bennett, 2010; Trochim, 2008); earth systems science (Earth, 2014); biological “integrative pluralism,” (Mitchell, 2003); the “synthetic philosophy of contemporary mathematics” (Zalamea, 2013); “integrative thinking” in organizational development (Martin, 2009), “cybersemiotics” (Brier, 2013); Bryan Norton’s (2005) approach to sustainability through adaptive ecosystem management; “interpersonal neurobiology” (Siegel, 2012); “transmodernism” (Dussel, 1995, 2002) and “integration and implementation sciences” (Bammer, 2013), meta-analysis (Cooper, 2009) and systematic reviews (Gough, 2013).

These integrative approaches are being developed within a single discipline or knowledge domain, or between a limited selection of them. A much smaller number of approaches attempt to “include” or encompass in some sense all the general domains of human knowledge—from the arts and humanities to the social and natural sciences. These are the ‘heavyweight’ integrative metatheories of our time: the philosophy of critical realism, founded by Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014), and its cognate social theory; integral theory founded by Ken Wilber (1949-); and complex thought, founded by Edgar Morin (1921-). They represent some of the most advanced expressions of macro-level integrated knowledge that encompasses, and/or articulates an orienting metatheory for, all domains of human inquiry. In order to situate the particular status of these three metatheories, a deeper discussion of metatheory in general is called for.



Metatheory fell on hard times in the post-sixties cultural milieu in which postmodernism and poststructuralism flourished in the humanities and much of the social sciences. There was a widespread disdain for abstract, big-picture thinking and grand meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1984). Many of the ensuing critiques, which accused metatheories of having hegemonizing, totalizing ambitions that ignored the diversity of the world and its construction within discourse, have a certain validity, but in our view apply largely to what we call ‘old-school metatheory’ or metatheory 1.0. Metatheory 1.0 is essentially modern positivist metatheory, rooted in discredited metaphysical assumptions, and insufficient in its methodological transparency. For example, this kind of metatheory was prominent amongst some of the philosophes of the European Enlightenment, such as the founder of positivism in its modern sense, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte developed various big-picture theories, including speculative developmental schemes, inadequately grounded in either transcendental or empirical methods. Comte’s metatheory was born largely of speculation, unchecked by the rigors of scientific peer-review, proclaiming a unilinear, triumphalist developmental progression from ‘primitive’ levels of social evolution towards the ‘civilized’ status represented by the modern West and its ‘positive’ knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it is an example of a monistic approach to the integration of knowledge in the form of grand and totalizing theory. According to Edwards (2010, p. 51), “one central aim of modernist social science is to search for theoretical monism” – what George Ritzer (2001) refer to as the aim “to discover general laws of human society and to put them together systematically in the form of [grand] sociological theories”(p. 116). This form of theorizing is certainly a form of big-picture theory, but is not grounded in a procedural rationality; that is, a transparent methodology available for social validation or refutation in an open, democratic style. As Edwards notes, “a key reason that overarching theory in particular has always struggled to gain scientific credibility is its lack of a solid methodological basis” (p. 46); to which critical realism would add that its metaphysical assumptions are often vulnerable to transcendental critique; and integral theory would add that it also lacks adequate epistemic reflexivity (e.g., situating its claims in relation to relevant structures of interiority). The proclamation of such grand meta-narratives, popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, clearly grounded in Eurocentric biases and power dynamics much more than rigorous empirical analysis, touted under the pseudo-objective guise of ‘positive social science’, has been a major contributor to the cultural trauma in the West in relation to metatheory and to the barrenness of much social science. To be clear, such a power<sub>2</sub>-laden and -rationalising metatheory has little to do with a metatheory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, except insofar as the latter builds on a demonstration that the former is false, misleading or inadequate. We hesitate to call it a ‘metatheory’ at all; its name within Bhaskarian philosophy is ‘ideology’ (see especially R. Bhaskar, 1986/2009).

In contrast to metatheory 1.0 and in keeping with an understanding of it as ideology, we propose the notion of *metatheory 2.0*, a broad category of metatheorizing that we





argue is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Metatheory 2.0 can be defined as a form of big-picture or integrative theory grounded in the following criteria or principles: methodological transparency and judgemental rationalism, epistemic reflexivity and relativity, ontological realism and comprehensiveness, and integrative pluralism (see Table 1). Methodological transparency refers to the reflexive disclosure of the methodology and methods (or injunctions) from which knowledge claims are derived. Thus, metatheory 2.0 adheres to a procedural rationality or methodological transparency that is open to ongoing rigorous assessment or criticism in terms of clearly defined validity criteria. Moreover, it sustains the possibility of judgemental rationalism, which will in general depend on ethical reflexivity and responsibility, in the context of the actuality of epistemic relativity and the necessity of ontological realism. In addition, metatheory 2.0 engages a robust epistemically reflexive inquiry in relation to the assumptions and salient epistemic structures of the research—a kind of researching the researcher (N. H. Hedlund, 2008)—so as to both situate one’s knowledge claims therein and potentially mitigate problems of inter-individual variability and subjective bias (N. Hedlund, 2010; N. H. Hedlund, 2008). Both methodological transparency and epistemic reflexivity enrich the dialogical process connected to the final stage of the research process—that of social validation. Given our epistemic fallibility as embodied personalities engaged in epistemically relative inquiries, one function of such practices is to enhance the peer-review process surrounding the relative validity, utility, strengths, and limitations of the knowledge claims of a given researcher. In the absence of reflexive transparency, it can be rather difficult to assess aspects of the relative validity of the ‘view from nowhere’ that many researchers implicitly assume (Edwards, 2010; Nagel, 1986). Ontological realism is the critical realist view that the object of inquiry is existentially intransitive in relation to the investigator and relatively or absolutely intransitive causally. Ontological comprehensiveness refers to the inclusion of all key dimensions, planes or contours of reality known to humans—including real generative mechanisms and structures in the subjective, social, and natural domains—in the purview of one’s metatheorizing. This does not necessarily mean that one is integrating theory from all of these domains per se, but rather that all these domains are considered and one’s metatheorizing situated within this context. Finally, metatheory 2.0 is an expression of integrative pluralism, as opposed to an integrative monism (as in metatheory 1.0). Integrative pluralism has two declensions, epistemological (emphasized by integral theory) and ontological (highlighted by critical realism). In regard of the problem of theoretical pluralism (for example, in the social sciences), the monistic approach of metatheory 1.0 attempts to assert a singular, totalizing, abstract, and universal overarching theory that does not account either for competing perspectives or the real depth and diversity of the world. In contrast, integrative pluralism in its epistemological mode “retains an appreciation for the multiplicity of perspectives while also developing new knowledge that connects their definitive elements to build more expansive, ‘roomier’ metatheoretical frameworks” (Edwards, 2010, p. 16). For critical realism integrative pluralism, or



developing integrative pluralism, is also and most fundamentally another name for a philosophical ontology that grasps the world as asymmetrically stratified and differentiated, dynamic and interconnected (R. Bhaskar, 1986/2009, p. 101).

Metatheory 2.0 has two distinct modes: *metatheory  $\alpha$*  (alpha) and *metatheory  $\beta$*  (beta). Distinguishing *metatheory  $\alpha$*  from *metatheory  $\beta$*  along the lines of Bhaskar's distinction between *metaphysics  $\alpha$*  and *metaphysics  $\beta$* ,<sup>11</sup> the former is concerned to articulate a general metatheory for the sciences through formal transcendental investigation of their presuppositions and those of human practical activity more generally, whereas the latter subjects the general conceptual frameworks actually deployed in scientific research and practical programmes to critical scrutiny and synthesizes their findings. Both 'underlabour' for science, and both also deploy the method of immanent critique, absencing absences in other approaches and theories and in their own past phases to arrive at more adequate and complete conceptual formations. Metatheory  $\alpha$  is the chief task critical realist philosophy sets itself, while metatheory  $\beta$  is the main focus of integral theory and complex thought, as well as Edward's (2010) approach to scientific metatheorizing. The former's transcendental method proceeds a priori but conditionally from historically relative premises and issues in a general philosophical ontology, the latter proceeds a posteriori and issues in a general scientific ontology; and each articulates a cognate epistemology and methodology. While the findings of metatheory  $\alpha$  are ex ante in relation to the findings of science, they must in the long run be consistent with those findings; the findings of metatheory  $\beta$  build critically on the findings of science and are thus ex post.<sup>12</sup> Since science itself deploys an essentially transcendental procedure,<sup>13</sup> the two kinds of metatheory beautifully complement each other. Both are intended to play an orienting and facilitating rather than prescriptive role in relation to substantive scientific enquiries; deploying a metatheory in some substantive enquiry has been usefully likened to using a word processor with an operating system running in the background. Each science has an ontology, epistemology and methodology specific to its subject matter, for which metatheory intends to underlabour in its specificity rather than provide a ready-made blueprint for all that can be mechanically applied.

**Table 1.** Metatheory 2.0 Principles

Methodological Transparency and Judgemental Rationalism
Epistemic Reflexivity and Relativity
Ontological Realism and Comprehensiveness
Integrative Pluralism



**Table 2.** Metatheory  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$

Metatheory $\alpha$	Metatheory $\beta$
Meta-philosophy	Meta-science
Philosophy of Science	Science
A priori from historically relative premises	A posteriori
Transcendental arguments plus immanent critique	Conceptual clarification and synthesis plus immanent critique
Abstract and Formal	Concrete and Substantive
Philosophical Ontology	Scientific Ontology
<i>Ex ante</i> in relation to empirically-grounded theory	<i>Ex post</i> in relation to empirically-grounded theory

Having distinguished metatheory 1.0, or ideology, from metatheory 2.0, or metatheory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century—as well as its two modes of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ —we can now turn to look at the encounter between critical realism and integral theory and the various advancements and outcomes that ensued.

#### 4. A History of the CR-IT Dialogues

In this section we present the historical context of the symposium series between critical realism (CR) and integral theory (IT), which provides more details to the general outline provided by Roy Bhaskar in his opening remarks in the Preface. We have chosen to provide a detailed overview of the encounter between these two schools of thought because we feel that it provides disclosure with respect to the method of exploratory-dialogical encounter from which the contents of this book were largely derived. We also feel that a more detailed historical overview can offer value in by potentially informing other similar initiatives.

This volume—and its sister volume *Metatheory for the Anthropocene: Emancipatory Praxis for Planetary Flourishing* (R. Bhaskar, Esbjörn-Hargens, Sean, Hedlund, Nick, Hartwig, Mervyn, forthcoming, 2016)—are among the many exciting results of over four years of deep dialogical engagement between two communities of scholar-practitioners: that of critical realism, on the one hand, and integral theory, on the other. The books, in many ways, can be seen as the result of systematic exploration and inquiry into the relationship of two of the planet's most comprehensive integrative metatheories and how each might be impacted and transformed through such an encounter; we were curious to see what kind of 'mutant hybrid-offspring' might be born through their cross-pollination, and how they might mutually empower each other with respect to real-world engagement vis-à-vis the complex global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century. Thus, this book and its sister volume can be seen as a report of the results of employing



an integrative methodology of dialogical engagement and cross-pollination of two schools of metatheoretical thought in the context of four symposia over the course of four years. We will describe highlights of each of the symposia in turn.

*A Meeting of Minds: University of Luxembourg, June 2010*

In June 2010 a number of the world's leading integrative metatheorists and philosophers converged, for the first time, at the University of Luxembourg for the international symposium "Research Across Boundaries," organized by Markus Molz and the German-based Institute for Integral Studies, to engage an historic meeting of minds and hearts.<sup>14</sup> Among those scholars were the four editors of these two volumes: Roy Bhaskar, Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, Nick Hedlund, and Mervyn Hartwig.<sup>15</sup> At this academic gathering Roy and Sean were both in the same section devoted to "Integrative Frameworks Crossing Multiple Boundaries." During the course of the event they had the opportunity to connect both in and out of session and immediately struck up a friendship. During their conversations they discovered their mutual love for and interest in philosophical meta-approaches to reality, and with growing excitement began to explore the resonances between critical realism and integral theory and how they can learn from each other. Roy, Sean, and Nick stayed in touch afterwards and soon began to envision and organize a symposium in the San Francisco Bay Area. From then on all four have maintained contact and continued to explore the rich interface between the two metatheories.

**Symposium 1: John F. Kennedy University, San Francisco Bay Area, September 2011**

In the fall of 2011, the Integral Research Center and Integral Institute, in partnership with the International Centre for Critical Realism, hosted the inaugural Critical Realism & Integral Theory Symposium at John F. Kennedy University in the San Francisco Bay Area. This four-day event was planned by Roy, Sean, and Nick to bring together established scholars from both approaches to explore the points of similarity and divergence. The goal was to create a generative space of inquiry and dialogue, edgy in its capacity to be critical of each approach, while at the same time being constructive. In order to encourage a level of intimacy and depth among participants, only 15 people were invited from each approach. Integral theory participants included:

- Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, USA
- Clint Fuhs, USA
- Nick Hedlund, USA/the Netherlands
- Jordan Luftig, USA



- Michael Schwartz, USA
- Robb Smith, USA
- Zak Stein, USA
- Roger Walsh, USA
- Lisa Waters, USA

Critical realist participants included:

- Eirin Annamo, Norway
- Roy Bhaskar, UK
- Hans Despain, USA
- MinGyu Seo, South Korea
- Mervyn Hartwig, UK
- Neil Hockey, Australia
- Paul Marshall, Spain/UK
- Leigh Price, UK/South Africa
- Tim Rutzou, UK/Australia
- Nick Wilson, UK

In addition to these two major groups there was a third group of metatheorists who were not identified with either CR or IT but familiar with both. They were invited to offer a reflective engagement outside of identification with either approach, help each approach see its blind spots, and provide an overarching view of integrative metatheory. These participants included:

- Gary Hampson, Czech Republic/UK
- Bonnie Roy, USA
- Lauren Tenney, USA

Additionally, there were a number of participants who attended parts of the event, including:

- Annick de Witt, the Netherlands/USA
- Ray Greenleaf, USA
- Sushant Shresta, USA/Nepal
- Vernice Solimar, USA

Over the course of our four days together, we had the opportunity to get to know each other in some depth. During our long formal sessions in dialogue, each side had the opportunity to introduce itself philosophically. It was a very exciting time in which we were learning each other's theoretical languages, and identifying many striking similarities, complementarities, and broad resonances. While we were also beginning to note some key differences and potential areas of incommensurability, this was not a strong focus, and we did not go into these in depth. The predominant note was a vital



sense of optimism as we oriented ourselves to the possibilities for collaboration and integration. We were in a kind of ‘honeymoon’ phase in which a mood of warmth and generosity prevailed, and there was a strong sense among some, if not many, that the deficiencies of each approach synchronistically seemed to correspond with the strengths of the other, such that two metatheories might fit together in an almost yin-yang sense of complementarity, or like two pieces of a puzzle. In line with this enamoured mood, Esbjörn-Hargens (2011) wrote the following passage reflecting on his experience at the symposium:

It was a very engaging four days and I think it is fair to say that both meta-approaches will never be the same. The similarities between the meta-philosophy of Bhaskar and the metatheory of Wilber are simply stunning. Furthermore, the ways they complement each other via their unique combination of strengths and limitations is remarkable. For example, Integral Theory excels at articulating a sophisticated and nuanced theory of epistemology whereas Critical Realism is unsurpassed in presenting a multi-layered and complex theory of ontology. Integral Theory has a primary focus on individuals and their growth and development all the way till nondual realization. Critical Realism has a primary focus on society and the injustices therein which must be addressed for collective emancipation.

The main area of divergence that emerged occurred around Integral Theory’s post-metaphysical notion of enactment and Critical Realism’s critique of neo-Kantianism and their notion of the Real. While the complexities of the exchanges around this are too multifaceted to get into here, I will just say that I felt more alive in those moments than I ever have before. It was just thrilling to be at the intersection between Critical Realism and Integral Theory and watching both approaches having to confront some deep epistemological and ontological issues; issues that likely will have a major impact on both schools of thought as they continue to unpack the implications of what the other school was pointing out to them.

In short, there were a number of deep exchanges between the two groups. Integral Theory has a lot to learn from Critical Realism and vice versa. The Critical Realists raised some good critiques and identified areas of underdevelopment within Integral Theory and we did the same for them. I feel that Integral Theory has found a soul mate in Critical Realism (and Bhaskar’s philosophy of metaReality). I learned as much about Integral Theory over these last four days as I did about Critical Realism. Thus, this four-day encounter served both schools of thought in helping each one to make their own approach an object of their collective awareness. Therein lies the subject to object principle, which is the driver of growth and transformation. I honestly feel that Integral Theory will never be the same now—it has and will continue to be transformed by its encounter with the Critical Realism “other.” In fact, there are already a variety of ongoing exchanges, collaborations, and engagements between the members of the symposium from both communities of discourse. For Integral Theory to mature into its post-formal potential as a meta-framework for theory and practices, ongoing events such as this will be essential and I believe are now inevitable (p. v).

Some of the most notable creative outcomes of this first symposium include:





- A number of academic articles in both *Journal of Critical Realism* and the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* were published that extended and deepened the engagement.
  - *Journal of Critical Realism* published three articles inspired by the symposium. These are Paul Marshall's "The Meeting of Two Integrative Metatheories",<sup>16</sup> Timothy Rutzou's "Integral Theory: A Poisoned Chalice?",<sup>17</sup> and Hans Despain's "Integral Theory: The Salubrious Chalice?"<sup>18</sup>
    - Marshall's article offers a fine overview of the points of connection and divergence between critical realism and integral theory and a constructive vision of how the two approaches might interact in mutually enhancing ways.
    - Rutzou's article essays a philosophical critique of integral theory from a critical realist perspective.
    - Despain's article analyses the potential theoretical benefits offered by integral theory. While endorsing some of Rutzou's points, it argues that integral theory offers much to critical realism in the form of developmental theories, cultural anthropology and transpersonal psychology.
  - The *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* published four articles on critical realism and its relationship to integral theory: Paul Marshall's "Toward an Integral Realism: Part I: An Overview of Transcendental Realist Ontology"<sup>19</sup> and "Ken Wilber on Critical Realism;"<sup>20</sup> Roy Bhaskar's "Considerations on 'Ken Wilber on Critical Realism';"<sup>21</sup> and Ken Wilber's "In Defence of Integral Theory: A Response to Critical Realism"<sup>22</sup>
    - Marshall's first article discusses how integral theory might benefit from critical realism by providing an in-depth overview of critical realism's foundational transcendental realist ontology, including a review of relevant background philosophies informing it.
    - Marshall's second article was written as a summary for Roy Bhaskar of Ken Wilber's position on critical realism. The article was based on an exchange between Marshall and Wilber as a part of the journal review process.
    - Bhaskar's article is a response to Marshall's summary, which was hoped to have initiated a more direct conversation between Bhaskar and Wilber.
    - Wilber's article was written as a long endnote for his forthcoming book, Volume 2 of the Kosmos Trilogy, prior to his



‘exchanges’ with Marshall and Bhaskar, and originally posted on the Integral Life website: <https://www.integrallife.com>.

- A strategic partnership was established between the International Centre for Critical Realism at the UCL Institute of Education, University of London and the San Francisco-based MetaIntegral Foundation in general, as well as with the Integral Research Center in particular. This partnership became the institutional underpinning for the CR-IT symposium series, as well as for the present volume and its sister volume.
- A post-conference workshop on metaReality following the 2012 International Association of Critical Realism Conference, “Global Challenges & Critical Realism Debates,” at Rhodes University in South Africa, was partly dedicated to constructively exploring the relationship between critical realism and integral theory.
- A group of American participants from New England, including Hans Despain, Zak Stein, Lauren Tenney, and Bonnie Roy formed an ongoing dialogue group.
- Paul Marshall’s PhD thesis project evolved into an exploration of the interface of critical realism, integral theory, and Edgar Morin’s complex thought – a shift that was importantly inspired by the symposium. Paul continued to engage in mutually provocative dialogues in this area with Roy, whom he studied under at the UCL Institute of Education at the University of London.
- In the wake of the symposium, Nick Hedlund, who at the time was a PhD student at the California Institute of Integral Studies, began to collaborate with Roy Bhaskar. Roy eventually invited him to study under him at the UCL Institute of Education, University of London. Through the symposium and subsequent dialogue with Roy, Nick underwent an intellectual revolution, moving from a primary identification with the philosophy of enactivism to a modified critical realist position. The trajectory of this revolution is broadly expounded in Nick’s chapter in this volume.
- In the summer of 2012, Roy, Sean, and Nick consolidated a vision for the present volume, wrote a proposal, and landed a contract with Routledge. They began to invite contributors to submit précis, from which the submissions were selected for publication in the book.
- Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, in collaboration with Mark Forman and Jordan Luftig, began to envision the 2013 Integral Theory Conference in San Francisco. The conference was deeply inspired by the kind of dialogical engagement of bringing these metatheories together exemplified in the symposium. The conference sought to bring into dialogue three key integral metatheories – integral theory, critical realism, and complex thought – and thus redefine the field in, no longer in term’s of Wilberian integral theory exclusively, but rather in terms of the dynamic confluence of these three metatheories.



*Symposium 2: Integral Theory Conference, San Francisco, July 2013*

The second symposium was held as a pre-conference event of the Integral Theory Conference (ITC) in San Francisco in July of 2013. This daylong international symposium, “Metatheory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century: Critical Realism & Integral Theory in Dialogue”, was held for invited critical realists and integral theorists to converge once again and advance the dialogue. As noted above, a major theme of the third Integral Theory Conference, “Connecting the Integral Kosmopolitan”, was exploration of the relationship(s) between integral theory and critical realism, as well as that of complex thought. Roy Bhaskar delivered a keynote address, along with the French philosopher and founder of complex thought, Edgar Morin. The conference marked Roy’s introduction to the integral community at large, which Roy was rather delighted by. We felt that the integral community almost as one mirrored back to Roy the deep value of his ‘spiritual turn’ and subsequent vision of metaReality, whereas in the critical realist community it has been much more controversial. In the integral community, Roy’s work, in all three of its major phases, was received in a wider context, which was important for Roy. Roy and Edgar Morin also met and conversed with each other. This constituted an historic confluence of their respective metatheoretical streams worth noting in its own right. Moreover, several prominent critical realists attended and presented, numerous presentations at the conference were devoted to exploring points of contact between these two metatheories, and two new award categories for conference papers, “best engagement with critical realism” and “best engagement with complex thought” were included by the conference organizers.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the second symposium, though it remained predominantly focused on the meeting of just two of these metatheories, was a kind of microcosm of the macrocosm of the conference – and in many ways, the whole conference was inspired by the kind of engagement demonstrated at the first symposium at JFK University, nearly two years earlier.

While we very much built on the generative dialogical encounter that we began at the first symposium, the focus of the second one was beginning to turn from a more (meta)theoretical approach to the realm of praxis and application in a contemporary planetary context. Thus the one-day San Francisco symposium focused on the ways in which these two (and other) integrative metatheories can join forces to transform scholarship and address the most pressing global challenges of the 21st-century—from climate change to the global economic crisis to the need for new forms of education. Over the course of the event, we sought to create a space of free-flowing exchange and nurture a rich field of mutual understanding that would continue to inspire future engagement and development within and between both approaches.

This symposium also saw the beginning of collective work on the present volume (which grew into two volumes). Accepted précis, along with several chapter drafts for



the book were sent to participants prior to the symposium, providing an opportunity for reflection on the themes and theses presented therein, and were used as a starting point for our engagement. We wanted, once again, to create a generative space of inquiry and dialogue that was critical, but this time the focus was more oriented to real world solutions. More specifically, dialogue focused on the ways both metatheories (and various interfaces and syntheses) could be employed in creative ways that illuminate reality and pathways toward holistic social-cultural transformation in the face of contemporary ‘wicked problems.’ This, we felt, was the optimal focal point for our dialogue, as opposed to focusing primarily on the debate around how each theory ‘maps onto’ – or fails to map onto – one another.

Many of the same scholars participated in this symposium, though some important critical realist voices were missing, and there were also some new faces. We again invited some metatheorists who were familiar with both (and other) approaches to provide some triangulation and contextual engagement from an ‘external’ vantage point. Naturally, being a part of the Integral Theory Conference, there were more integral theorists and fewer critical realists this time around. Integral theorists included:

- Bruce Alderman, USA
- Annick de Witt, the Netherlands/USA
- Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, USA
- Clint Fuhs, USA
- Nick Hedlund, USA/the Netherlands
- Gilles Herrada, USA/France
- Ed Kelly, Ireland
- Lynette Lee, USA
- Jordan Luftig, USA
- Tom Murray, USA
- Aftab Omer, USA
- Matthew Rich, The Netherlands/South Africa
- Michael Schwartz, USA
- Zak Stein, USA

Critical realists included:

- Roy Bhaskar, UK
- Hans Despain, USA
- Paul Marshall, Spain/UK
- Leigh Price, UK/South Africa

Other metatheorists included:



- Mark Edwards, Australia
- Gary Hampson, Czech Republic/UK
- Adam Robbert, USA
- Bonnita Roy, USA

The San Francisco symposium not only deepened the engagement and alliance between CR and IT but also brought to light the potential for engagement with Morin's complex thought (and also other approaches, such as speculative realism or actor-network theory). There was also a sense of excitement about Roy's keynote address and critical realism being formally introduced to the integral community, as well as that of complex thought.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the group dialogue in the symposium, Paul Marshall gave a short presentation that offered an overview of each of the three metatheories – arguing that there is an important dialogue, complementarity, and potential integrative synthesis in bringing the three metatheories together. It seemed that nearly everyone was impressed and inspired by this vision that Paul had articulated with such clarity, sophistication, and eloquence. In this way, the horizon of our engagement seemed to widen.

Beyond this bright and buoyant sense of possibility, during this symposium (and the time in between the two), we were starting to substantively metabolize and comprehend each other's positions, having done more background reading and research, and as a result come to understand more fully some of the key differences in our respective metatheories. For example, CR's critique of the *epistemic fallacy* and *actualism* and the ways in which they arguably play out in the context of IT, as well as IT's critique, in various inflections, of what would later be named by Zak Stein (see Stein's chapter in *Metatheory for the Anthropocene*) as the *cognitive maturity fallacy*, and the case that CR succumbs to it. However, this greater appreciation for the differences was generally back-grounded, and the sense of solidarity and broad agreement foregrounded. There was likely more dissent in the community than many of us realized at this symposium, but the focus on real-world emancipation seemed to captivate our attention and—for the moment—overshadow our differences. Moreover, at that point, we had only read each other's précis and a few draft chapters—but, as we would learn, the 'devil of disagreement' often lies in the details, which were largely yet to be thoroughly expounded in the chapters.

Noteworthy outcomes that emerged between the second and third symposia include the following:

- Many individuals in the integral community began referencing critical realism in their work – so the integral community has had major uptake in citation of CR material.



- We estimate that 30-40% of integral scholars who presented papers at ITC 2013 – and a disproportionate 50-60% of the prominent leadership in the integral community – have engaged with critical realism. Such engagement, has been highly generative, and will likely have lasting impacts on the field.
- The 2013 International Association for Critical Realism (IACR) conference in Nottingham, U.K., featured another post-conference day devoted to metaReality, including its relationship to integral theory.
- In early 2014, *Journal of Critical Realism* published two additional articles furthering the CR-IT debate: Timothy Rutzou's "Integral Theory and the Search for the Holy Grail: On the Possibility of a Metatheory",<sup>25</sup> and Hans Despain's "Integral Theory and the Search for Earthly Emancipation: On the Possibility of Emancipatory and Ethical Personal Development."<sup>26</sup>
- Initially conceived as a single anthology, in the Spring 2014 the burgeoning length of the book provoked us to propose that the original book be split into two stand alone volumes: the present one, and its aforementioned companion *Metatheory for the Anthropocene: Emancipatory Praxis for Planetary Flourishing* (forthcoming, Routledge, 2016). While this book takes up a more theoretical focus, *Metatheory for the Anthropocene* is concerned, as the title implies, with questions of a more applied, practice-oriented nature.
- At the 2014 European Integral Conference in Budapest, Ken Wilber delivered a keynote address and engaged in a subsequent question and answer style dialogue (over Skype). In the question and answer period Wilber was asked what he was working on recently, and, according to Frank Visser, "[O]ne of the topics he mentioned was to write about what he saw as 'serious problems' in the philosophy of critical realism, which could possibly result in a Wilber-6 phase of his work".<sup>27</sup>
- Gary Hawke, a British scholar-practitioner of integral theory and critical realism, produced an online audio and video series of interviews with Roy Bhaskar, "Introduction to Critical Realism", in an effort to make critical realism more accessible. These materials are available on YouTube. Also see Gary Hawke's website at: <http://www.aletic-coaching.org/>.
- In the spring of 2014, Roy proposed that Mervyn Hartwig join the editorial team to assist with the burgeoning workload. Sean and Nick agreed and Mervyn came on board.





*Symposium 3: UCL Institute of Education, University of London, July 2014*

The third symposium “Integrative Metatheories in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century: Forging New Alliances for Planetary Flourishing in the Anthropocene” was held at the UCL Institute of Education, University of London, as a post-conference event following the 17<sup>th</sup> annual International Association for Critical Realism Conference “From the anatomy of the global crisis to the ontology of human flourishing.”<sup>28</sup> In some respects, the conference took up the dialogical spirit of ITC 2013, albeit to a much lesser degree, and built on it. Several integral theorists presented at the IACR conference, and some noteworthy dialogues ensued.

This one-day symposium was again intended to help forge new alliances across theoretical boundaries in which we could practically apply our joint insights to addressing pressing real-world challenges in the emergent context of the Anthropocene, such as climate change. The present volume and its companion served as a strong basis for the London symposium. As such, it was a much more structured event than either of the two prior symposia. Authors read each other’s chapter drafts, engaged in deep dialogue, critique, and constructive inquiry. Chapters were sent out for all to read and served as the basis for group dialogue. Specifically, select authors were paired based on thematic resonance. Each author briefly summarized the key points of their own chapter before the paired author offered criticisms and inquiry points and opened up a group discussion on it. The feedback and insight from the symposium was woven into further chapter revisions. Each chapter was already the result of the cross-pollination forged in the prior symposia, but this second-cycle of reflection, constructive critique, and dialogue constituted a kind of meta-level cross-pollination. This, we feel, led to a more refined, integrated final product – which you are now holding in your hand or reading on your screen.

Mirroring the context at ITC 2013, because the London symposium was under the umbrella of the IACR Conference there were more critical realists than integral theorists, and there were again some new participants. Those who attended included:

- Eirin Annamo, Norway
- Roy Bhaskar, UK
- Hans Despain, USA
- Mark Edwards, Australia
- Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, USA
- Gary Hampson, Czech Republic/UK
- Mervyn Hartwig, UK
- Gary Hawke, UK



- Nick Hedlund, USA/the Netherlands
- Neil Hockey, Australia
- Otto Laske, USA
- Paul Marshall, Spain/UK
- Iskra Nunez, USA/Mexico
- Lene Nyhus, Norway
- Tim Rutzou, UK/Australia
- Michael Schwartz, USA
- Tone Skinningsrud, Norway
- Nick Wilson, UK

Overall, in the London symposium, the mood of maturity and charged-dialectic predominated. The core differences had been drawn out and the sense of critique and discord had become more pronounced. So this symposium had a stronger sense of the incommensurability and points of difference, which marked a new, more sober and mature mode of engagement. It was easy to think we all agreed when we were just talking, but when people actually completed and shared their chapters, it quickly clarified the differences. We could then really see where everyone stood and thus begin a level of substantive and nuanced debate that previously was not possible. Roy was only able to articulate the positions after having read the chapters. Writing the chapters made the details a lot clearer. Of course part of the reason the differences showed up more strongly at the London symposium was simply that more CR scholars showed up at the IACR conference, but they weren't so sympathetic to IT that they would fly across the world for a one-day event.

The honeymoon phase had ended, but, it seemed, there was enough passion and resonance – perhaps most prominently around our shared commitment to emancipation and flourishing in the real world – to keep us going. While the sense of difference indeed became more pronounced in this symposium, the focus on real-world service functioned as a concurrent and countervailing tendency that built solidarity as well. In many ways, it felt like a deep connection and alliance had emerged which was not only founded on a *prima facie* sense of resonance and complementarity, but also a respect for some very deep (and sometime charged) differences and disagreements. Indeed, we were discovering, it was often precisely in this sense of dialectic and difference that the most potent and provocative transformational potentials dwelled.

However, there was a paradoxical sense in which the hermeneutics of generosity in the spirit of the engagement seemed to hold and contain such discord. It felt as though we had moved into a shared space in which there was enough intimacy, understanding, and solidarity for us to be more unabashedly real and raw with each other. The passion and love for reality, truth, and wisdom was tangible. Our hearts were fully in it and the sense of deep care for our beautiful and imperilled world was profoundly palpable. There was a potent emotional sense of shared love and concern for the planet and



alignment around the project of emancipation, yet a deep sense our differences were also present. As we dialogued, explored, critiqued, and inquired together, it felt as though we had moved from more of a pseudo-community to real community, in that we were able to incorporate conflict and difference in a full and robust way, yet do so with respect and trust in our enduring bond and shared commitment. There was something of intense beauty in holding this dialectical tension in our hearts and minds; by the end of the last session, nearly all of us found ourselves moved to tears. There was a sense that we had moved from an emphasis on identity in the first symposium, and slowly developed the sense of difference in and through the second, and were now arriving at a sense of strong difference simultaneously with that of identity – a kind of dynamic and messy identity-in-difference.

It was a special day – and for many of us, our last with Roy, our dear friend who many of us hold as a great, deeply loving man and philosophical genius at a level that is difficult to appreciate at this point in history. Roy presented his typology of five positions within the CR-IT dialogue (presented in the Preface and developed below), as a useful way for us to reflect on the multiyear engagement and the positions represented in the room (and the books). This felt like an apt offering for our moment, as there was a sense that we had reached a point of culmination and maturation in the process and had, in some respects, settled into various positions along a spectrum of identity and difference. However, as was reflected in Otto Laske's suggestion that there is more of a dynamic dialectic than a settled sense of positions, the atmosphere of the exchange felt far from settled. Rather, there was a potent sense of passionate, vital, and transformational-dialectical charge suffusing and impelling the collective field. Interestingly, dialectical thinking seemed to have been a key point of contention, both in terms of critiques along the lines of 'having a dialectical metatheory' as a position and 'embodying dialectical thinking' as an integrated cognitive-emotional-social mode of engaging the process.

Other than a number of postgraduate seminars at the UCL Institution of Education, this was to be Roy Bhaskar's last public performance. He died a few months later, on 19th November. Roy devoted his life to a struggle to win the intellectual high ground for a global society of universal free flourishing and was greatly appreciated and loved by all who knew him well for his cheerfulness, his generosity, his warmth and inclusiveness, his talent for making people feel very special and give their best and above all for his gentleness and his love. These qualities were richly in evidence at the symposium, even in illness. Without Roy's exuberant support, the CR-IT dialogue would never have happened. His absence from the process will make a huge difference, but we will draw inspiration and strength from his life and his affirmation of the creative powers and potentials of human beings as such. Among his last words as he left the symposium, underlining the primacy of self-change in the demi-real,



were: ‘We are all TINA compromise formations.’ When we get rid of the compromises, human creative potentials are unleashed.

*Symposium 4: Integral Theory Conference, Sonoma State University, San Francisco Bay Area, July 2015*

At the time of writing, another CR-IT symposium is scheduled for this coming July as a post-conference event of the 2015 International Integral Theory Conference, “Integral Impacts: Using Integrative Metatheories to Catalyse Effective Change” hosted by Sonoma State University. This symposium will be an opportunity to reflect on the finished books and the key critiques each theory has of the other. Whereas the previous symposia were exploring a multitude of themes as expressed in the various chapters, this one will encourage in-depth exploration of the key issues each one has with the other. Part of the goal is to be able to further clarify the differences and situate ourselves as a community in the tension between identity and difference. This pursuit, as always, is not one of mere abstraction, but is grounded in a commitment to seriousness or the coherence of theory and practice. This is very much in line with the theme of the conference: catalysing real-world impact in the move from metatheory to meta-praxis, from right view to right action.

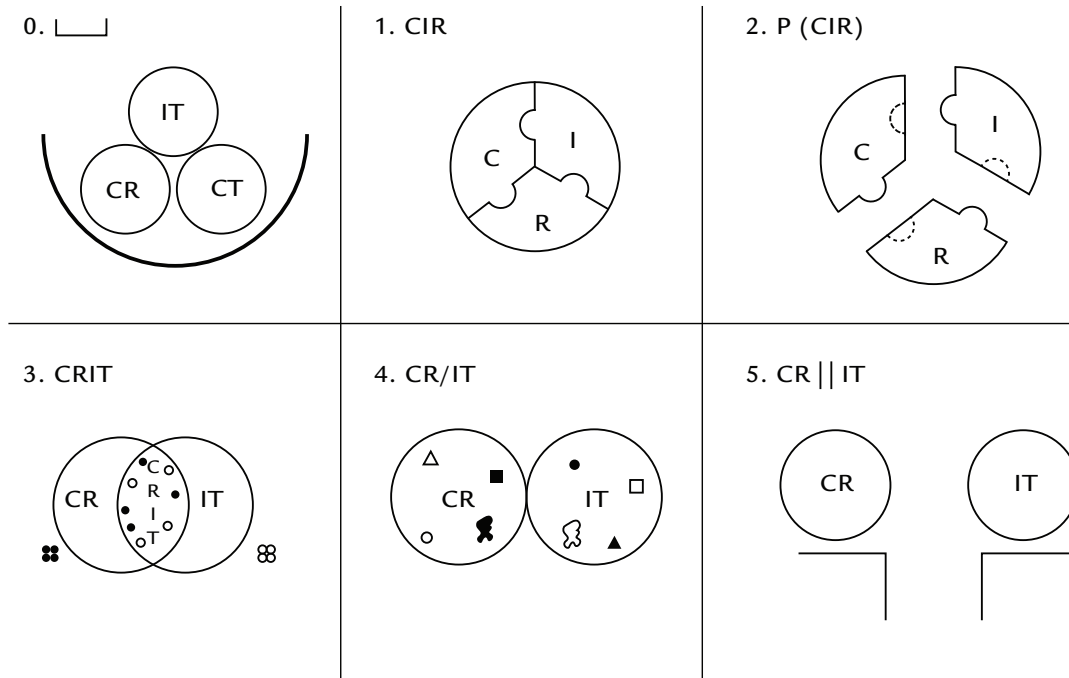
Having provided a short history of the dialogues between critical realism and integral theory, we will now briefly offer a typology of metatheory encounters that emerged out of the multi-year dialogue on the way to situating the various chapters in this volume.

## 5. A Typology of Metatheory Encounters

In the Preface, Roy Bhaskar outlines five positions in the engagement between critical realism and integral theory.<sup>29</sup> As noted, the Preface is based on the transcript of Roy’s opening remarks at the third and (at the time of writing) most recent symposium in London. In the dialogue following Roy’s remarks, Mark Edwards introduced a sixth position that we feel is quite useful to specify. In this section we review the positions Roy outlines and develop this framework further. We do so for several reasons. First, we feel that these six positions are useful for different metatheoretical communities to consider when encountering each other. The order presents a spectrum of possible positions that can be inhabited; while many variations on them are possible, these seem to be the main types. Second, as explained below, we realized after the fact that the table of contents we had intuitively arrived at was ordered in terms of these six positions. As such, we feel that it is useful to invoke this typology as a way of understanding and contextualizing the chapters in this volume (see section 6 below).



**Figure 1.** Typology of metatheory encounters



In addition to the five positions Roy outlined in the Preface, we have included the additional position inspired by Mark Edwards' comments. In his exchange with Roy, Mark makes the point that there is also a position that is focused on the context or "clearing" of the integrative metatheory engagement, as opposed to the specific content or metatheories being engaged. Since this position signifies the conditions or context for any encounter between integral metatheories to occur we have placed it prior to the other five positions and used a zero to designate it. Using a "0" in this way both preserves the order of Roy's typology and serves to signify the clearing that this position is highlighting. This position can also be signified with a keyboard by "[ ]" to represent the context in which metatheories, in this case CR, IT, and CT, are engaged with each other. In sum, these six positions essentially move from a general clearing of engagement (position 0) to decreasing degrees of compatibility or integration (positions 1-4) to incommensurability and non-dialogue (position 5). Moreover, it is worth noting that Roger Walsh, in his excellent foreword, provides a resonant typology of five major possibilities that arise in response to the meeting of (meta)theories (p.<\*>). These likewise are oriented along a continuum of commensurability and integration and have a rough correspondence to some of the positions we outline, yet add nuance and additional inflections.<sup>50</sup>



Interestingly, as we mentioned, when we first began to order the table of contents for this volume we intuitively organized the chapters in an order that reflects the sequence of these six positions. Since this volume is about dialogue between two or three integral metatheories we decided not to include a chapter representing position 5—no fruitful dialogue—though interested individuals can read Tim Rutzou’s articles in *Journal of Critical Realism*. We find it noteworthy that in the course of the four symposia, articles and chapters were generated that illustrate all six positions. In addition, some chapters in this volume may contain arguments associated with more than one position. So these six positions should not be reified. Rather they serve as general or ideal types of distinct orientations that can occur across a spectrum of possibilities.

## 6. In This Volume

The first two chapters of the volume represent in various ways position 0. We open the volume with Zachary Stein’s “Beyond nature and humanity: Reflections on the emergence and purposes of metatheories.” In this chapter, Stein takes a metaview on metatheories. Adopting an “expressive” style rather than a “persuasive” one, he explores the notion of “metatheory” and provides an historical reconstruction drawing on some key figures (e.g., Peirce, Baldwin, Piaget, and Habermas) that contribute to contemporary understandings of the practice and philosophy of metatheory. He discusses the normative nature and function of metatheories, with a focus on their evolutionary and developmental framings. Stein ends with linking his reflections to the metatheory projects of Wilber and Bhaskar. This chapter serves the volume by helping to ground our current project in the historical and philosophical contexts that have set the stage for our dialogical encounter. Stein invites us to simultaneously look backward and forward as to the purpose of integrative metatheories.

Building on the theme of reflecting on and delineating the clearing of integrative metatheorizing the next chapter is Mark G. Edwards’ “Healing the Half-World: The Emancipatory Potential of Meta-Level Social Science”. Edwards is well known for his ground-breaking work in articulating the architecture of an integral meta-studies. In this chapter he furthers his project by exploring the healing and emancipatory potential of a meta-level social science. To do this he examines Bhaskar’s triadic lens “Absolute-Relative-Demi-reality” and its meta-ontological implications for reflexive social science. To deepen this inquiry he juxtaposes Bhaskar’s lens with Wilber’s meta-hermeneutic engagement with the Absolute-Relative lens. Edwards’ leverages both Bhaskar and Wilber’s approaches to illustrate how an emancipatory social science could be developed. In doing this, Edward’s not only illustrates the process of engaging multiple integrative metatheories to support emancipatory aims, but he demonstrates the value of drawing on both critical realism and integral theory for such





a project. In other words, Edwards illuminates the process of creating a meta-context by engaging specific metatheories.

Next we have Sean Esbjörn-Hargens' "Developing a Complex Integral Realism for Global Response: Three Meta-Frameworks for Knowledge Integration and Coordinated Action." This is an ambitious chapter that can be viewed as a representative of position 1, though Esbjörn-Hargens' intent is more about developing a "meta-praxis" of creating an integral metatheory. To illustrate this he places critical realism, integral theory, and complex thought into a "trialectical" encounter that serves to address the blindspots of each approach. Drawing on the key strengths of each integral metatheory, Esbjörn-Hargens develops three meta-frameworks (one for each of the domains of epistemology, methodology, and ontology) to support this meta-praxis. This chapter provides a powerful example of what a preservative synthesis between the three integral metatheories might consist of and as such paves the way for further development of such a complex integral realism.

Complementing the previous chapter, Paul Marshall's "Towards a Complex, Integral Realism" serves to provide a detailed analysis of the key concepts and frameworks of all three integral metatheories (critical realism, integral theory, and complex thought) and their resulting common ground. Marshall does an excellent job of discussing the areas of cross-fertilization between these three metatheories. In contrast to Esbjörn-Hargens' chapter which uses the three integral metatheories to go "meta-meta", Marshall uses them to go "meta-micro" and provide a detailed overview of the similarities and differences between all three. He concludes his chapter by identifying some of the key features of a "complex, integral realism." This chapter serves as an illustration of position 2 and the possibility of a synthesis between these three integrative metatheories.

In "Rethinking the Intellectual Resources for Addressing Complex 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Challenges: Towards a Critical Realist Integral Theory" Nick Hedlund rolls up his philosophical sleeves and begins the hard work of creating a non-preservative synthesis between critical realism and integral theory. He calls the result a CRIT – a critical realist integral theory—and this represents position 3, which is characterized by a non-preservative synthesis (i.e., some elements from each theory are negated in order to create the synthesis). To do this, he examines in detail the epistemological and ontological positions of each metatheory. Then he critiques each metatheory in light of the other theory. This systematic analysis does much to lay the groundwork for considering what a CRIT might consist of. This chapter does a great job of detailing the philosophical challenges each metatheory poses to the other and how they might be reconciled into a new vision.



In a similar, but less systematic and synthetic, spirit to Hedlund, Michael Schwartz explores the complementary and divergent natures of critical realism and integral theory. In his chapter, “After Integral Gets Real: On Meta-Critical Chiasma of CR and IT” he identifies a number of points of contact between both metatheories and how each can be enhanced by distinctions and perspectives from the other. Schwartz begins with the polarized domain of being and knowing. It is polarized in the sense that this is where the most obvious clashes of perspectives occur between the two traditions. Next he explores the important role that negativity and nothingness plays in both metatheories. This sets the stage for him to explore the role of schemes: CR’s stratified ontology of horizontal depth and IT’s stratified ontology of vertical height. He concludes with a discussion of nonduality, a view that both schools include as important and foundational to their approaches. While in some respects Schwartz’s chapter appears to be oriented to process as much as position, we nonetheless feel that this chapter represents a view that falls between positions 3 and 4.

Striking a more first-person reflective tone, Mervyn Hartwig’s “Why I’m a Critical Realist” represents position 4. Hartwig holds that there are important resonances between critical realism and integral theory and that each can benefit from an encounter with the other. However, he argues that there are fundamental incommensurable aspects that render any real synthesis (preservative or otherwise) impossible. This chapter in effect has two streams of discourse occurring simultaneously. On the one hand there is the narrative of Hartwig’s philosophical journey with critical realism and an argument that the polycrisis can be resolved only by an epochal transition to a global society based on solidarity and love, as thematised by critical realism. On the other hand there are his robust endnotes, which provide a context for him to unpack some salient points about the limits of integral theory and its incommensurability with critical realism. This structure serves to highlight how the practice of philosophy is wonderfully always *inter alia* a very personal and biographical process.

The final chapter of the volume is Tom Murray’s “Contributions of Embodied Philosophy to Ontological Questions in Critical Realism and Integral Theory”. This chapter takes a different approach than previous chapters in that it is less concerned with the relationship or possible synthesis between critical realism and integral theory. Instead, Murray draws on the field of embodied philosophy (a la Lakoff and Johnson’s position of embodied realism) to augment both CR and IT. He introduces a number of the core distinctions and findings of embodied realism and illustrates how these notions can ground integrative metatheories like CR and IT. He focuses on epistemological and ontological issues, which is quite useful given that it is within these contexts that most of the philosophical challenges and opportunities exist between these two approaches. In some respects this final chapter represents position 0 in that it foregrounds the process of integrative metatheorizing and helps establish the



clearing of such metathinking and meta-practice. However, we felt that this was an apt chapter to complete this volume with, as it highlights how the dialogue that has occurred to date, and is in part represented by the chapters in this volume, can be further developed, expanded, and deepened by drawing on other philosophical traditions beyond the sphere of integrative metatheories as such. Besides, given the abstract nature of integrative metatheories, this chapter is useful in anchoring them in our embodied experience, making us more aware of the epistemic drives and multiple metaphors we can use to navigate, in fruitful ways, the many lines of inquiry that the encounter between integrative metatheories opens up.

Together these eight chapters serve to illustrate a wide range of potential positions of relationship between critical realism and integral theory (and in some cases complex thought as well). In addition, various other bodies of work and philosophical traditions are drawn on to support the inquiry around the possible relationships that can be supported between these integrative metatheories. Our authors argue for and against various degrees of synthesis, augmentation, and complementarity as well as make a case for incommensurability and outright disagreement. On the whole we feel they do a formidable job of documenting the range of philosophical issues that have been present in our series of symposiums while highlighting the value of bringing two different groups of scholar-practitioners together for dialogue and engagement.

We are very pleased to conclude the volume with an Afterword by Markus Molz who, as noted above, is largely responsible for planting the seeds—at the Luxembourg symposium in 2010—for what grew into this five-year (and counting) dialogue between leading scholar-practitioners of critical realism and integral theory (as well as other notable positions). Molz's Afterword helps situate the generative encounter documented in this volume within an even larger inquiry around the importance of creating interspaces of engagement between different streams of integrative and even non-integrative metatheories. We welcome Molz's reflections as they serve to further our own commitment to using what has transpired between the communities of critical realism and integral theory as a way of exploring and modeling the transformative and emancipatory potential of bringing different metatheories into intimate contact with each other.

## 7. Conclusion

As you read this volume and engage the many perspectives and positions presented herein, we hope you will be inspired to make your own contributions to the ongoing exploration of the deep need for integrative metatheories in the 21st century. Integrative metatheories can make a significant contribution to birthing a thriving planetary civilization. These contributions will be even more potent to the extent that different traditions of metatheory engage each other and find ways to support



the emancipatory aims of each other. This process of engagement begins with people — like you — who are drawn to metatheory and its potential contributions to actualizing an eudaimonic world. So we invite you to seriously consider how you might you contribute to the ongoing project that has been initiated in these pages.

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Annick de Witt for her valuable support and feedback on an earlier version of this introduction.

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Roy passed away before we completed this introduction. We have decided to include his name in authorship since his involvement with the project and input into the contents of the introduction remained formative.

<sup>2</sup> Bhaskar (2002/2012, xxix f., lxxi f. and passim) deploys the theory of generalised co-presence – the enfoldedness at the most fundamental level of everything within everything else – to argue that any movement, however small, toward universal free flourishing as we ‘dive’ to our ground-states, will tend to invoke a reciprocal response in all other beings, thus magnifying such actions in a dialectically resonant way. The dive to the ground-state is thus, he argues, “the mechanism of the universal silent revolution, a mechanism which is clear but whose form and effect cannot be predicted. However, given this mechanism, no-one should underestimate the effect of any act they perform. Historicism, in the sense of predicting the future, is totally flawed. All we can say is that if the species, and our planet in a recognizable form, is to survive, only through such mechanisms as this will it happen. In the silence and everywhere, simultaneously the dawn breaks—this is the periodicity of the sunrise (p. lxxx).”

<sup>3</sup> According to some generalized definitions, metatheory “involves the study of the epistemological, ontological, methodological, or axiological premises on which any theoretical statement rests” (Edwards, 2010, p. 39) and functions as an overarching interpretive lens (see section three for a more nuanced discussion on the definitions of metatheory). Worldviews have been defined as “overarching systems of meaning and meaning-making that to a substantial extent inform how we interpret, enact, and co-create reality; they are complex constellations of epistemic capacities, ontological presuppositions, and ethical aesthetic values that converge to dynamically organize a synthetic apprehension of the world” (see e.g., Lyotard, 1984). Indeed, there is a striking resonance between these. For more on worldviews, see the work of Dutch social scientist de Witt (A. Hedlund-de Witt, 2013a, 2013b; A. Hedlund-de Witt & Hedlund-de Witt, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> As Randall Collins argues in *The Sociology of Philosophies* (2000), rather than ideas emerging prefabricated from the minds of a few great thinkers or being created by ‘cultures’, small groups are the source of most intellectual innovations. Such intellectual innovations then impact and shape the culture at large.

<sup>5</sup> For an introductory overview of each of these metatheories see: Esbjörn-Hargens (2010) for integral theory, Hedlund de-Witt (2012) for critical realism, and Montouri (2013) for complex thought.

<sup>6</sup> Genetic engineering as well as the development of artificial intelligence are likewise potentially high-stakes experiments that come to mind as potentially major 21<sup>st</sup>-century threats to humanity and the biosphere. However, unlike the issues presented above, which are grounded in strong scientific consensus, these may or not turn out to pose significant threats.

<sup>7</sup> This concept, popularized by the Dutch Nobel prize winning atmospheric chemist Paul Cruzen (see Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), signifies a new geological epoch marked by the profound and far-reaching causal power of human, social life in shaping the evolutionary trajectory of Earth system processes. This new epoch contrasts with previous epochs, which have been identified by stratigraphic and fossil data, the most recent being the generally hospitable and climatically stable Holocene. See the companion book to this volume: *Metatheory for the Anthropocene: Emancipatory Praxis for Planetary Flourishing* for an extended discussion of the notion of the Anthropocene.

<sup>8</sup> In line with this, a critical realist metatheory of crisis recently articulated by Bob Jessop (2015) stresses the semiotic and hermeneutic dimensions of crises as well as their more objective dimensions.

<sup>9</sup> Such approaches have been deconstructed by numerous (postmodern and poststructuralist) philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists alike, mainly because of their Eurocentric, neo-colonial, and derogatory implications, and their commitment to an oversimplified ontological parsimony that is out of step with the complexities of the empirical evidence (De Witt & Hedlund, 2015, in press; G.



Marshall, 1998).. The underpinning metaphysics of positivism is devastatingly critiqued by Bhaskar (e.g., 1989/2011).

<sup>10</sup> Our notion of metatheory 2.0 is very much in alliance with the work of Mark Edwards (2010) and his development of a scientific method of metatheorizing and an integral meta-studies (also see chapter 2 in this volume). The work of George Ritzer (1991, 2001, 1990) is likewise an approach to metatheorizing that our notion of metatheory 2.0 is likewise somewhat inspired by and builds on. However, Ritzer's work tends to focus on empirically-grounded sociological metatheorizing, whereas our approach cuts across disciplines. Fiske and Schweder's (1986) work is also worth noting as a relatively contemporary set of perspectives on metatheory in the social sciences.

<sup>11</sup> Bhaskar (1986/2009, pp. 19-20).

<sup>12</sup> Following Ritzer (1991, 2001) and Colomy (1991), four sub-types of metatheory  $\beta$  may be distinguished. Metatheory  $\beta 1$  studies extant theory to produce a metatheory that overarches some or all of a theoretical domain, that is, some part of a discipline's theory, all of a discipline's theory, or multiple disciplines (Ritzer's Mo). Metatheory  $\beta 2$  studies theory in preparation for the production of new theory on unit level, rather than an overarching new metatheory (Ritzer's Mp). Metatheory  $\beta 3$  studies an existing theory for purposes of attaining a deeper reflective understanding of it, but does not attempt to produce new theory or metatheory (Ritzer's Mu). Metatheory  $\beta 4$  is used to assess the conceptual adequacy and scope of other metatheories and theories (Colomy's Ma). Given that we have scanned across the horizon of extant theoretical definitions of metatheory, we consider our definitional scheme to be a kind of meta-definition along the lines of Metatheory  $\beta 1$ .

<sup>13</sup> Bhaskar (1979/2015, pp. 50-51).

<sup>14</sup> The international symposium "Research Across Boundaries – Advances in Theory-building" brought together, for the first time ever, "around 30 leading researchers from more than 15 countries and as many different research areas. They are representatives of an array of contemporary integrative frameworks and research practices." According to the organizers, the goal of the symposium was "to foster dialogues among them and additional participants through plenum, small-group and open space sessions, in order to discover common concerns and stimulating differences regarding advanced boundary-crossing research approaches." Please see <http://dica-lab.org/rab/> for more details on the symposium and <http://www.integral-studies.org/> for information on the Institute for Integral Studies.

<sup>15</sup> Other scholars at the Luxembourg symposium contributing chapters to this volume include Mark Edwards and Gary Hampson.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall (2012b).

<sup>17</sup> Rutzou (2012).

<sup>18</sup> Despain (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Marshall (2012c).

<sup>20</sup> Marshall (2012a).

<sup>21</sup> Bhaskar (2012).

<sup>22</sup> Wilber (2012).

<sup>23</sup> Best engagement with critical realism as awarded to Nicholas Hedlund for an earlier version of his chapter in this volume. Best engagement with complex thought was awarded to Sean Kelly, Adam Robbert, and Sam Mickey for their paper "The Varieties of Integral Ecologies: Kosmopolitan Complexity and the New Realisms."

<sup>24</sup> In addition to Edgar Morin, a number of other notable scholars of complex thought attended and presented at the conference, including Sean M. Kelly and Alfonso Montouri of the California Institute of Integral Studies.

<sup>25</sup> Rutzou (2014).

<sup>26</sup> Despain (2014).

<sup>27</sup> Visser goes on to note that: "(During the past Integral Conference in 2013, Roy Bhaskar's critical realism was contrasted with Wilber's integral philosophy, and some scholars have suggested integral



theory was in need of a ‘grounding in ontology’, which subsequently Wilber denied. In his understanding, integral theory was complete as it is. This is quite a sophisticated debate we have to leave to the professionals to work out. Paul Marshall and Nick Hedlund-de Witt, two students of Bhaskar who I met at the conference, are involved in this meta-integral debate.)” See <http://www.integralworld.net/visser69.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Moreover, this event built on the momentum of the increasing coordination and collaboration amongst integrative scholar-practitioners in Europe following the 1<sup>st</sup> Integral European Conference (Budapest, 8-11 May 2014), where Annick de Witt, Gary Hampson, Nick Hedlund, Paul Marshall, Matthew Rich, and others presented.

<sup>29</sup> The positions Roy articulates are as follows: 1) Complex Integral Realism (CIR), exemplified by Sean Esbjörn-Hargens in Chapter 3, and characterized by ‘preservative synthesis’; 2) The Possibility of Complex Integral Realism (P(CIR)), exemplified by Paul Marshall in Chapter 4, and characterized by ‘potential synthesis’; 3. Critical Realist Integral Theory (CRIT) exemplified by Nick Hedlund in Chapter 5, and characterized by ‘non-preservative synthesis’; 4) Critical Realism/Integral Theory Resonance

(CR/IT), exemplified by Mervyn Hartwig in Chapter 7, and characterized by ‘resonance, but no synthesis possible’; 5) Critical Realism and Integral Theory Incommensurability (CR||IT), exemplified by Tim Rutzou in his *Journal of Critical Realism* articles, and characterized by ‘no fruitful dialogue; incommensurable.’

<sup>30</sup> Walsh’s five responses (p. <\*> of his foreword) are as follows (with the rough correspondences to our positions noted parenthetically):

- Defensive dismissal of the validity and value of alternate theories (Position 5)
- Mutual enrichment, which will hopefully always occur (Position 4)
- The identification of common factors: What ideas, dimensions, levels and epistemologies do the theories hold in common? (Position 4)
- Assimilative integration: In this response, elements of one theory are assimilated into another theory. This is something that metatheories do routinely, and thereby enrich and enlarge themselves. (Position 4)
- The formation of a novel integrative theory that effectively synthesizes and integrates the elements of the original constitutive theories. (Positions 3 and 1)