

The Promise of a Flourishing Theoretical Psychology

Blaine J. Fowers
University of Miami

Theoretical psychology has developed and matured tremendously in recent years, putting its members in the position to deeply contemplate what a flourishing theoretical psychology might look like. This article examines that question through an Aristotelian lens, following the argument that flourishing is a matter of the excellent expression of a being or collective's natural functions. The discussion identifies 4 key functions of theoretical psychologists, researching, reflecting upon, reexamination of, and reformulation of psychological theory, research, and practice. The excellent expression of these functions is presented as the way to achieve the central goods of theoretical psychology, with 4 goods highlighted: knowledge, identity, communion, and meaningful contributions. The conclusion is that theoretical psychology can flourish as a subdiscipline by remaining true to its nature and functions.

Keywords: communion, eudaimonia, flourishing, function, theoretical psychology

The idea of human flourishing has had a dramatic renaissance in recent years, beginning with its revivification in moral philosophy and becoming a primary inspiration for the positive psychology and character education movements. The concept has its roots in the ancient Greek philosophers, with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics as proponents of the idea that ethics is best conceived as the study of eudaimonia or human flourishing. Aristotle's thought has been particularly influential in the revival of eudaimonic thought and most contemporary interest has focused on his *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE). This interest has produced a dramatic rethinking of ethics with an emphasis on the cultivation of character strengths as the key to living the best kind of life as a human being.

In defining eudaimonia, Aristotle (1999) was very clear that it is not a state of mind, or an inner reality, or a property of an individual. He

defined eudaimonia as the highest good, the one for the sake of which humans do everything else. But he also said that "Eudaimonia is an activity" (1169 b 29), meaning that eudaimonia is a way of acting in the world.

The scholarly and practical fruits of the revival of eudaimonic thought have been rich and valuable in philosophy, education, and psychology. Yet the focus on character development and individual flourishing only gets it half right. If we listen carefully to what Aristotle had to say about the good life, we recognize that flourishing is very much a shared good, one that we can only pursue through our friendships, partnerships, and communion. As Aristotle (1999) began to define eudaimonia in the first book of the NE, he wrote that "this good . . . belongs to the most sovereign and most comprehensive master science, and politics clearly fits this description" (1094a 27–29). Moreover, "the attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a polis¹ (society or community) is nobler . . . In short . . . social and political matters . . . are the

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Blaine J. Fowers, Department of Educational and Psychological Studies, P. O. Box 248065, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL 33124. E-mail: bfowers@miami.edu

¹ The Greek term *polis* is generally translated as nation or state, political units we moderns understand, but Aristotle was referring to the city-state of his time. His term is generally understood to include any society with well-developed and commonly held conception of its nature and laws. I retain the Greek term *polis* to emphasize this broader meaning, and my hope is that we can think about and participate in STPP as a community.

aims of our investigation” (1094b 8–12). He returns to this point in the last chapter of the NE, essentially designating the NE as an introduction to the *Politics*.

Aristotle (1996a) amplified his point about the priority of the community with the assertion that “the *polis* is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual” because “the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing” (1253a 19–26). This reversal of the priority of individual and collective is startling to us moderns because we believe so strongly that the individual is prior to the collective. Yet his point is powerful and true: as an ultrasocial species (Fowers, 2015), humans cannot flourish as individuals, only as members of communities. My purpose in this article is to apply this insight to the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology (STPP) because I am convinced that the strength and vibrancy of STPP has a very large impact on how individual theoretical psychologists will fare.

I think a discussion of the current state of STPP and its prospects for becoming a flourishing organization is timely because there are important ways that we have matured as an organization that put us in a position to contribute meaningfully to a better discipline of psychology and improve the societies in which we live. One of the most exciting aspects of serving as president of the STPP was the recognition that we have become so much more capable of pursuing the goods of theoretical psychology than we have been in the past. In reflecting on the status and prospects for theoretical psychology, I am following the lead of two previous presidents. Slife (2000) discussed the work of theoretical psychologists in terms of the practice of the subdiscipline and Martin (2004) focused on what theoretical psychology can do. I will attempt to build on their excellent reflections to explore what it would mean for theoretical psychology to flourish.

Before embarking on this analysis, I have three caveats. First, let me hasten to correct any misapprehension that the title of this article means that I am personally promising a flourishing theoretical psychology. Obviously, no individual can make such a promise. STPP can only flourish if we, as a collective, engage in the activities that conduce to a thriving scholarly community. I want to share my thoughts with you on what a flourishing STPP would look like

and on the activities I believe can conduce to that end.

Second, I describe a way of understanding theoretical psychology that comes to light from a neo-Aristotelian perspective. It is obvious that the fit between Aristotle’s views and our current circumstances is far from perfect, inasmuch as we live in a vastly different world than he did. Many scholars have appropriated his ethics to describe virtue and flourishing in our time, and this clearly requires modifications of his thought. To some, applying Aristotle’s thought to a professional association of theoretical psychologists may exceed the bounds of reasonable interpretation.² After all, as individual professionals, we struggle with our own and others’ personal ambitions, careerism, and with bureaucratic constraints and institutional pressures. As a professional organization, our activities could be seen as entirely bounded by serving the needs of a professional-managerial class that is, in turn, beholden to the interests of governmental and commercial interests. Although there is some value in recognizing egocentric motives and interest-group politics (and these very real issues deserve thoughtful attention), my colleagues and I have argued that limiting our understanding of human action (including the work of psychologists) to such narrowly instrumental terms imposes unnecessary and undesirable constraints and distortions on our social world (Fowers, 2005, 2008; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). In this article, I appeal to Aristotle’s ethics as a way to recommend a higher calling or vocation for theoretical psychologists than careerism. I hope to illuminate a mode of activity to which we can aspire, perhaps even making it possible to flourish together. Of course, perfection in such a pursuit is beyond our human limitations, but I think it is reasonable to believe that we will fare better or worse depending on the degree to which we fulfill our functions as theoretical psychologists.

Third, along with highlighting the strengths and possibilities that give us reasons for confidence, I discuss some of the foibles and shortcomings that undermine our endeavors as indi-

² I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out these dangers of my appropriation of Aristotle to the workings of the STPP, as well as for some of the terms in which I discuss the pitfalls here.

viduals and as a group. Let me say at the outset that I have been just as guilty of these shortcomings as anyone else, so I do not stand in judgment, nor do I claim to be beyond the struggles of ordinary mortals in the throes of pursuing greater understanding and clarity.

What Would a Flourishing Society Look Like?

There can be many visions for the best form of theoretical psychology. I have chosen to reflect on our subdiscipline through an Aristotelian lens. I believe this will be productive because Aristotle has unique and illuminating things to tell us about human flourishing, and his philosophy is strongly focused on humans as social beings who require community. He also focused on the lived, practical world. As Nussbaum (1986) put it, “It is one of the distinctions of Aristotle’s thought to see in the everyday and the apparently trivial a scene for the expression of human excellence” (p. 359).

Aristotle on Individual and Political Flourishing

Function argument. Aristotle (1999) defined the goodness of any entity in terms of fulfilling its characteristic function. “Function” is the translation of the Greek term *ergon*, which can also be translated as work, as in seeing the goodness of sculptors and carpenters in terms of how well they pursue their characteristic work. Aristotle used these examples to illustrate the relationship between function and goodness on the way to claiming that the characteristic functions of humans are found in our nature as social, rational animals. The eye is a common illustration of the function argument. Eyes have the function of seeing, and it is impossible to understand what an eye is (its nature) without appreciating its function. Once we recognize its function, we are immediately aware that an eye can function better or worse and good eyes see well. For Aristotle, then, there was no bright line between the facts of nature and evaluative judgment.

Aristotle (1999) famously defined humans as “by nature a social and political being” (1097b 11), and he discussed the deep sociality of human beings throughout the NE and the Politics. He correspondingly stated that “what is by na-

ture proper to each thing will be at once the best and most pleasant for it. In other words, a life guided by intelligence (*nous*) is the best and most pleasant for man, inasmuch as intelligence, above all else is man. Consequently this kind of life is the most eudaimonic” (1178 a 5–8). These and many similar statements drive home the point that eudaimonia (which I read as flourishing) is constituted by excellence in characteristically human activity, which is to say excellence in rational and social activity. Another way to put this is that humans flourish when we have good reasons or purposes for what we do, and we engage in this activity within enduring bonds of friendship, animated by shared goals.

What does this tell us about how theoretical psychology can flourish? First, Aristotle (1999) discussed communal life in terms of the polis, and said that “the main concern of politics is to engender a certain character in the citizens and to make them good and disposed to perform noble actions” (1099b 30–32). In the *Politics*, Aristotle (1996a) told us plainly that “no one denies” that “the eudaimonia of the individual is the same as that of the polis” and “the more excellent a polis is, the more eudaimonic it is” (1324a 5–14). For the purposes of reflecting on our work as theoretical psychologists, we can extrapolate that the function of an organization such as STPP is to engender the excellence of theoretical psychologists. I must emphasize that Aristotle’s understanding of a good organization was not based on its efficiency, productivity, or expansion. Rather, he saw the quality of an organization in the extent to which it fosters the best in its members. Therefore, the function of STPP is to help theoretical psychologists to “perform noble actions,” and a flourishing STPP cultivates and fosters excellence in the practice of theoretical psychology.

Following the function argument, a good theoretical psychologist is one that engages in the characteristic activities of theoretical psychology with excellence. These activities themselves have desirable ends, which can also be discussed as the goods of theoretical psychology. We can get a better grasp of what it is to be a good theoretical psychologist by discussing the excellent pursuit of these more specific goods, such as knowledge and communion.

Goods. The first sentence of the NE is that “Every art or applied science and every system-

atic investigation, and similarly every action and choice seem to aim at some good" (Aristotle, 1999, 1994a 1–2). The first feature of this sentence worth noting is Aristotle's claim that every action and choice in every art, science or investigation is aimed as some good. There can be no doubt that Aristotle would see the discipline of psychology, including scientific psychology as aimed as some good or goods (although he would, no doubt, be perplexed and disturbed by some of the ways that psychologists understand and pursue those goods). The pursuit of the good is likewise characteristic of STPP. The most obvious good is the good of knowledge, with goods such as justice, inclusion, and the reduction of suffering also easy to recognize. Professional psychology is not very explicit or clear in articulating, defending, and pursuing these goods, but their pursuit is obvious when one takes the time to look. That means that protestations about a fact-value distinction in science or the avoidance of value commitments in clinical or policy applications of psychology are pure fictions.

The second thing to notice in the opening sentence of the NE is the Greek term translated as "action" here is *praxis*, generally a weightier term than "action," indicating the kind of doings that constitute one's life as going well or badly (Broadie & Rowe, 2002). Praxis also connotes intentional, meaningful, social practice, so I think it is safe to say that many of our activities together in STPP can be considered praxes that are aimed at some goods.

Before proceeding, it is important for me to dispense with a common misinterpretation that Aristotle approaches the human good by prescribing a single good way for human beings to live. We can have many legitimate disagreements with him, but reading him as dogmatic is not one of them. In the opening lines of the NE, Aristotle contrasts the plural "goods" with the singular "good." He noted that "since there are many activities, arts, and sciences, the number of goods is correspondingly large" (1094a 7–8), meaning that worthwhile ends are distinctly plural, not singular. The overall good of eudaimonia, a good without qualification, is comprised by a felicitous integration of the particular goods one pursues in various activities. There are many different configurations of plural human goods that can constitute eudaimonia, not just one. Aristotle (1999) makes the connec-

tion between the plural goods and eudaimonia, the goal without qualification, in this way: "Honor, pleasure, intelligence, and all virtue we choose partly for themselves—for we would choose each of them even if no further advantage would accrue from them—but we also choose them partly for the sake of eudaimonia, because . . . it is through them that we will be eudaimon" (1097b 2–5).

In a direct and quite intentionally parallel fashion, Aristotle (1996a) also begins the *Politics* with the claim that "every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good" (1252a 1–3). So it is clear that he saw communal action as aiming toward the good as well. In addition, Aristotle suggested that a community is more than a place where people congregate, exchange goods, and provide common defense. Communities exist, he thought, "for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only" (1280a 32–33). Communities are constituted by friendships and exist for the sake of noble action. Through a community, people can pool their talents and wisdom to be better collectively than anyone can be as a separate individual. Parallel to the plurality of goods, Aristotle (1996a) clarified that "the nature of the polis is to be a plurality . . . a polis is not made up only of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similars do not constitute a polis" (1261a 18–25). (One important disagreement that virtually everyone today has with him is that he was quite wrong to exclude women from his plurality of citizens.)

In our case, this suggests that STPP can be more than a venue for us to gather, socialize, give talks, and bestow awards. STPP at its best will be a community in and through which we collectively seek the human good. As Aristotle (1999) put it, "The aim of politics is the good for man" (1094b 7). Now I want to turn to some specific goods we seek in STPP, how we can pursue them more intentionally, and how these pursuits can contribute to the human good.

Four Goods of Theoretical Psychology

I enumerate four goods that I think are central to theoretical psychology. This is not the only possible list, but I believe that these goods are sufficiently capacious to capture much of what we do and to be congenial to most, perhaps all

of us. Nevertheless, theoretical psychologists excel at devising critical questions and challenges, so my formulations will not be the final or only way to understand the goods of STPP. In that spirit, this article may provide a beginning point for a (hopefully) extended conversation. The four goods I discuss are knowledge, identity, communion, and meaningful contributions.

In many different ways, these four goods illuminate the functions of theoretical psychologists, which I will summarize as the four “Rs” of theoretical psychology: research, reflection, reexamination, and reformulation. *Research* for theoretical psychologists is not generally of the standard empirical form, but it involves the diligent work required to deeply understand the psychological theory, research, and practice on which one wants to *reflect* theoretically. *Reexamination* is synonymous with critique, the critical questioning of assumptions, methods, and interpretations. I discuss *reformulation* as the movement toward improvement in psychological practices made possible by exercising the other three functions. I believe theoretical psychologists are quite skilled in reflection and reexamination, but we must improve our research and reformulation capacities.

Knowledge

The pursuit of knowledge is a *prima facie* good for humans, psychologists, and theoretical psychologists. From an Aristotelian perspective, knowledge is a good that is choiceworthy in itself for human beings and therefore does not strictly require value beyond itself. Nevertheless, knowledge is also a key contributor to many other human goods, in addition to being a key constituent of eudaimonia. Thus, it is important to value knowledge both for its own sake and for the sake of improving our discipline and our societies.

Continue to develop theoretical knowledge. The members of STPP have produced many excellent works that explore vital theoretical questions in psychology. We already excel in the theoretical and philosophical analysis of the discipline of psychology, and it is important for us to continue to pursue this knowledge for its own sake. Some examples of this kind of work include the sociohistorical contextualization of psychology (Kirschner & Martin, 2010) and

psychotherapy (Cushman, 1995), the exploration of ideological biases in psychological research (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife & Williams, 1995), questioning assessment and construct validity practices (Lamiell, 2003; Slaney & Racine, 2011), and examining the ethical dimension of psychology (Fowers, 2005; Goodman, 2012). All of these endeavors involved in-depth research on the topics of interest and extensive reflection and reexamination of received views.

Make progressive theoretical alternatives our primary goal. As theoretical psychologists, we have developed powerful critical tools to reveal and analyze the blind spots, ideologies, unacknowledged moral commitments, and overstated objectivism in psychology (reflection and reexamination). These tools and the critiques they potentiate are invaluable contributions to the discipline. There is no possibility of becoming a reflective, progressive discipline without this kind of reflection and critique. These critiques are not generally welcomed with open arms, but we can increase receptivity to our work by attending carefully and understanding charitably our colleagues’ aims and concerns. We accomplish this by carefully and thoroughly researching the work on which we are reflecting. When we have not done sufficient research, we tend to rely on straw person arguments, dichotomizing, and excessive generalizations, which produce weak arguments.

The most important key to increasing receptivity to our work is to extend our work beyond critique to offer genuine alternatives to the blind spots, ideologies, unacknowledged moral commitments, and overstated objectivism that we identify. Just telling people that they are making a mistake is insufficient for theoretical psychology. For all the value of critique, by itself, it is unlikely to foster transformation. We need to reformulate psychological theory and practice to move beyond the mistakes and half-baked views that hamstring our discipline.

I know that genuine reformulation of problematic approaches to psychology is a difficult, long-term endeavor. The challenges of formulating real alternatives are substantial. I spent more than 10 years critiquing the ideologies of individualism and instrumentalism before I began to see a positive alternative that could follow from those critiques of ideology. Many of you will not need that much time, especially if

you have positive theoretical progress as your goal from the outset. One way to encourage efforts toward progressive theory is to give you some examples of this kind of work.

I believe that one of the ways in which we can see the maturation of STPP is that there are now a number of thinkers among us who have taken on the challenge of showing our discipline that we do not have to settle for theory, research, and practice that are shot through with unacknowledged ideologies and overblown claims to objectivity. Let me give you a few brief examples and an apology for being unable to include everyone who is shining the light of reformulated theory. Among his many contributions, *Slife (2004)* has gone beyond his initial critiques of atomism and abstractionism in psychology to develop a theory of strong relationality. He has persuasively formulated a relational ontology that rewrites our understanding of what it is to be a human being by showing that “things are not first self-contained entities and then interactive. Each thing, including each person, is first and always a nexus of relations” (p. 159). Martin has found shortcomings in the very popular developmental concept known as theory of mind. Rather than settling for critiquing this concept as hopelessly individualistic and excessively mentalistic, Martin has developed position exchange theory, which applies Mead’s dialectical, contextual, and relational concepts to reveal that human beings learn to understand others’ perspectives through exchanging positions, beginning with childhood games (*Martin & Gillespie, 2010*), a viewpoint that is also deeply reminiscent of *Gadamer’s (1989)* concept of play. After a decade of critiquing the hidden ideologies of instrumentalism and individualism, Richardson and I began to see how the Aristotelian concept of the human good could lead the way beyond these ideologies (*Fowers, 2005, 2012; Richardson, 2012*). I found that the idea of shared goods formed a natural complement to individual goods and that constitutive goods formed a natural complement to instrumental goods. This led to a eudaimonic theory of action that includes individual and instrumental activity, but transcends individualism and instrumentalism.

All of the people to whom I have referred are senior theorists. I want to make three points about that. First, it takes a significant period of time to construct theoretical reformulation. As such, it is an aspirational goal, one that requires

a long preparatory period of research, reflection, and reexamination, usually entailing extensive flailing about in the process of developing an alternative vision. So progressive theory requires a high tolerance for flailing and floundering. Second, it takes time because becoming a contributor to a long tradition of thought can only emerge from in-depth research. Think of a concert pianist or an expert artisan; long practice and development are necessary. Third, if one’s practice is not directed toward making excellent contributions, this development will not magically occur. One does not become a concert pianist by haphazardly banging on a keyboard or an expert potter by mucking about with clay. These are intentional developments over many years. Thus, my second recommendation to young theoretical psychologists is to set a clear goal of developing progressive theory and then devote themselves to dogged persistence in exploring and formulating real alternatives to the limits of psychological theory, research, and practice. There are no shortcuts to excellence.

I understand that there are theoretical perspectives endorsed by some members of STPP that question the possibility and prospects of what I have been calling progressive theory. Many postmodern perspectives cast doubt on conceptions of better and worse as outgrowths of totalizing discourses. What I take to be valuable in these perspectives is the encouragement of critical scrutiny of our ideas of a better or worse society, a better or worse psychology, a better or worse STPP, and better or worse psychological theorizing. I agree that it is necessary to question the appropriateness and value of any judgments of what is good or better, but I do not accept a counsel of despair that somehow dictates in advance that such judgments are impossible to justify. All of us make these kinds of judgments all the time. I think we even agree on many of them. To give a few examples, an APA that prohibits psychologists from participating in torture interrogations is better than an APA that turns a blind eye to psychologists’ involvement in these activities. An APA with theoretical psychology is better than an APA without it. An STPP that recognizes and confidently communicates its value is better than one that skulks in the shadows.

If we as theoretical psychologists can persuade ourselves that progressive theory is a

reasonable possibility, the next step is to seek philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have the resources to reshape psychological theory. Such resources are not generally obvious, but a persistent search can turn them up. The philosophical perspectives that deny that any real alternatives are possible—that we are simply stuck in an endless loop of ideology and revolving power relations—can offer valuable insights, but such excessive generalization and negativity can lull us into torpor, suggesting that there is no real progressive theory to do and making strenuous efforts toward reformulation seem pointless. I see the denial of the possibility of progressive theory as an unnecessary and unhelpful self-limitation of the theory. Of course, this is another very brief, rather rhetorical installment of a conversation that some of us have been having for 20 years, so I recognize that my suggestions regarding progressive theory may not be persuasive for everyone.

Professional Identity

At first glance, identity may not seem to be a good. From an Aristotelian perspective, however, having a clear identity is a key feature of the best kind of activity and life. This is because the ongoing sense of who one is as an individual and what a collective is clarifies what is worth pursuing, what counts as progress in those pursuits, and provides the wherewithal to imagine a future in which those ideals can be fulfilled. It is important, therefore, to clarify, as best we can, who we are as theoretical psychologists.

Clarify who we are as a scholarly community.

One of the hallmarks of a flourishing organization is that it has clear and communally endorsed purposes. I think we have some work to do in this area, as evidenced in our mission statement: “The purpose of the division is to explore the human science and philosophical aspects of psychological theories.” Although this mission statement is admirably succinct and capacious, it is vague to the point of vacuousness. It is also uninformative about why people would devote themselves to such a mission or why anyone should pay attention to our work. I know all too well that the suggestion of creating mission and vision statements usually induces a gag reflex. Yet I think that clarifying our purposes and the ends we seek as a group could provide themes around which we can more

strongly coalesce, from which we might draw guidance, and by virtue of which others can see the value in joining or attending to STPP. Mission statements should present the ends of an organization, and, at best, show the inspirational nature of those ends. As Aristotle (1996b) noted, “. . . it is a mark of much folly not to have one’s life regulated with regard to some end” (*Eudemian Ethics* 1214b 10–11), and this is just as true of organizations as it is of individuals. I want to suggest that the ends of STPP could be framed as promoting a more reflective, deliberative, self-clairvoyant, and ethical profession and society.

Develop our unique capacities as theoretical psychologists. In considering our identity as theoretical psychologists, it is vital that we really pay attention to what we are uniquely positioned to offer; that is, to our function. One of the serious dangers of being a small group that often feels marginalized and beleaguered is that we may not take our talents and capacities seriously enough. As theoretical psychologists, we are uniquely able to translate the important philosophical questions that bedevil psychologists into terms our disciplinary colleagues can understand. We have among us specialists in many key areas of philosophical psychology. We can offer ontological analysis to deepen and enrich psychological accounts of what it is to be human, of human identity, and of human action. Many among us have much to offer with respect to epistemology and the philosophy of science, an area where psychology still lags woefully behind other human sciences. Many theoretical psychologists are also highly skilled in revealing and exploring the moral dimension of psychology, uncovering and questioning the hidden moral commitments in every subfield of psychology. The discipline of psychology desperately needs our assistance to upgrade its theory, and we have to get better at responding to that need, which I elaborate more below.

Subdisciplinary activities. Several key developments in STPP have put us in a position to have greater influence in psychology. The first development is progress in the kind of publications that are a key form of professional identity development and communication. One of the most important steps forward in theoretical psychology in recent years is Teo’s (2009) leadership in taking the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* from a semiannual

Sage publication to a quarterly APA journal. Some of us also remember Slife's (1993) leadership in making our erstwhile newsletter into a fully professional journal. Although these transitions have not always been smooth or easy, they have brought us closer to our colleagues in the APA, increased the number of articles published in theoretical psychology, and strongly enhanced STPP's visibility. The real point of these instrumental goods is that they provide the infrastructure for pursuing the constitutive goods of theoretical psychology: knowledge, professional identity, communion with our colleagues, and meaningful contributions to our profession and our societies.

There are three other professional communications that have or will contribute to clarifying and developing the identity of theoretical psychology. Martin, Sugarman, and Slaney (2015) have completed an edited *Handbook of Methods in Theoretical Psychology*, which will showcase the work of many theoretical psychologists. This is a landmark book that will be a resource to us, our students, and other publics. It is also an important step in clarifying the identity of STPP. Thanks to Wendt (2014), we have a place in the 21st century through a theoretical and philosophical psychology Facebook page. I encourage you to join and contribute to it. In a third development, Goodman and I set up an STPP listserv that allows direct posts from members. If you are a member of STPP and you are not receiving posts from this listserv, please contact me to be included. It has been very active since its inception. I learned about many theoretical psychologists whom I did not know, some of those have already become more active members of STPP. Their knowledge and energy will strengthen and broaden STPP.

Pursue inclusiveness. As we clarify and develop our identity, it is important for us to be inclusive by welcoming diversity in backgrounds and in theoretical perspectives. The richness of our conversations with one another and the quality of the contributions we can offer psychology depend upon having a multivocal STPP. Sacks (2003) uses the analogy of the marketplace to clarify the irreducible value of diversity. If everyone in a marketplace produced and tried to sell the same goods, it would not be much of a marketplace. The enriching value of a marketplace is that one person can exchange what she has too much of for some-

thing she does not have. Thereby, everyone is better off. The marketplace of ideas works very similarly. It is in intellectual exchange that our ideas become enriched, deepened, and nuanced.

Let me mention one other form of inclusiveness that may be valuable to us. We are predominantly a group of scholars. In recent conversations with practitioners, I have encountered significant interest in the kinds of theoretical questions that engage us. Our practicing colleagues also face ontological questions about human nature and identity, epistemological questions about reasonable convictions and self-knowledge, and ethical questions of responsibility and how to live a good life. Reaching out to our practicing colleagues with the resources of theoretical psychology can provide many opportunities for important conversations and for sharing our knowledge and expertise.

Communion

There are three key ways that Aristotle emphasized the importance of human relatedness. First, he identified humans as social and political beings whose flourishing is dependent on the quality of our communal settings. Second, friendship is a central good for Aristotle. Third, he makes it very clear that contributing to the overall good of one's community is the highest form of practical life. The term Aristotle (1996a) used to describe these activities is *koinonia*, which is translated as good fellowship or communion (1295b 23). The key meanings of this term include participation, partnership, contributory help, and sharing in an endeavor (Strong, 1979). These terms have been specifically adopted in Christian understandings of the bond among coreligionists, but I am referring to a pre-Christian understanding of communion between relationship partners, friends, business partners, and political partnerships. I think it is very appropriate and useful to discuss specifically political and intellectual communion. I particularly want to invoke the idea that our work in STPP involves sharing in an important endeavor, and that our theoretical work is part of a shared endeavor in the discipline of psychology and in the societies in which we live.

Communion within theoretical psychology.

Cite each other. The concept of a shared endeavor in STPP evokes a vision of cooperation and collaboration that goes beyond simply congregating. One very simple measure of how

much we see our work as a shared endeavor is the extent to which we cite other theoretical psychologists' work. As a way to get some indication of the pattern of citations, I looked at the reference lists of articles authored by members of STPP in the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* for the last two years. I divided citations into self-citations of the authors, citations of the authors' favorite philosopher, and citations of other theoretical psychologists. It turns out that we cite other theoretical psychologists slightly more than self-citation and citation of our favorite philosophers. Yet most of the citations of other theoretical psychologists were of those who were geographically or theoretically closely aligned with the authors (often proximal in both ways). I believe that this degree of insularity falls well short of the kind of shared endeavor that a flourishing STPP would have. It suggests real limits in the breadth of our research on topics of interest and in the degree of reflection on our own work.

It is possible to think of a greater degree of mutual citation in purely instrumental terms. Impact and h factors are very simple and crass measures of prominence in academia, but I think they are still useful. Greater mutual citation will raise the impact factor of our journals as well as boosting one another's prominence. Although this could be a purely strategic, instrumental activity toward the end of raising our subdiscipline's stature, we can also approach mutual citation as a way to raise the level and quality of dialogue within the Society. After all, citing other scholars is constitutive of good scholarship (research), in which one engages with other points of view, takes them seriously (reflection), and generates new understanding through the interaction of perspectives (reformulation).

We can also see mutual citation as one embodiment of Aristotle's (1999) concept of character friendship, wherein we want the best for each other and try to bring out the best in each other in pursuit of mutually valued goods. This friendship can involve the genuine acknowledgment of one another's accomplishments, making use of arguments and concepts developed by others and building on their work. Friendship can also include raising critical questions about one another's work and holding each other accountable for good theory. This mutual accountability is essential because the quality of our

work is as much a collective achievement as an individual one. We accomplish this to a large extent behind the scenes in peer review, but it is also important to act as friendly critics in our meetings and publications, with the emphasis on working together as friends to raise the quality and cogency of our work. Aristotle (1999) strongly believed that "in order to be eudaimon, a man needs morally good friends" (1170b 19).

Learn from each other and build on each other's work. A central feature of a flourishing organization is that the members are able to see one another as resources and to draw strength and inspiration from each other. Aristotle (1999) emphasized that "the friendship of good men is good . . . and they are thought to become better too by their activities and by improving each other; for from each other they take the mold of the characteristics they approve" (1172 a 9–12).

One of the more discouraging features I have observed in our work and our interactions is how little we capitalize on the great strengths we have in STPP. We tend to operate in silos, collaborating almost exclusively with our near neighbors, whether that is geographical or theoretical proximity. As a consequence, few of us actually even cite the major theoretical developments that have been achieved in other silos. I am thinking of concepts like strong relationality (Slife, 2004), the ideologies of individualism and instrumentalism (Richardson et al., 1999), and epistemological violence (Teo, 2010), as well as other candidate concepts. These tend to be voiced by individuals or small groups, but they seldom find their way into our common conversation. I think these and similar concepts should become part of our standard parlance so that the value of these theoretical developments can become cumulative.

In my experience, scholarly work gains notice, prominence, and influence for two very different reasons. One is the quality of that work, but quality is often insufficient. The second is the collaborative efforts and mutual support of moderate to large groups of scholars who promote and expand those ideas. As individuals, we are very likely to toil in obscurity, but collaboration is a force multiplier for our work. Again, this can be seen as strategic activity for the sake of status alone, but that is not what I intend. Rather, I believe that good scholarship is much more than a matter of individual

brilliance. It is an outgrowth of conversation, critique, and collaboration. As smart as we are individually, we are much smarter when we collaborate, invite challenges to our work, and incorporate our responses to those challenges in future work. When we incorporate challenges to our work, it amounts to a self-reformulation.

Demonstrate the dialogue and reflection within the Society we want to see in psychology. There have been occasions when we have risen to a high level of dialogue and reflection in STPP. I am thinking particularly of the spirited exchanges between Gergen (2011) and his critics over the years and the panel devoted to discussing Held's (2005) recent book. These were very exciting moments in our group where individuals came out of their silos and put their ideas at risk with one another. They represented the kind of research, reflection, reexamination, and reformulation I have been discussing within STPP. Many people have told me how galvanizing those conversations were. Of course, there are also the risks or affront or fissioning in such exchanges, so a high degree of mutual respect is necessary to maintain our bonds.

Even more important, we have to make dialogue with one another a shared goal because dialogue can only be pursued in concert with others—no one can achieve dialogue alone. The beauty of making dialogue a shared goal is that we can develop an ethos in which we can learn from each other and enhance what we have to offer. Dialogue is also a constitutive goal because it is a defining feature of good scholarship and a necessary pathway to greater understanding. That is, dialogue is a constituent of good scholarship. Pursuing dialogue as a shared goal will give us room to develop our dialogical practices, including rectifying missteps along the way. Pursuing dialogue as a shared goal will allow us to manage the associated risk and fear because we will recognize that we are all in the same boat. The shared goal will also facilitate any needed relationship repair because good relations are necessary for dialogue cultivation and the pursuit of greater understanding. The goal I have in mind is a partnership in exploring theoretical psychology, a communion through dialogue.

I think more stimulating exchange can help us with one of our greatest challenges in STPP: increasing our young membership. One of the best ways to do this is to make Society sessions

and meetings exciting by having ongoing dialogue, where participants with divergent perspectives raise question about their differences and explore new ground in topic areas that matter. This kind of lively interchange can enlighten, inspire, and encourage reflective thought.

Attend and participate in the Annual Mid-Winter meeting. Our Mid-Winter meetings are an important sign of the maturation and development of the Society. When we began to hold them, they were experiments, the outcome of which was uncertain. The meetings have been so successful that we moved from a biennial to an annual format in 2013. It is an excellent meeting in which we can discuss our theoretical interests in greater depth than the Convention format allows. We also have many opportunities to socialize together, build new relationships, and foster student involvement.

Communion with other scholars. I want to encourage the goal of communion with scholars outside STPP as well. Meaningful engagement with scholars outside STPP will require us to create presentations and publications that will be welcomed and sought out by those colleagues. I do not mean to say that we should pander to others' interests and projects. I do have three recommendations for fostering positive connections with our colleagues.

Learn about and from other scholars. My first recommendation is to make it a priority to really learn about and from the work of the scholars we wish to engage (research). This sounds so simple, but I am sure others have, as reviewers and readers, seen descriptions and critiques of other psychologists' work that offer overly broad assertions, caricatures, straw persons, and outright distortions in the service of scoring critical points. When we approach other scholars in this way, it can be no surprise that they will have little interest in what we have to say. Distortion and dismissal beget distortion and dismissal. More importantly, shallow scholarship of this sort undermines the very idea of theoretical psychology. The function of research means taking the time and interest to deeply understanding the scholarship we wish to question. It is to really learn what others have to teach us. It is to understand the theoretical problems they face and the challenges they experience in dealing with these problems. In other words, *koinonia* or communion is consti-

tuted by working with, not against our colleagues outside of STPP. It is so easy to make and drink our own kool-aid, attending only to our favorite theorists and talking only to other theoretical psychologists who more or less share our views. It is so comforting and pleasant to do so that it is no wonder that it happens so much. Yet doing so maintains silos within STPP and marginalizes us from our disciplinary colleagues and from our societies. We need to improve our capacity to communicate beyond STPP if we want our work to have significant scope and influence.

Offer solutions with the resources of theoretical psychology. The second recommendation for communion beyond theoretical psychology is that once we have identified the theoretical problems with which other scholars struggle, we can deploy the resources available to us as theoretical psychologists to address these problems. I am convinced that the best way for us to improve psychology as a discipline is to become resources to our colleagues in tackling the conceptual difficulties that hamstringing their work. It will no doubt often be the case that the pitfalls, conundrums, ideologies, incoherences, and self-defeating conceptual schemes are unrecognized by those working in a particular area, so some work will be necessary to illuminate the challenges before taking steps toward a different approach (reflection and reexamination). I am suggesting that we take the problems our colleagues face and show them how taking a more sophisticated, dialogical, open-minded, or ideologically conscious perspective can reformulate the work they want to do. What we want to do is to work with our colleagues dialogically rather than savage them in journals that only theoretical psychologists read. My point here is that critique is a means to the end of a better psychology; critique is not an end in itself.

I understand that this is very difficult to accomplish, but let's keep in mind that we do not have to provide final or complete resolutions of the problems we face, only improvements in available understandings and enhancements of contemporary practices. Let me give you a few very brief examples in the area of education. Martin and McLellan (2013) discussed the contributions of psychology to the problematic creation of expressive, enterprising, and entitled students and the importance to educational re-

form of reconceptualizing students as communal agents à la George Herbert Mead. Slife (2012) provided a conceptual framework based on his concept of strong relationality, supplemented by virtue ethics to enhance the educational program at the Greenbrier Academy, a therapeutic boarding school for girls. Osbeck, Nersessian, Malone, and Newstetter (2011) explored the influence of disciplinary identity in scientific work and discussed a whole-person approach to science education. I apologize for leaving out other good examples, and I would be happy to learn about reformulations that others are pursuing.

Eliminate pejorative biases, overgeneralization, and unnecessary jargon. The third recommendation for fostering communion is to describe others' work fairly. I was dismayed when reading a recently published article in one of our theoretical journals that used the phrase "mainstream psychology" repeatedly and characterized this "entity" exclusively in very pejorative terms. Such descriptions are unfortunately common and triply problematic. No reasonable generalization can apply to all psychologists' work. In addition, this kind of formulation dichotomizes into an enlightened "us" and a benighted "them." Finally, characterizing others' work with a string of pejorative "isms" is empty, negative rhetoric lacking illuminating specifics. These shortcomings are indicative of inadequate research. I would like to see excessively generalized terms such as "mainstream psychology" expunged from our vocabularies because this terminological ilk is not only off-putting, it is vacuous. If we want to critique assumptions and errors, let us do so specifically and with documentation. That is, let us base our critiques on a thorough study of the topic (i.e., well researched).

Similarly, from time to time, I have noticed an explicit animus toward empirical research in general and neuroscience in particular in some of our public discussions. No doubt there are excesses, distortions, and insupportable assumptions in empirical work and some neuroscientists make overblown claims based on faulty assumptions. But let us keep in mind that there are many important and legitimately empirical questions and that we cannot have psychological experience without a physical substrate.

Allow me to give one illustration of the value of empirical neuroscience. One of the puzzles of human nature is the degree to which our agentic species conforms to social norms and expectations. Recent neuroscience can show us one important reason why human beings are so extremely sensitive to social exclusion. Here's how it works: one of the primary areas for registering physical pain is the anterior cingulate cortex. This brain area is also activated by emotional pain. In particular, it is activated when an individual feels excluded by others, even if the exclusion is part of a distinctly meaningless activity (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). The activation for exclusion is every bit as strong as it is for moderate physical pain. This means that the pain of ostracism is very tangible to us, and avoiding exclusion is therefore a very high priority in general.

This neuroscience knowledge helps to explain the everyday occurrence of conformism, but notice that it does not explain the bases for inclusion and exclusion, one important category of which comprises elements of culture (dress, speech, and action patterns). Nor can this bit of neuroscience illuminate how to reflect on and reexamine the cultural patterns that provide the bases for inclusion and exclusion. One of the more obvious lessons of human history is that cultural patterns and traditions must be critiqued and revised over time. This example illustrates how the reflection, reevaluation, and reformulation, central to the mission of theoretical psychology, makes theoretical psychology a complement to neuroscience rather than its mortal opponent.

The fourth recommendation to promote communion with other psychologists is that although we need some specialized vocabulary and theory, we need to avoid the temptation to rely excessively on a hyperspecialized vocabulary. The use of unnecessary jargon may feel comforting to us, but it creates a virtually impenetrable wall of words that is alienating to colleagues outside of theoretical psychology, and it is one of the difficulties in attracting new members to STPP. Too many of our presentations are virtually entirely unintelligible without years of background study. If we want communion with people who have not absorbed everything that we have absorbed, we need to limit

the use of jargon and carefully define the terms we do use.

The use of sweeping, critical statements, a rejection of research designed to answer legitimate empirical questions, and a reliance on unnecessarily esoteric terminology amount to a kind of self-marginalization. There are, of course, important theoretical conversations that will take place primarily among a relatively small group of illuminati, but if we want to raise the level of discourse in the discipline of psychology so that our colleagues can address vital, but neglected theoretical questions, we have to make our work both accessible and compelling to them. We have to make common cause with those outside theoretical psychology if we want psychology to become more theoretical. The burden of demonstrating relevance is squarely on us.

Meaningful Contributions

We, as theoretical psychologists, can contribute significantly to the betterment of our profession and our societies. In particular, we are uniquely qualified to increase the depth and frequency of reflection in our profession and societies by asking critical and neglected questions. Our theoretical and philosophical knowledge also positions us to facilitate deliberation about what matters most for psychologists and citizens. We have the expertise to raise and explore essential questions about what it is to be human and how this knowledge can facilitate human flourishing. Theoretical psychologists are also uniquely qualified to facilitate a greater commitment to an ethical profession and society.

Engage in key contemporary topics.

There are many topics of vital interest to our profession and the societies in which we live that call for theoretical reflection and reformulation. One of the most obvious ways that we can make meaningful contributions is to focus on such questions of deep interest and bring the resources of theoretical psychology to bear on them. There is tremendous energy in and significant work to be done on topics such as multiculturalism, the DSM, evolutionary psychology, moral psychology, identity, positive psychology, ethics, research fraud, educational reform, and so forth. Engaging these topics thoughtfully and in a prolonged way can show

the value of theoretical psychology, engage many people, and attract the interest of young scholars and practitioners who are fascinated by these topics. One way to pursue this may be to organize ourselves by forming special interest groups to work together on a selection of these key topics.

As we approach important topics, two of the things I mentioned earlier remain vital. First, we need to make our contributions accessible and relevant to the concerns and issues that other psychologists face. One way to increase the likelihood of accessibility and relevance is to collaborate with others whose primary interest is in the topic and who can help with translating and making theory applicable to others who are interested in the topic. There is no faster or more certain cure for inaccessible verbiage than talking to people outside one's specialty. Another marvelous curative for an addiction to esoterica is to teach theoretical psychology to undergraduates. They are serious sticklers for accessibility and applicability.

Create a reflective discipline. Our most important contribution to psychology and the broader society may not be the specific theoretical concepts we offer, such as strong relationality or eudaimonic theory. It may come in the form of encouraging a more reflective, dialogical discipline of psychology. I think these two characteristics have a *prima facie* validity as excellences in a profession that is dedicated to greater understanding of what it is to be human and to fostering the welfare of human beings. Of course, we could have a considered debate about whether reflection and dialogue are excellences, but such a discussion would be to embody reflection and dialogue. These two elements of theoretical psychology seem central and indispensable to me. If that is so, then doing excellent work as theoretical psychologists is a matter of communicating in a reflective, dialogical manner. When we monologue at others, we fail. When we confidently assert formulations that are not open to discussion and question, we fail. I think the path to a flourishing theoretical psychology is to reflectively consider important questions about our humanity in dialogue with colleagues and citizens who are working to better understand and foster good human lives.

Conclusion

Human beings are amazing creatures. We are capable of so much that is grand, noble, and beautiful. Our collective achievements range from awe-inspiring artistic performances to an Internet connected world to landing probes on Mars. Yet we have also proven ourselves capable of committing holocausts and engaging in the most casual brutality, astonishing exploitation of others, and the destruction of our natural environment. All of us are vulnerable to the inducements of egocentricity, self-deception, ideology, greed, envy, and fear that bring out the worst in us. The extremes in human actions highlight the necessity of a steadfast focus on fostering what is best in our nature. Aristotle noted frequently that, at our worst, humans are the worst of animals, but nobility is possible when we actively cultivate excellence. There are many ways to bring out the best in human nature, and I am convinced that the praxis of theoretical psychology is one of those ways. Yet theoretical psychology is very difficult to practice, and many of us often feel marginalized and discouraged. I have spoken with a number of colleagues about this, some of whom have abandoned the sub-discipline due to their disappointments. When I struggle with the challenges of the work, the occasional despair about its value, and the frequent isolation I experience in it, I often ask myself why I continue. The answer that I return to over and over is my conviction that theoretical psychology has a very important role in psychology, and that my best hope for making some small professional contribution to the human good is through theoretical psychology.

None of us can know the ultimate value of our contributions, but we can ensure that our attempts to contribute are in good faith. I have suggested a number of ways to gauge this through reflection on our praxes as theoretical psychologists. We can ask ourselves questions such as the following: Do we seek knowledge or status as our primary aim? Are we learning from and building on our colleagues' work or just attempting to score points against them? Are we building toward progressive theory or engaging in perpetual critique? How does our work contribute to the identity and unique resources of theoretical psychology? Are we participating in

STPP in a way that invites the interest of people who do not share our views? Are we building on other theoretical psychologists' work or attempting to go it alone? Are we actively developing communion with psychologists and other scholars outside theoretical psychology through seeking to solve problems they face? Are we bringing the resources of theoretical psychology to bear on the important problems of our time? Is our work reflective and dialogical in quality and does it encourage reflection by and dialogue with others?

I do not think that any of us is individually capable of flourishing as theoretical psychologists. We can only flourish together. One reason for that is that we are profoundly frail creatures, and if we are left to our own devices it is next to impossible to consistently be at our best. There are just too many ways to go wrong. So we need others to reflect back to us how we are doing and encourage us to do our best for the best reasons. A second reason that we need each other so much is that the very nature of a good theoretical psychology requires us to be reflective and dialogical. The nature of theory is to identify and clarify the relationships among ideas, experiences, and happenings and this is a necessarily dialogical form of work. Theory engages us in reflecting on what we think we know in order to question that knowledge so that we can correct or deepen it.

With even the slightest reflection, it is easy to see that the discipline of psychology desperately needs the kind of reflective dialogue that we are uniquely positioned to foster. This need is also obvious in the societies in which we live. We need to understand that we have a great deal to offer and to act accordingly. Let us work together intentionally to build the best kind of theoretical psychology, one that can consistently and proudly contribute to a better psychology and to the human good. That is the promise of a flourishing theoretical psychology.

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