

## Realistically Re-Envisioning General Psychology and its Relation to Specialization

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In the face of psychology's continuing expansion and diversity, Pickren and Teo (2020) call for a re-envisioning of general psychology. They challenge us to reforge psychology's historic links to philosophy and the humanities while also accommodating contemporary critiques arising from the discipline's increasing specializations. In response, Osbeck (2020) explores the idea of general psychology as "common ground" and "point of view," and suggests that the latter makes general psychology itself a specialization. Nevertheless, she anticipates difficulties for resolving psychology's methodological "value conflicts," sees no resolution for its ongoing dilemma of establishing limits to avoid incoherence while also honoring diversity, and wonders how psychology can incorporate the position of critic without sabotaging its own disciplinary progression. In this paper we argue that general psychology neither stands in contrast to psychology's specializations nor is itself a specialization. When *realistically* re-envisioned in the light of a clarification of thoroughgoing realism, general psychology resolves Osbeck's dilemmas, extends the ways in which philosophy is always "in" psychology, and takes us much further along the "common ground" and "point of view" paths, to where they converge in their roles of infusing and contextualising psychology's numerous specializations. General psychology is thus the *sine qua non* of all psychological inquiry, no matter how specialized.

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Psychology as a discipline has long been challenged by its paradoxical combination of flourishing via empirical expansion and struggling via theoretical disarray. According to Mackay and Petocz (2011):

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Indeed, psychology is not so much one discipline as many, a large, disparate and sprawling enterprise, whose subdomains, ranging from cultural studies to brain science, depend on concepts of mind, action and person so various that they are almost unrecognisable as part of the same venture.... And as every student of psychology soon realises, there is little cohesion across the theories that are encountered in psychology's different subdomains. Psychology is a veritable boom town with scores of rambling unconnected buildings, some once fashionable but abandoned, others planned but never built, some large, many small, in different regions isolated from one another. (pp. 17–18)

This ongoing challenge of unification and coherence in the face of expansion and diversity has prompted a recent call by Pickren and Teo (2020) to re-envision general psychology. Their rationale is twofold. First, there is the “fragmentation of psychology into more and more specialties and the creation of an apparently endless variation of professional areas” (p. 3), leaving psychology with the problem of cross-specialization communication and cooperation. Second, psychology's globalization and internationalization have brought “recognition of indigenous knowledges predicated on different intellectual and experiential bases” which “have generated theoretical critiques that call into question the ontological and epistemological bases of psychology, general or applied” (p. 3). Accordingly, the combination of these two problems provides a unique opportunity “to re-think, re-envision, and re-calibrate general psychology” (p. 3). The authors identify a number of what we might call *desiderata* for this re-envisioned general psychology, which we have summarised in the following “wish-list” of eight (related and partially overlapping) points:

1. *Broader scientific approach.* Adopt a broader scientific approach, one that re-connects psychology with its foundational roots in *both* the sciences *and* the humanities, including the conceptual sciences (viz. philosophy and philosophy of science), thereby becoming not just another specialty, but an overarching view embracing “multiple ontological, epistemological, methodological, and even ethical bases.” (Pickren and Teo, 2020, p. 3)
2. *Metatheory.* Offer a metatheory that provides disciplinary foundations for psychology.
3. *Integration and comprehensiveness.* Provide an “integrated or comprehensive understanding of large bodies of research, mental life, and its analysis and applications.” (p. 4)
4. *Focus on shared content.* Focus on shared psychological processes, content, and activities “with the intent to develop a comprehensive understanding of mental life.” (p. 4)
5. *Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scope.* Embrace work “drawn from indigenous, postcolonial, and critical methods outside the global North that addresses the hegemony of Western theories of psychological experience and offers alternative constructions that hold potential to deepen and extend the psychological in humane fashion.” (p. 4)

6. *Methodological flexibility.* Give primacy to “the ontological that may require not only quantitative but also qualitative, historical, and metatheoretical work” (p. 4) resulting in methodological flexibility that “may challenge and enrich methodologies grounded in Western Enlightenment rationality.” (p. 4)

7. *Historical, social, and cultural understanding.* Accommodate critiques of bias, resulting in combining Western and non-Western ontologies and epistemologies to become “a project capable of understanding the historicity, sociality, and culturality of mental life.” (p. 4)

8. *Radical critique of the mainstream.* Promote challenges to dominant views by providing a radical critique of mainstream psychology.

Clearly Pickren and Teo envisage a general psychology that will negotiate a return to the old (a broader conception of science, reconnecting with philosophy and metatheory) with accommodation of the new (a vastly expanded arena of divergent cross-cultural points of view and epistemic sources, globalization-driven critiques arising from hitherto marginalized or excluded minorities). This combination will allow for focus on integration, comprehensiveness, and shared content, and will be the driving force behind methodological flexibility. General psychology will thus become “not just another specialty, but an overarching view” (p. 3).

Osbeck (2020) takes up the challenge and offers a vision statement for general psychology that endeavors to provide many of the *desiderata* while also extending the discussion and highlighting what she sees to be potential difficulties. As will become clear, she concludes that general psychology is a specialization — a “subspecialty” (p. 6) that plays the unique role of overseer and critic. In what follows we begin by presenting Osbeck’s views in some detail, partly because we agree with the directions she takes and the doors she opens, and partly because, where we run up against crucial points of disagreement, critical evaluation serves to progress our own argument that the problems she identifies can be resolved.

### **From General Psychology as “Common Ground” to General Psychology as “Point of View”**

Osbeck (2020) positions her contribution as a deliberate plea for a return to one of the enduring aspects of general psychology: its responsibility for philosophical reflection via questioning, clarifying, and evaluating. As she notes, the difficulties in defining general psychology “are tied to some of the earliest and most controversial problems confronting the development of psychology as a science” (p. 6). She then considers two ways of conceptualizing general psychology: as “common ground” (which she labels GP1) and as “point of view” (which she labels GP2).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A third way of conceiving general psychology as “that which is common to all persons, which we might designate as GP3” (n. 2, p. 15), is noted but not pursued.

GP1 is “what is ‘presupposed’ in all branches of psychology” (p. 8), and will be presupposed in any new developments, what is “common to all psychologists, to psychology *in general* ... [i.e., GP1 is] that which could be called invariant across psychology” (p. 6). Such enduring and presupposed concepts provide psychology’s philosophical foundations. Osbeck concludes that in psychology there are *no* theories, methods, values and assumptions common to all psychologists apart from the “dual positionality of the inquirer” (p. 9) — as both subject/knower and object/known of the inquiry. But such common ground “is philosophical in nature”; it “transgresses” into philosophical analysis and so even the promise of common ground as a distinct disciplinary (viz. psychological) point of view becomes a “seeming dead end” (p. 10). Hence, she turns from GP1 to a second — in her view more fruitful — conceptualization.

GP2 is a “subspecialty within psychology at large, a subspecialty with a perspective and set of questions that distinguish it from other branches of psychology” (pp. 6–7). It involves reviewing and communicating to the rest of the psychological community the results and implications of psychological research across its various fields and specializations as well as locating these in psychology’s broader interdisciplinary context. Osbeck comments that this “sounds very like that of a contemporary philosopher of science focusing on the scientific aspirations and productions of the science of psychology, concerned with summarizing, evaluating, and communicating general trends and progress on big issues” (p. 10). It reveals the “inherent philosophical stance of general psychology” (p. 10), the inevitable fuzzy boundary between psychology and philosophy, and it “implicates reflection on the discipline’s overall conceptual structure but also *values*, both epistemic and social” (p. 10, emphasis in original). She then discusses three examples of contemporary “broad-scale” developments in psychology that serve as illustrations of GP2.

The first, big-data analytics, involves data sets of unprecedented size, applicability, and variety in source, where the task for general psychology is neither to embrace uncritically nor to reject out of hand but to “seek to understand the significance ... for the field at large and to evaluate their impact” (p. 11).

The second is psychology’s methodological proliferation which, according to Osbeck, calls for reflection on methods as value systems which are “not always in alignment,” reflecting psychology’s epistemic multiculturalism (p. 13). Here the task for general psychology is to pursue “an accurate and comprehensive understanding of where and how value conflicts come into play” (p. 13), encourage communication and deliberation about values, and move towards “epistemic common ground” rather than “retreat into respective ideological and methodological silos” (p. 13).

The third example is Critical Psychology (CP), a burgeoning (albeit non-mainstream) international approach (e.g., Teo, 2015) noted for its critique of mainstream psychology’s positivist foundations, subject matter and methods,

and for foregrounding the ethical–political dimension of psychological practice. In Osbeck’s judgement, the essence of CP is critical evaluation which is “the point of view of general psychology” (p. 14). It can provide the critical overseeing and accountability and thus can “seek the larger framework,” although this “is not to be taken as consistent with the aim of unifying psychology. One could come to the conclusion that psychology resists unification, as others have demonstrated” (p. 14). Regarding unification she acknowledges that there may be overlap between GP1 and GP2: “GP2 may be ... a position from which one concludes that GP1 is illusory, that is, that psychology is marked principally by discontinuity or disunity (e.g., Green, 2015)” [p. 7].<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in Osbeck’s (2020) analysis three notable dilemmas arise for general psychology: the problem of negotiating methodologically-derived epistemic value conflicts; the difficulty of establishing limits to achieve coherence while also honoring psychology’s diversity; and the question whether psychology can incorporate the role of critic (CP) without sabotaging its own disciplinary progression by undermining its conceptual and methodological edifices.

Using Osbeck’s (2020) discussion as a springboard, and engaging critically with it at crucial points, we aim to show how realism, fully understood and consistently employed, extends the ways in which philosophy in general (including philosophy of science) is always “in” psychology, and takes us much further along the paths of “common ground” and “point of view,” to where they converge in infusing and contextualizing all and any psychology. This *includes* psychology’s numerous specializations. As such, a realist general psychology becomes, as Pickren and Teo envisage, more than Osbeck’s “research specialty.” It offers a far more radical critique of mainstream psychology than does CP, and it resolves the various “value conflicts” and dilemmas identified by Osbeck while also providing supposedly unachievable unification.

We emphasize realism that is fully understood and consistent because, as we see it, one major obstacle is a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of realism (see Hibberd and Petocz, 2022). This results in confused allegiances and endless cross-purpose debate among realists, those who claim to be antirealist, and those who, in not employing realism consistently, fall into a “partial realism.” For that reason alone we think it important to spell out what realism is, what it is not, and why that matters. This will not only reveal a system likely to be at odds with many readers’ expectations,<sup>3</sup> but will also allow a clear picture to emerge of what is involved in general psychology.

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<sup>2</sup> Osbeck’s citing Green here indicates that “common ground” involves *explicit consensus*, as that is the basis of Green’s assessment that psychology will never be unified. We argue later that realism’s common ground is neither necessarily explicit nor necessarily consensual.

<sup>3</sup> This system has sometimes been referred to as “situational realism” (Hibberd, 2014; Maree, 2020; Petocz and Mackay, 2013), but, strictly speaking, the qualifier is redundant.

### Clarifying Realism

We will not begin with the two standard observations that (a) realism comes in several varieties (e.g., Haig, 2021; Harré, 1986; Kitcher, 2001; Maree, 2020) and (b) realism is the thesis of a mind-independent world or reality. As will become clear, both are misleading; (a) rests on mistaking the variety of partial realisms for different kinds of realism, and (b) is often mistakenly thought to imply that mentality is not part of that mind-independent reality. Instead we ask the reader to consider the following examples of statements — statements with which, incidentally, we agree.

1. “Psychology has long made substantive use of qualitative methods of various kinds” (Osbeck, 2020, p. 12).
2. “We all share that we live, act, and engage in historically and culturally constituted societies” (Pickren and Teo, 2020, p. 4).
3. “Psychology has become ‘epistemically multicultural’” (Osbeck, 2020, p. 13).

We begin here so as to illustrate that each author is asserting what they take to be the case — each statement is put forward as being about how things really are and the author is ruling out its contradictory. This presumes realism — that to propose truly is to say things are *as they are*; that there are situations (or facts, or states of affairs [Armstrong, 1997]) which are not constituted through any acts of assertion.<sup>4</sup> That presumption seems to us to be unavoidable if we are to consider any matter of any kind.<sup>5</sup>

But there is more to realism than this. Consider the form or structure of these statements. At the very least, each involves something general being predicated of a particular subject — the use of qualitative methods and epistemic diversity are predicated of psychology (the discipline), and historically and culturally constituted societies are predicated of human life.<sup>6</sup> The *form* or (subject–predicate) *structure* of each of the statements entails a set of presuppositions (PSPs). For example, the first statement claims that, over time, the discipline of psychology

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<sup>4</sup>We add that (i) to propose falsely is to say that things are a certain way when they are not, (ii) it does not follow that, when we speak truly and, therefore, know some segment of reality, we also know that we have spoken truly, and (iii) the act of asserting (or proposing) is itself a situation (or fact).

<sup>5</sup>Although it is fashionable in some academic circles to adopt the rhetorical strategy of hedging all proposals, that tends to encourage ambiguity and/or blur the distinction between the truth/falsity of what is proposed and the psychological state of the proposer (in this case genuine or adopted uncertainty). We maintain that, consistent with realism, everything we propose is either true or false independently of how strongly or tentatively we believe it, and we assume that active readers will dispute any invalid arguments or claims which appear either false, irrelevant, or inadequately justified by us.

<sup>6</sup>Other forms of speech, such as the different kinds of hypotheticals, depend on the subject–predicate form and so cannot serve as alternatives to it (Anderson, 1962b).

has made substantive use of qualitative methods. First, this implies that every substantive use of a qualitative method in psychology has occurred somewhere in space and time, even if spread across large periods of time and vast tracts of space. So, PSP1: every situation has *spatio-temporal location*. Note that length, distance, and time (all physical attributes) are continuous quantities and, therefore, measurable. Second, there are factors responsible for psychology's use of qualitative methods and there are constraints on its consequences — situations (such as research decisions) cannot spring up spontaneously from nothing; they are caused and will in turn cause subsequent situations. PSP2: every situation involves *causality*. Third, the subject of the statement, psychology (the discipline), is different from its predicate, the substantive use of qualitative methods. Hence, the subject is related to the predicate via the relation of “being different from.” PSP3: every situation involves *difference* and, as difference is relational, every situation involves *relation*. Fourth, psychology is one particular discipline making substantive use of qualitative methods over time. PSP4: every situation involves *particularity*. Even when the subject of the statement involves the quantifier *all* (as in, all disciplines, all individuals, or all societies), the statement's particularity lies in “all” entailing each and every one (e.g., each discipline, each individual, each society). Disciplines, individuals, and societies can, of course, be counted, but counting instances is not measurement because frequency counts involve integers, not continuous quantities (Michell, 2010). Fifth, what is predicated of the particular discipline of psychology is a kind, i.e., something general, viz., qualitative methods and the relation of using. Both kinds are general because both are instantiated across different spatio-temporal contexts. PSP5: every situation involves *generality*. Whether the kind is qualitative or quantitative is an empirical question that requires defining the kind (identifying its essential features — saying what it is) and subsequently constructing tests appropriate for its assessment (Hibberd, 2019; Michell, 2010).

In short, when we consider the situations (to which we allude when we propose something), they occur somewhere in space and time, are brought about by preceding situations, shape subsequent situations, and are a particular instance of some general kind or type. These PSPs may sound like the Kantian categories, especially given their universality. But despite that similarity there is an important difference: the PSPs are in fact Aristotelian rather than Kantian — they are categories of *being*, not merely categories of *understanding* (see Anderson, 2007; Hibberd, 2014). The PSPs identify conditions *necessarily* involved when anything occurs (including, therefore, all biological and social situations, and all forms of language use).<sup>7</sup> These conditions are part of the “invariant scaffolding” or “infra-

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<sup>7</sup> Even if someone were to make only a noise, that in itself would be a fact or situation infused with the same invariant (categorical) features of what it is to exist or occur. The noise would be spatio-temporally located, it would have been caused, it would then change reality in some respect, and so on.

structure” of all situations onto which each situation’s distinct content “attaches.”<sup>8</sup> Hence their significance for general psychology: the PSPs show how psychology’s diverse specialities cleave together; *any study*, no matter how narrowly focussed, involves these universal conditions. Thus, in some measure, points 1 and 2 of the earlier “wish-list” are realized and there is real meat to Osbeck’s discarded GP1 notion of “common ground.” This accords with the mission statement of the Society for General Psychology.<sup>9</sup>

[The Division] ... promotes the creation of coherence among psychology’s diverse evidence based specialties, other scientific disciplines and the humanities. It encourages analysis of the merits and challenges of bridging concepts, methods, and theories.

Here we would add that, with respect to the urging that we “create” coherence, the conditions at the heart of the PSPs above are not of our making. They are neither mentally constructed nor co-constructed by the psychological subject and reality — they are *in* reality and, therefore, in all that is either non-psychological or psychological (the latter comprising one of reality’s many complex systems).<sup>10</sup> They infuse or pervade *all* situations and, therefore, all forms of inquiry.

Yet, we suggest, even more is involved. Far from the “seeming dead end” of GP1 (Osbeck, 2020, p. 10), seven interconnected principles either emerge directly from the PSPs above or are related indirectly. We take the synthesis of all seven to be distinctive of a consistent realist metatheory (e.g., Hibberd and Petocz, 2022; Petocz and Mackay, 2013).

### *Realism’s Interconnected Principles*

1. *Ontological egalitarianism.* If every situation involves spatio-temporal location, then occurring in space and time is the single way of being common to everything. Reality is, then, seamless; there are no realms or levels that are “higher” (as in idealism) or “lower” (as in reductionism) or somehow more or less “real” than others. This rules out dualism in all its many versions — matter/spirit, free/determined, facts/values, causal powers/effects, philosophy/science, science/meaning, natural/social. The relation between any two or more supposed

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<sup>8</sup>Our list of conditions is abridged. For a more thorough elaboration, see Baker (1997), Hibberd (2014), and Michell (2011).

<sup>9</sup><https://www.apadivisions.org/division-1/about/mission-statement>

<sup>10</sup>If the PSPs were mentally constructed or co-constructed by the psychological subject and reality, then both constructors would pre-exist the construction process, in which case neither would be subject to the PSPs. The onus is on the defender of such a position to, first, provide an alternative theory of what it is to be a PSP-less situation and, second, overcome the dualism between a PSP-less reality and a reality in which the PSPs necessarily inhere.



realms or levels cannot be described coherently without either collapsing the distinction between those levels or invoking a third level (Hibberd, 2010; Passmore, 1970).

2. *Situational complexity in process.* Situations are infinitely complex spatio-temporal segments of reality the contents of which are always in process, always nested or embedded in other situations, and always occur in context (historical, cultural, etc.). They cannot be decomposed into something less than a situation (e.g., just a relation without its relata). Attributes that characterize a particular network of situations (e.g., social institutions, persons) do not necessarily characterize their component situations (e.g., the individuals in the social institutions, the brain within the person), nor vice versa; making such attributional transitions perpetrates the *mereological fallacy* — a widespread problem in psychological and cognitive neuroscience (Bennett and Hacker, 2003; Smit and Hacker, 2014).

3. *Logic embedded in reality.* Logic is neither constituted in discourse nor is an abstract language or calculus. It is *embedded in reality* in two senses: first it pertains to the general forms of situations — the invariant conditions (identified above) that infuse all situations; second, it concerns relations between situations (e.g., relations of entailment). These logical relations are real. If, for example, psychology has long made substantive use of qualitative methods, it follows as part of the structure of reality that psychologists as people are involved in this process of “making use.” Also, a situation and its contradictory cannot both be real, so it cannot be the case that qualitative methods have *not* long been made substantive use of. Thus, “getting the logic right” is a necessary condition of all scientific research (e.g., Hibberd, 2014 and replies).

4. *Relations as non-constitutive.* Relation is a feature of reality, for every situation involves relations between subject and predicate, spatial and temporal relations involved in location, and every situation is related (spatially, temporally, causally) to other different situations. To say that relations are non-constitutive is to say that they do not make up (constitute) their relata; they cannot be reduced to or found within the items or situations related. Therefore, they cannot be reified or treated as things. Nevertheless, relations are not less “real” than the items or situations related. Consider a simple spatial relation of the book being beside the cup. Each item (book and cup) has its own intrinsic characteristics that do not include its relation to (its being beside) the other; the being-beside relation does not constitute, so cannot be found in, either the book or the cup. The being-beside relation is not a third *thing* in addition to the book and the cup. But how the book and cup are spatially with respect to each other is as real a part of the situation as are the book and the cup as items. Certainly, the parts of a situation or object are related to each other (the pages of the book stand in spatial relations to its cover, and the handle of the cup stands in spatial relations to its lip and base), so those relations between the parts are internal or intrinsic to the wholes of which they are

parts (book and cup respectively). But relations between those parts are not *intrinsic to those parts*. In short, relations do not constitute or make up, either partially or wholly, the items or situations related, and the fallacy of constitutive relations is the error of claiming that they do (Hibberd, 2014; Holt et al., 1910; Mackie, 1967).

5. *Causality occurs in a field or context.* Causality is a feature of reality in that any situation arises from antecedent situations and then gives rise to further situations. However, causality is not a simple two-term linear (cause–effect) sequence or constant conjunction; it is a complex three-term relation (cause, field, effect) in which the agents (or causes) act on the field (or causally relevant conditions) to change it in some respect (the effect) [Hibberd, 2014; Mackie, 1974]. Given principle 4, each term (situation) in the causal relation is logically independent of the other two terms — the effect is not part of, or contained in, the field or the cause. However, the effect’s existence is materially or causally dependent upon a range of (logically independent) antecedent conditions (causes acting on the field). Hence, causal dependence is not to be confused with logical dependence (Hibberd, 2014).

6. *Mentality as relational.* Cognition (knowing) is a particular kind of psychological relation between organism (involving brain and perceptual apparatus) and environment (the content of situations and their PSP form or structure) [Anderson, 1927/1962a; Michell, 2011]; more generally, it is taking something to be the case when that something obtains. To convert the cognitive relation into a thing (the “mind,” and then — as in much psychology today — the brain) is to reify the cognitive relation (the constitutive fallacy noted in principle 4). This is accompanied, typically, by the mereological fallacy (noted in principle 2). Given that relations are non-constitutive, the cognitive relation cannot be internal to the brain — as it is widely assumed to be in psychology. Identifying cognition as a relation that an organism sometimes stands in (with respect to situations) is not to deny that such occurrences are real and causally efficacious. It is only to deny that psychological relations are a component of either the organism (or some part thereof) or the situations they are related to.

7. *Science as critical inquiry.* Recall the realist presumption — that to assert or propose something truly is to *say things are as they are*, and consider principle 6 — that cognition is *taking something to be the case when it obtains*. Cognitive error, therefore, is taking something to be the case when it does *not* obtain. This may lead to proposing falsely, i.e., stating that something is the case when it is not. Human cognition is at the heart of scientific activity — the latter being continuous with ordinary inquiry (Haack, 2003, 2020). Science consists in investigating the situations that comprise any complex (including human) system, and offering statements/assertions about what is the case (e.g., the three assertions we began with). When we are right, science gives us truth, though that does not entail knowing that we are right, nor does it entail certainty or indubitability. Crucially, science is motivated in part by psychological, social, and political forces, hence

no inquiry is disinterested. That may lead to misrepresentation of reality (false assertions), but such misrepresentation is not inevitable because what is proposed does not depend *logically* (principles 3, 4, 5 and 6) on the motivational state of the inquirer or on the social context of the investigation. Science is, then, a “potentiation of common sense, *exercised with a specially firm determination not to persist in error* if any exertion of hand or mind can deliver us from it” (Medawar, 1969, p. 59, italics added). Therefore, the core feature of science is not experimentation, mathematization, measurement, or any other particular method, but *critical inquiry* (Cohen and Nagel, 1934) — careful, systematic investigation, employing our best available error-detection mechanisms, and testing claims via logical (conceptual) and observational tests (as opposed to relying solely on authority, dogma, faith or intuition). In that respect science is *self-corrective*, testing its *own* claims and assumptions (e.g., asking why critical inquiry is necessary).<sup>11</sup>

In sum, we hope in this brief detour to have shown that realism is a precondition of discourse and, hence, of any form of inquiry or position taken, regardless of whether proponents of that position explicitly accept or deny it. In spelling out what realism involves, we have attended to conditions (designated in the PSPs) necessarily involved when anything occurs and then unfolded seven related principles and their synthesis. The resulting self-critical metatheoretical system is one which, we claim, meets the standards of scientific inquiry, by which we mean *critical inquiry*, and is foundational to coherence across all forms of psychological inquiry. We understand the view that ethical and epistemological matters and methods are of greater relevance to psychology (e.g., King et al., 2021). However, when the metatheoretical system above is breached, serious errors follow, leading to what has been widely criticized as psychology’s scientific immaturity regarding conceptual analysis, definition, measurement, hermeneutic and case-study research, and its ongoing Cartesian dualism, internalism, and representationism (e.g., Hibberd, 2019; Machado and Silva, 2007; Mackay and Petocz, 2011; Michell, 2010; Petocz, 2004).

### *What Realism is Not*

It now becomes clear, we hope, what realism is *not*. We can summarize in five points. First, realism, at core, is not a paradigm, perspective, school, approach, or theory (along the lines of behaviourism, cognitive science, computationalism, perceptual control theory, etc.); it is not just another pet approach, which we might fail to persuade others to adopt because they already have *their own* pet approach (cf. Green, 2015). It is not a “theoretical perspective” that provides “metaphysical

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<sup>11</sup> Thus although the nominal form “science” is restricted to certain subject fields (e.g., physics, chemistry, psychology, etc.), wherever critical inquiry occurs, that field is marked by a *scientific approach* — it investigates the subject matter (e.g., history, anthropology, sociology) *scientifically*.

certainty” while occupying the “safe end” of a “continuum of practical assumptions” and competing with, say, a more “risky” approach like developmental evolutionary psychology (Marsh and Boag, 2014, p. 49).<sup>12</sup> To set realism in competition with these various approaches is to make Ryle’s (1949) “category mistake.” Debates about competing schools, theories, approaches, etc. in psychology are conducted in the context of the assumption of realism; such debates *presuppose* realism — as do the theories and approaches being debated.

Second, realism is not chiefly a thesis about what exists or occurs. Its primary concerns are what is involved when anything exists or occurs and what follows (logically) from that. So it is misleading to say that one is realist about horses but not about unicorns, or realist about matter but not about spirit. For example, Green (2015) states: “I am fairly realist about some scientific objects (e.g., trees, mountains, stars) and I am fairly instrumentalist (antirealist) about others (e.g., implicit memory system, the openness-to-experience personality trait, dissociative-identity disorder)” [p. 212]. Again, debates about the reality of various psychological phenomena, hypothetical explanatory concepts, and so on, are conducted — can *only* be conducted — in the *medium* of the situational (subject–predicate) logic outlined above. We support Green in questioning the reality of, say, personality traits like “openness-to-experience.” But that is not to be antirealist about traits; it is to provide a realist critique identifying logical error, in this case reification.

Third, realism does not come in varieties. Realism is either thoroughgoing (thoroughly consistent) or, where it is not, where there is a falling away from realism at some point or in some way, it can only be described as “partial realism.” There are different partial realisms because there are different ways of falling away from realism, but there are not different realisms. The variety of “realisms” (e.g., Greenwood’s [1992] realism, Fodor’s [1985] representative realism, Bhaskar’s [1978] critical realism, Harré’s [1986] ethogenic realism) referred to in the literature (see Haig, 2021; Maree, 2020) is a variety not of realisms but of partial realisms.<sup>13</sup> Determining whether a presumed realism is partial or thoroughgoing requires examining the collection of assertions made in its name, together with their implications, and assessing whether, and if so where, any of the PSPs and principles has been neglected or compromised.

Fourth, following from the previous point, contrary to the beliefs of many mainstream psychologists and their critics, realism is not positivism. It does not include the views and approaches (concerning philosophy, metaphysics, reality, science, scientific method) that can be found in mainstream positivist psychology — scientism and naïve scientific triumphalism, ignoring or misrepresenting historical

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<sup>12</sup> As indicated earlier (see note 5), certainty involves a particular kind of psychological relation, and feeling certain about any statement is not relevant to the statement’s truth or falsity.

<sup>13</sup> We recognize that “thoroughgoing” is also a qualifier, but we use it to distinguish realism from “partial realism” rather than one supposed kind of realism from another.

and sociological facts about the non-linear progress of science, excluding and seeking to discredit philosophy, embracing operational definitions, treating experimentation and quantitative methods as co-extensive with scientific investigation, neglecting qualitative and historical methods. All these illustrate how mainstream positivism falls away from realism and fractures into partial realisms.

Finally, realism is neither an ideology nor a system of values. It is ideologically neutral in the sense that it concerns *what is involved in something's being the case* and what follows logically. It does not deal with what ought to be the case or how we ought to behave, nor can it solve value or moral dilemmas. On a realist analysis of the concept of value, nothing is a value per se because valuing is a *relation* — between a cognising and motivated entity or person or social group and whatever is valued.<sup>14</sup> Science can investigate values in the sense of investigating valuing — what is valued by whom (e.g., that quantitative methods are still highly valued by psychologists), why, what policies (actions) are pursued, what motivational processes underlie different policies, why and how there are conflicting valuing, and so on. Insofar as the aim of science is the discovery of facts, it is reasonable to claim that scientists value the truth and, therefore, the correction of error. It might also seem fair to claim that the ethical position on science is that the truth ought to matter to scientists and not be subverted for other reasons. But such claims are not part of the “is” of scientific inquiry, from which, as Hume noted, one cannot legitimately derive an “ought.” They presuppose either the definition of science as a fact-seeking enterprise or the truth of the conditional *if* one wants to investigate scientifically *then* one must seek the truth rather than fudge data, misreport procedures, etc. Scientific inquiry is valued by most people because it answers questions about the nature of processes, including means-ends processes.

### *Why Does it Matter?*

Why does it matter for understanding the role of general psychology what realism is and what it is not? There are two reasons.

First, it matters because it answers the question “what happened to psychology over the last century?” and provides a diagnosis of an ongoing problem that is not usually addressed. With psychology’s fracturing into partial realisms, general psychology — specifically, general psychology as inextricably involved in any psychological inquiry — became lost. The problems began with a widespread falling away from realism, initially among mainstream explicit subscribers to realism (as

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<sup>14</sup>In typical moral discourse, the relation of valuing is converted into a supposed intrinsic property of the valued activity (“X is right/wrong/good/bad”). A factual preference relation is converted into a *pseudo*-factual statement about an intrinsic property. This can serve as a powerful method of persuasion (Maze, 1973).

with mainstream positivists), and then with a subsequent “domino-effect” across the board — among “middle-ground” theorists who oppose (in many cases justifiably) the positivism of the mainstream (e.g., Harré, 2002; Liebrucks, 2001; Martin et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 1999), among “critical realist” opponents of the mainstream (e.g., Bhaskar, 1978), among “critical psychologists” (e.g., Cromby and Nightingale, 1999) who claim that their relativism/constructivism is consistent with realism, and even among radical social constructionists (e.g., Edwards et al., 1995; Gergen, 1994; Neimeyer, 1995; Shotter and Lannamann, 2002), insofar as their explicit antirealism denies or ignores the inevitable realist PSPs on which antirealism is based.<sup>15</sup> Thus it was the mainstream heart of psychology, in an effort to gain respectability as a genuine science, whose misguided way of executing that aim set the partial-realism ball rolling.

The second reason is related to the first. It matters because, with the diverse terrain of psychology so dominated by misconceptions of realism, by explicit antirealism, and by resulting partial realisms, considerable time and effort is wasted on futile pseudo-debate in which the real issues are obscured, thus evading critical scrutiny and hampering progress. For example, in attempting to explain why psychology is not unified and probably never will be, Green (2015) observes that “There is a great deal of debate in philosophy of science these days among ‘realists’ and ‘antirealists.’ My guess is that the antirealists are winning at present” (p. 211) because, contrary to the realist caricature of antirealism as promoting “anything goes” and “all stories are equally valid,” antirealism aims “not to undermine science but, rather, to see clearly and to explain important phenomena within the evolving historical institution called ‘science’ which are often ignored or hastily covered over by those who might be termed naïve scientific triumphalists” (n. 11, p. 211). Green concludes that the power of the antirealist narrative lies in its “effort to come to terms with the history of science as it has actually proceeded over the past several centuries” (p. 212). Yet Kuhnian (Kuhn, 1970) observations about the history and sociology of science that focus on its crooked path via constant fluctuations and negotiations are perfectly compatible with realism’s combined principles of situational complexity in process, causality as a network or field, and science as critical inquiry. They are also compatible with the realist view (and Green follows Kuhn again here) that in science we aim to move “from the less adequate understandings of the past to the (we hope) more adequate understandings of the future” (Green, 2015, p. 212), a process made possible by the fact that “it is our underlying ontological conceptions ... and our apprehension of methods that *are often in error and need to be revised*” (p. 212, emphasis added). The legitimate target here is not realism but mainstream psychology’s positivist scientific triumphalism, and there is nothing antirealist

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<sup>15</sup>Critiques by Held (2007) and Hibberd (2005, 2010) show why these various partial realisms fail requisite conceptual tests.

about the criticisms. Hence, as a portrayal of the disunity between realists and antirealists, the picture misses the mark; it is a picture that owes its confusions to the “domino-effect” described above.

But now this allows us to arrive at a genuine point of disagreement between realists and antirealists — which is not the stumbling socio-historical path of science, but what that stumbling *implies*. The realist will point out that getting things wrong (even quite often or most of the time) implies that it is possible sometimes to get things right; error is parasitic on truth and knowledge, and can only be identified in the context of non-error (principles 3, 6, and 7). Some “antirealists” (and Green is right to note that many do not take this next step) neglect the logical point and claim that getting things wrong implies that we cannot ever get things right; there is no possibility of objective knowledge and truth. This is where the supposed realist caricature of the antirealist position as “anything goes” or “all stories are equally valid” *does* identify the problem.<sup>16</sup> When, for example, the Kuhnian sociology of science is said to *entail* relativism of truth or objectivity, the sociology of science is being illegitimately conflated with the logic of science.<sup>17</sup> There is insufficient space here to provide other examples. But it can be shown that this “domino-effect,” where critics of mainstream positivism mistakenly believe they are criticising realism and so come to think of themselves as antirealists, has resulted in both misunderstanding the reach of realism and obscuring those instances where the “dominos” fall farther afield into genuinely antirealist claims.

### General Psychology Re-Envisioned

We are now in a position to elaborate our thesis that realism not only provides the Pickren and Teo (2020) *desiderata* for a re-envisioned general psychology without falling into self-contradiction, but does so in ways that extend considerably Osbeck’s (2020) two themes of “common ground” and “point of view” to a position where the broader point of view is entailed by common ground. “Common ground” and “point of view” converge and infuse what is common to inquiry of any kind and, therefore, all psychology and all specializations in psychology. This infusion also resolves the dilemmas and “value conflicts” that Osbeck considers major obstacles.

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<sup>16</sup>If both  $p$  and  $\sim p$  were the case, “anything goes” *would* follow logically (Copi, 1954). It also follows from Popperian anti-inductivist scientific irrationalism (Stove, 1982). The critics of antirealism are specifying accurately the unacknowledged implications of certain antirealist claims.

<sup>17</sup>This conflation has been widespread. Heralded by Popper (1959), popularized by Kuhn (1970), and adopted in Bloor’s (1976) “strong program in the sociology of scientific knowledge,” the conflation has led to key ideas being reversed for no coherent reason (Stove, 1991, p. 3).



*Expanding General Psychology as “Common Ground”*

To begin with, the required “metatheory” for psychology is comprised of the unavoidable presuppositions that alert us to the conditions that necessarily infuse all situations. Then there is the common ground of every *psychological* situation, whether that of inquirer or object of inquiry, being inextricably embedded in and constrained by the related principles of ontological egalitarianism, situational complexity in process, causality in context or field, logic, relations as nonconstitutive, and mentality as relational. And, as soon as we embark on psychological investigation, we are also constrained by the principle of science as critical inquiry.

From the principle of science as critical inquiry comes the common ground of the general method of critical inquiry, from which, in turn, a variety of specific methods — both conceptual and observational — flow. This variety is not a matter of ideological legitimization; methodological proliferation flows *scientifically*. The complex nature of situations, involving both quantitative and qualitative features (as per the PSPs), requires an approach that fits method to the nature of the phenomenon of interest. Hence, realism requires that research methods in psychology be expanded from their contemporary narrow domain to include *under the single scientific umbrella of critical inquiry* those forms of qualitative investigation germane to its subject matter. Qualitative research is necessary for the investigation of matters that are *not* quantitative and, therefore, includes conceptual analysis. “Scientific testing” includes both logical (conceptual) testing and empirical testing (Hibberd, 2021; Machado and Silva, 2007; Petocz and Newbery, 2010).

Realism also serves the Pickren and Teo (2020) *desideratum* by extending the idea of common ground to Osbeck’s (2020) unexplored GP3 (note 1) — “that which is common to all persons.” Accepting Osbeck’s “dual positionality of the inquirer,” we can see that this situation — even if the inquirer were never the object of inquiry — takes us even further, for it *logically presupposes* a cognizing human capable of inquiring.<sup>18</sup> And this cognizing individual cannot be a disembodied Cartesian *res cogitans* for “[w]e all share that we live, act, and engage in historically and culturally constituted societies” (Pickren and Teo, 2020, p. 4). The cognizer has in common with other cognizing individuals a physical body comprised of biological structures, perceptual apparatus, motivational states and processes, etc. These bodies also have in common gestation, birth, a relatively long period of infantile dependence, and processes of growth and development, both physical and psychological.<sup>19</sup> The resulting psychological complexities are attributable to

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<sup>18</sup> An inquirer *may* engage in self-analysis or self-investigation, but it is by no means the usual situation that the inquirer is *simultaneously* positioned as the object of inquiry.

<sup>19</sup> Freud (1926/1953) identified this long period of physical dependence as providing the environment for psychological dependence and thus enormously significant in understanding human psychology.



the shared content of unity of body with multiplicity of mental structures and motivational impulses — the person is a *unitas multiplex* (Stern in Lamiell, 2014, p. 3; cf. Brown, 2012). There is, then, the common ground of general psychological kinds (PSP5), such as emotion, attachment, and cognition, among so many others, predicating those situations that constitute psychology's subject matter, while individuals will differ with respect to, for example, emotionality, attachment and cognitive styles, and their adaptability to change. As Martin (2020) insists, psychology's focus is "persons acting, developing and changing within historical, sociocultural contexts" (p. 113). Nevertheless, that which is general is still instantiated in situations where individuals act, develop, and change while embedded in very different contexts.

To emphasize the key point, these many aspects of common ground do not disappear when we investigate individual, social, or cultural differences arising from different bodies, different developmental experiences, different historically and culturally constituted societies, or when we focus on a narrow specialist domain in psychology (e.g., eye-witness testimony, mother–infant communication) or when we investigate a single individual in a single case study; they cannot be "bracketed off" in the Husserlian phenomenological sense. The PSPs bring out the universal form of situations, one that involves the general and the particular, the nomothetic and the idiographic. Historical, social, theoretical context all inform what the specialist is investigating. Common ground is always present and, thereby, general psychology is the concern of the specialist. This opens the door to understanding the extent to which psychology's common ground converges with and extends the notion of general psychology as "point of view."

### *Extending General Psychology as "Point of View" and Solving the "Dilemmas"*

As noted earlier, Osbeck's (2020) vision for general psychology as "point of view" is that of a subspecialty. Through "integrative analysis," it evaluates the "soundness and broader implications" of psychology's broad-scale developments, such as methodological proliferation, and the emergence of CP (p. 15). Osbeck also identifies three difficulties: the problem of negotiating methodologically-derived epistemic value conflicts, the dilemma of establishing limits to achieve coherence while also honoring diversity, and the problem of psychology incorporating the role of critic without sabotaging its own disciplinary progression through an undermining of its conceptual and methodological edifices. How does realism extend this vision while also resolving the predicaments?

As we have seen, realism encompasses the extended common ground in psychology. This is the basis of any discipline-wide analysis — the required big-picture view. That view includes not just remaining aware of its common ground but incorporating it into any kind of research. With respect to methodological proliferation and the fact that psychology has long made substantive use of

qualitative methods, realism accommodates this *scientifically* (as we noted earlier). Necessarily, quality — no less real than quantity — is a feature of every situation, and critical inquiry makes clear that more than a century of psychometric research has produced no evidence that psychology's kinds (or attributes) are quantitative, making psychology's "quantitative imperative" a corruption of genuine science (Michell, 2003). A rigorous scientific approach requires that we fit the method to our material and, when that material is qualitative, it requires an appropriate qualitative method. Thus, the metatheoretical system suggested here disconnects method from ideology, and challenges the perceived ideologically-derived justification of different methods (Michell, 2004, 2010). It exposes the partial-realist aprioristic methodological misconceptions of both mainstream psychology and its various oppositional movements, misconceptions which, as Osbeck observes, prompt each party to habitually "retreat into respective ideological and methodological silos" (p. 13).

With method disconnected from ideology, we can cast light on the first of the apparent stumbling blocks for general psychology — the idea of "epistemic multiculturalism" bringing conflicts between "epistemic values." Pickren and Teo (2020) assert that American journals need to be "less Western" (p. 4) and Osbeck (2020) adds that in psychology's epistemic multiculturalism, methods can be regarded as value systems not always in alignment, creating barriers among psychologists "with incompatible epistemic values" (p. 13).

Realistically, methods are not value systems even though we may well be interested in understanding "where and how value conflicts come into play" (Osbeck, 2020, p. 13). Given the realist analysis of valuing as a *relation* and its disconnection of method from ideology, when researchers value one method over another it is because they believe (rightly or wrongly) that the chosen method is better suited to investigating the subject at hand, not for any other reason. And that is an empirical issue rather than a value conflict.

Furthermore, applying the question of valuing to epistemology, the main issue becomes one of understanding why some groups value knowing some things and others value knowing other things — always remembering that valuing has to do with motivational salience and that knowing is a "success word"; whatever is known (as opposed to merely believed) is, by definition, true (Stove, 1982). While there is cross-cultural common ground, historical and cultural contexts will vary, and along with them the situations which are epistemically salient to (i.e., valued by) different groups. To use a popular example, it has been claimed that Inuit speak a language (from the Eskimo–Aleut family) with many different expressions for "snow," reflecting an ability to discriminate (visually, tactually, etc.) between different types of snow. These aspects of their environment are presumably far more salient for them than for those living in hot climates. Hence, knowing the different types of snow, being more motivationally salient to Inuit, is epistemically valued by them more than by others.

Epistemology also deals with beliefs. Beliefs (unlike knowledge) can be true or false, and psychologists are interested not only in what people know, but also in what they believe, such as the “placebo effect” and the causal efficacy of false beliefs. This is the basis of the phenomenologist’s insistence that what people believe is more relevant to understanding their behavior than either the way things really are or what people know about the way things really are. In other words, a realist general psychology accommodates the valuing of beliefs that may well be false (albeit not recognized to be false), but that play a significant role in social and cultural self-identity. The Azande believe in witches and witchcraft (Bloor, 1976), and they value these beliefs. Likewise, for socio-cultural-political reasons, mainstream positivist psychologists believe in Pythagoreanism — that reality, including psychological attributes, is fundamentally quantitative and quantifiable — and they value that belief. They do not value *knowing* about quantification for they are not motivated to test their assumption that psychological variables are quantitative (Michell, 2010). This demonstrates that those who value discovering the truth (e.g., scientists) may nevertheless be simultaneously driven by competing motivations.<sup>20</sup>

Understanding different valuing relations also requires understanding the valuing of different perspectives. For example, Australian Indigenous peoples are less imbued with the idea of land “ownership” (with its concomitant associations of control and exploitation) than with the idea of land “custodianship” (with its concomitant associations of sustainable and harmonious assimilation). The non-Indigenous acknowledgment that vacillates arbitrarily between paying respect to “the traditional *owners* of the land” and paying respect to the “traditional *custodians* of the land” is not mere linguistic variation but indicative of misunderstanding and bias.

In the light of these senses that realism gives to the idea of different epistemic values, we think that the realist principles of ontological egalitarianism and situational complexity in process (at the very least) require the recognition that culturally diverse voices are important for understanding and explaining human psychology. Incorporating hitherto marginalized or silenced groups provides psychologists with a broader and richer understanding of the diverse interests and negotiations with environment that are involved in human behavior. But it is important not to misrepresent the situation. Supposed cultural differences between, say, “Azande logic” and “Western logic” (Bloor, 1976) have prompted the inference that the different cultures employ a “different logic” (i.e., moving away from accepting the principle of counter-example, relations of implication, etc.). Yet this disguises the fact that the difference lies in different *beliefs* about reality, that is, different believed-in *premises*. It does not undermine logic’s universality,

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<sup>20</sup>The fact that any inquiry is “interested” because it is motivated does not preclude inquirers from discovering what is the case. But it does highlight the importance of science as self-corrective and self-critical (principle 7).

such as the relation of entailment. For the Azande, given their beliefs, their reasoning about witches and inherited witchcraft substance in the blood is, as Triplett (1988) demonstrates, perfectly Aristotelian in that the conclusion follows from their beliefs (premises). For mainstream psychologists, given their beliefs about quantity, their reasoning about psychological measurement is also perfectly Aristotelian. Both groups are equally susceptible to arguments that are valid but *not sound* because the premises are false.

The second of Osbeck's (2020) "dilemmas" that realism casts light on is that of establishing limits to achieve disciplinary coherence while also honoring diversity, a problem that is associated with a tension between general psychology and unified psychology. Following those who conclude that attempts to unify psychology are futile (e.g., Green, 2015; Yanchar, 2004), Osbeck notes that general psychology does not entail a unified psychology, and that seeking the larger framework "is not to be taken as consistent with the aim of unifying psychology" (p. 14). Psychology, it seems, cannot be unified because the field is "inherently embedded in historically contingent sociocultural practices" (Green, 2015, p. 207), so that "the very idea of theoretical unification, and the exclusivity that inevitably comes with it, requires substantial defense" (Yanchar, 2004, p. 1280). Osbeck concludes that the dilemma in psychology of coherence versus diversity is not one that looks to be resolved in the near future.

Given the unavoidability of realism as unfolded through the PSPs, *all* disciplines are inherently embedded in historically contingent sociocultural practices. Nevertheless there is a distinction to be made between *unification-as-coherence-among-facts* (UC1) and *unification-as-consensus* (UC2). Realism entails only UC1. Achieving UC2 is unlikely. UC1 pertains to the absence of contradiction irrespective of consensus or disagreement. UC2 is neither necessary nor sufficient for UC1. The distinction between UC1 and UC2 is another instance of realism's broader distinction between the *logic* of science and the *psycho-sociology* of science, a distinction that we have suggested is often neglected.

Specifically, when UC1 and UC2 are conflated, and when achieving UC2 is regarded as a futile enterprise, that conclusion is then illegitimately carried over to UC1, and the lack of UC1 is then equated with open-mindedness and diversity. But such "tolerance" is misguided. First, evading the situational logic outlined earlier means that one is not wise to the universal (formal) features of situations as the (i) placeholders for knowledge generally, and (ii) excluders for those conceptual (formal) errors that we can easily fall into. Second, it thwarts the difficult but important task of selectively eliminating psychology's many contradictory approaches to the same subject matter. Yet in that task lies the process of "establishing specific limits" to avoid the "confusion and wasted energy of disciplinary incoherence" referred to by Osbeck (2020, p. 9). The limits are established by the situational logic and its implications — they are imposed by nature, not by researchers with particular theoretical axes to grind. Only

within such necessary constraints can the acknowledging and honoring of “the vast diversity of psychological subject matter and the plurality of methods that accompany its expansion” (p. 9) be sustained.

In short, it is only in the context of partial realism, insofar as it conflates coherence and consensus, that the issue of coherence versus diversity becomes a “dilemma,” and the attempt to pursue coherence is abandoned so as to honor diversity. Diversity pertains to the many areas of psychology and their profusion of aims, methods, models, and theories. Far from precluding or obstructing diversity, disciplinary coherence underpins it.

Finally, with respect to critical evaluation, Osbeck (2020) sees CP as presenting “the most formidable challenge to psychology in its traditional or mainstream trajectories” (p. 14), but she questions whether psychology can “integrate or incorporate the position of critic without undermining its very conceptual or methodological edifices, sabotaging its own disciplinary progression” (p. 14).

Realism’s principle of science as critical inquiry means that criticism does not lie in the hands of just one approach. As a positive program seeking to better understand human subjectivity, promote the humanities, address ethical concerns, etc., CP research is an important corrective to the mainstream. However, CP also falls away from realism. There is, for example, its post-Kantian epistemological constructivism: only through our use of concepts can we “perceive sociopsychological reality” (Teo, 2015, p. 246).<sup>21</sup> But, while it is true that “we all share that we live, act, and engage in historically and culturally constituted societies” (Pickren and Teo, 2020, p. 4), it is also true that the concepts involved in what it is to be a society are genuine kinds that constitute real situations (McMullen, 2011), with which we are in direct cognitive relation (Michell, 2011). If, instead, what is known is constituted through our use of concepts, then we cannot know reality as it is; we can only know things-as-conceived-of-by-us. But if that is true, *it is false*; we do know something about how the world is — that we cannot know anything about reality. The upshot of epistemological constructivism is that it fails the criterion of coherence and nullifies the concept of error. In short, CP’s adherence to epistemological constructivism undermines both its assumed role as critic and the importance of its research. It is at odds with principles 4, 6, and 7. Osbeck’s concerns about psychology as critic apply equally to CP. That is, if accepted conceptual and methodological edifices are unstable — whether that be CP’s constructivism or mainstream psychology’s measurement theory and practices or *anything in our own analysis here* — then those edifices *require* sabotage, because only by undermining and replacing them is disciplinary progress made possible. Criticism, including self-criticism, lies in the hands of every single investigator.

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<sup>21</sup> This thesis is also a feature of many middle-ground theorists critical of psychology’s mainstream (see Held, 2007).

### Conclusion

Pickren and Teo (2020) see the challenge for re-envisioning general psychology to be psychology's century of expansion, diversity, fragmentation, and specialization, such that general psychology is like a shepherd needing to tend an ever-multiplying and ever-straying flock. Alternatively, Osbeck (2020) sees general psychology as itself a subspecialty whose challenges lie in methodological value-conflicts, the tension between coherence and diversity and the potential of criticism to undermine disciplinary edifices. But if general psychology, *realistically* conceived, does not stand apart from specializations, nor is itself a separate specialization, if adopting the role of critic and self-critic is a necessary part of any investigation, then psychology's increasing proliferation is not the problem. We have attempted to show how a consistent realism — one that does not fall away into partial realism — delivers the *desiderata* that Pickren and Teo identified, while also revealing the additional ways in which philosophy is “in” psychology and extending the idea of general psychology as common ground and point of view beyond that envisaged by Osbeck. Unfolding the PSPs of discourse reveals common disciplinary foundations that could enable “mutual understanding and collaboration” among all psychologists (Osbeck, 2020, p. 15). Extending these into realism's set of interconnected principles could lead to a broader and coherent scientific approach (encompassing natural, social, and conceptual sciences) which in turn demands methodological flexibility. Together with the PSPs, the principles allow focus on shared content, including shared psychological processes, content, and activities, regardless of the specialization. This, in turn, extends the scope of general psychology to encompass interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary material. Realism thus accommodates and embraces hitherto marginalized or excluded voices (both non-Western and minority groups within the Western tradition), extending the scope of understanding of the historicity, sociality, and culturality of psycho-social life. Finally, we have argued that realism provides a critique not only of partial-realist mainstream psychology but also of the partial-realist (including antirealist) opposition to the mainstream. Realism is emancipatory in that it disconnects methodological flexibility from ideology, the logic of inquiry from the psycho-sociology of inquiry, and coherence from consensus, while also harnessing critique *for* progress rather than seeing it as disruptive of progress. As such, it resolves the “dilemmas” of integration and comprehensiveness versus critique and limitations, and of critique versus progress. Understood realistically, general psychology is a *sine qua non* of any psychological inquiry, no matter how focused or specialized.

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