

A Meta-Individual Account of Personality Studies

Leonid Dorfman* and Elena Barashkova

Perm State Institute of Culture, Perm, Russia

Abstract: A meta-individual account of personality studies is shown as a kind of dual-system models. Numerous dual-system models in cognitive, personality, and social psychology have received attention. In the above list, the meta-individual world theory would also be worth noting. What is the notion of the meta-individual world? The term 'meta' has both epistemic and ontological meanings. On the epistemic view, the meta-individual systems approach assumes a generic model of some portion of reality supplemented with partial confluence theories. It is a kind of meta-theoretical principles, which explicitly or implicitly guide empirical research. On the ontological view, the meta-individual world conceives of a personality extension in a larger system, namely, both the personality itself and its reach beyond its body, extending to a closer social setting. Two principles lie at the core of the meta-individual world theory: duality and complementarity. They lead to a structuralist account which opens multi-dimensionality of personality.

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2nd International conference "Science, Technology, and Art Relations – STAR" (Tel Aviv, Israel, 19–21 November 2014). A longer version of this paper has appeared in the URL: http://engineers.org.il/_Uploads/12583STAR2-Papers Abstracts-.pdf, (pp. 65–80). [1].

Keywords: Meta-individual world, Duality, Complementarity, Multi-dimensionality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Given its roots in philosophy, contemporary psychology has largely adopted an analytic approach (e.g., [2-5]). During last decades, psychology researchers have also acknowledged integrative and systems theories. We propose a meta-individual world theory. It can be seen as a kind of dual-system models in personality studies.

The paper consists of several sections. In the first section, the meta-individual world is considered as a kind of integrative theory. The second section is concerned with the notion of the meta-individual world. Here we attempt to conceptualize what the meta-individual world is, how it is organized and how it regularly operates. The third section uncovers the principles of duality and complementarity as the core of the meta-individual world theory. The fourth section deals with a structuralist account, which is shown on the lines of multi-dimensionality. In conclusion, the overall results of the study are summarized.

2. THE META-INDIVIDUAL WORLD THEORY AS A TYPE OF INTEGRATIVE THEORY

The meta-individual world theory is a type of integrative theory. The last decades, psychology

researchers have recognized the importance of integrative theories, among them, for instance, perspectivist theory [6], system justification theory [7], subjective well-being theory [8], and shared reality theory [9]. In Russian psychology, Volf Merlin [10] has developed a theory of integral individuality. Besides, systems theories have emerged as well. Most system perspectives have been expanded to include personality research (e.g., [11, 12]). Numerous dual-system models in cognitive, personality, and social psychology (e.g., [13]) have also received attention. In the above list, the meta-individual world theory would also be worth noting. Although the theory of the meta-individual world was first published around two decades ago [14], it has been further developed ([15, 19]). Its scope has expanded and its level of precision has improved. In addition, much new empirical evidence for this theory has been supplied. Thus, the theory of the meta-individual world has changed substantially to date. Taking into account its current state, it would be further developed.

3. THE NOTION OF THE META-INDIVIDUAL WORLD

To begin with, it is necessary to define the key term, that is, what is the notion of the meta-individual world? The term 'meta' has both epistemic and ontological meanings. On the epistemic view, the meta-individual systems approach assumes a generic model of some portion of reality supplemented with partial confluence theories. It is a kind of meta-theoretical principles,

*Address correspondence to this author at the Perm State Institute of Culture, Perm, Russia; Tel: + 79194776831; E-mail: dorfman07@yandex.ru

which explicitly or implicitly guide empirical research [20]. On the ontological view, the meta-individual world conceives of a personality extension in a larger system, namely, both the personality itself and its reach beyond its body, extending to a closer social setting. In everyday life, people ordinarily deal with a subjective sense of knowing rather than with more rigorous, objective knowledge. This subjective experience is a valuable rather than objectively verifiable knowledge of reality [21]. The meta-individual world is mostly based on this subjective experience. The notion of personality used here refers to the dispositional ground that focuses on the broad, enduring and stable characteristics, which remain invariant across situations (e.g., [22]). The closer social setting embraces all that is meaningful for the personality: relatives, friends, valuable ideas, preferred occupation and career, art and literature, leisure, and the like. The meta-individual world's various implications can be seen in related phenomena, such as creativity and intelligence, memory and imagery, personal interrelations and leadership, achievement motives and growth, the performers' perspective on art pieces.

4. THE PRINCIPLES OF DUALITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY AS THE CORE OF THE META-INDIVIDUAL WORLD THEORY

Two principles lie at the core of the meta-individual world theory: duality and complementarity. According to the duality principle, two systems are specified. One of the systems (System 1) unifies the personality and its closer social setting. Within this system, the personality extends to its closer social setting, making changes in it. Thus, the personality occupies the primary position and the closer social setting the secondary position. This system carries a connection of the closer social setting to the personality. The other system (System 2) also connects the closer social setting to the personality, but in the opposite direction. Within this system, the closer social setting extends to the personality, making changes in it. Here, the closer social setting occupies the primary position and the personality the secondary position. The two systems are distinctive, operate in their own right and are relatively independent from one another, although they hold a common personality-social ground. It is mystery how a point refers to two straight lines. This happens if the lines intersect [23]. The intersecting lines are a metaphorical expression of personality traits attached to Systems 1 and 2, *i.e.*, in different 'places,' 'here,' and 'there.' This way, the duality of MIW gives rise.

The meta-individual world theory predicts that Systems 1 and 2 operate in 'parallel' mode and in the mode of their partial 'intersection.' In 'parallel' mode, Systems 1 and 2 do not intersect; their lack of junction results from their derivations from different sources. This is like two lines that do not intersect. When Systems 1 and 2 partially 'intersect,' they have a shared area, despite the fact that they remain distinct. This is like two lines that intersect at one point. It is worth noting that when Systems 1 and 2 partially intersect, they receive some commonality and integration, although the systems continue to stand out and operate distinctively. Thus, both diversification and integration are inherent to the meta-individual world. Still, the integration is considered, to some extent, advantageous as compared with the diversification. Herewith, the integration is based on duality. Actually, the meta-individual world carries a twofold meaning, which is uncovered through the systems 1 and 2.

The dual arrangement of the meta-individual world theory has been empirically tested in various fields and has received support in studies on self-concept as a plural self [24], creative thinking [25], emotional preferences [26], and destructive personality [27].

It would seem that the assumption of Systems 1 and 2 remind Jean Piaget's [28] classic work on accommodation versus assimilation. Indeed, some similarities can be seen in our theories. For instance, to Jean Piaget, assimilation is the process of fitting new information into pre-existing cognitive schemas, in which new experiences are assimilated with old ideas. This is like system 1 in our theory. In contrast, accommodation is the process of taking new information in one's environment and altering pre-existing schemas. This is like system 2 in our theory.

However, the present account provides contrast with that of Jean Piaget. Unlike him, focusing on information and operative intelligence, we examine personality and its social environment, their relationships and interactions. Also, systems 1 and 2 conceive of a new fragment of reality as compared with that of assimilation and accommodation. Notice also, that the meta-individual world emerged within boundaries of general psychology and social psychology. Piaget's theory, instead, deals with cognitive development and education.

On a larger scale, one can notice that traditionally, researchers prefer to examine the above systems separately. This allows them to avoid any collision between these systems. For example, behavioral

psychology is based on the conditioning idea. Conditioning occurs through interaction with the environment (e.g., [29]). However, behavioral psychology underestimates internal mental states. Conversely, Eysenck provided theory of the causes of personality [30]. He proposed that extraversion was caused by variability in cortical arousal and the neuroticism dimension was determined by individual differences in the limbic system. However, the role of social environment almost finds no place in this theory.

The rationale is that systems 1 and 2 are to some extent not quite compatible. They collide, though they co-exist and supplement each other. The issue is to identify how mutually conflicting systems can exist and co-exist and how the personality reconciles the conflicting systems. Thus, it is of particular importance whether one system can complement the other system, although the complementary principle has been developed within another framework as well [31]. Duality and complementarity are principles that bring an additional and integrative knowledge about people's lives because extra conditions are taken into account.

The following examples will show the above-mentioned systems really co-existing. Imagine a person selecting a book to read. The person then holds the primary position and the selected book the secondary position (System 1). As the reader assimilates the contents of the book, she is under its influence. Then the book takes primary position and the reader the secondary position (System 2). A more complex example emerges if we imagine the reader under the book's influence (System 2) and at the same time mentally changing, modifying and introducing extra meanings to the book's contents (System 1). This is even more apparent when the person is involved in the process of learning to write narratives (System 2) and then starts writing her own narratives (System 1). Within the meta-individual framework, any of the above examples requires capturing both systems and their complementarity. Certainly, the above examples are rather simplified, but they uncover the core of the meta-individual approach.

It seems that empirical testing of the dual systems should begin with a treatment designated to separate one system from the other. It is also necessary to divide the variables conditional on their membership in one or another system. Even if these two conditions are not fully met, they still provide a worthwhile starting point. We have been conducted several studies that attempt to take an account of this treatment.

In one study [32], the girls aged between 18 and 20 were asked to evaluate their mothers, fathers, younger siblings and themselves on a set of variables. One prediction was variability across systems, namely, the girls as daughters and the same girls as older sisters would differ on the same variables. Actually, the girls' reports differed significantly from their evaluations of parents (System 2) and younger siblings (System 1) on the same variables such as self-conception, novelty seeking, and dominance. The girls also gave significantly different evaluations to parents and siblings on variables of gaining control over another person, reward-dependence, harm-avoidance, persistence, adaptation, and cooperation. Thus, the data evidenced that the girls' evaluations are flexible and shift across the two systems. In general, the girls' personalities revealed their dual properties conditional on the system in which the girls enter.

In another study [33], relationships between sergeants and officers, as well as between sergeants and cadets, were examined in a male sample from the Military University of the Russian Internal Troops. Again, one assumption was that the sergeants' relations to officers and cadets reveal different systems, namely, System 2 and System 1. In particular, the differences appear because the sergeants are subordinate in relation to officers and commanding in relation to cadets. One prediction was that the same sergeants in subordinate and commanding positions would differ on the same variables. The data obtained were consistent with this prediction. The variables of dominance, social conformity, lies, and self-confidence varied significantly across the above systems. The sergeants revealed fully the dual properties of their evaluations conditional on the system in which they enter.

Admittedly, one may see dual systems as another way of thinking about context as a relativistic concept. Although this issue is controversial, basically, we propose to see dual systems a kind of context for its appropriate interpretation. This topic gives rise to a separate study and we leave it for future work of elsewhere.

5. STRUCTURALIST ACCOUNT

The dual and complementary principles can serve as a ground for structuralist account including multi-dimensionality. In addition, the interaction between Systems 1 and 2 is revealed.

Notably, the personality-social ground is common for System 1 and System 2. But this ground will be

seen as heterogeneous. The initial criteria for highlighting the particular personality-social ground of each system can be as follows: (A) System 1 and System 2 work in opposite directions. (B) There are differences between primary and secondary positions specified within each system. As a result, a partitioning of the personality-social ground arises. First, the personality domain and the closer social setting domain appear. Second, the personality domain divides into two subdomains and the closer social domain into two subdomains as well. Within System 1, one personality subdomain joins to one closer social subdomain such that the former occupies the primary position and the latter the secondary position. Conversely, within System 2 the other personality subdomain joins to the other closer social subdomain such that the former holds the secondary position and the latter the primary position.

Thus, the personality domain can be viewed as two-dimensional because one of its subdomains is involved in System 1 and its other subdomain in System 2. The closer social domain is also two-dimensional, due to one of its subdomains referring to System 1 and its other subdomain to System 2. Finally, the meta-individual world conceives of a four-dimensional structure including the subdomains of systems 1 and 2.

Empirical data [34, 35] support the claim that the aforementioned subdomains appear as separate factors, though they are related to some degree.

To clarify, these subdomains have received the following names: The first sub-domain is termed authorship or agency. Agency is the capacity of the personality to act independently and make its own free choices. The personality treats itself as the cause of the actions it performs and the outcomes it produces. By doing this, the personality distinguishes between the outcomes of its own actions and outcomes caused by other agents (e.g., [36]). The agency may lend itself in the expression like 'I'm trying herself to find a way out of difficult situations.'

The second subdomain is termed possession or psychological ownership. Possession involves person-object relations like other people and artistic creations as well as with nonphysical entities such as ideas and words. Possession emerges when a personality attaches itself to objects and the target of ownership or a piece of that target becomes "its" ("It is mine") (e.g., [37]). The possession is manifested in the following expression: 'My influence on my friend can be strong.'

The third subdomain is termed perspective-taking. It entails taking the role of someone else (e.g., [38]). A person intuitively another person's viewpoint, perceptions, thoughts, knowledge, attitudes, or goals. The primary purpose of perspective-taking is to evaluate a situation, state, or object as it is seen by others (e.g., [39]). The perspective-taking is shown in the following expression: 'Obviously, a friend can do what she wants.'

The fourth subdomain is termed relatedness. It refers to the propensity to relate to others and is usually organized around the personality's being able to attain and maintain relationships (e.g., [40]). Various terms are used to identify aspects of relatedness, including being part of a social order, a self-in-relation, the unconditional, noninstrumental wish to merge with another, dependency, sense of belonging, attachment, affiliation, cooperation, and intimacy [41]. One can find the relatedness in the following expression: 'I can easily comply with the requests of friends.'

Thus, the personality domain falls into the agency and relatedness subdomains. The closer social domain falls into the possession and perspective-taking subdomains. In doing so, the agency and possession subdomains refer to System 1, and the perspective-taking and relatedness subdomains refer to System 2. Based on exploratory factor analysis, it is revealed that items of above mentioned subdomains appear in each of four independent factors [42].

CONCLUSION

The meta-individual world theory is a kind of integrative theory. It permits to look at various branches of psychology incorporated. Among them are personality, individual differences, social psychology, and the like.

The principles of duality and complementarity uncover the roots of the meta-individual world theory. An attempt has been made to conceptualize what the meta-individual world is, how it is organized and how it regularly operates. The meta-individual world carries a twofold meaning, which reveals systems 1 and 2. They move in opposite directions and are composed differently. Given this, the personality domain falls into four subdomains. The agency and possession subdomains refer to System 1, and the perspective-taking and relatedness subdomains refer to System 2. The data obtained are consistent with this theoretical consideration.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dorfman L, Barashkova E. (2014). The variation basis of the performing arts: A performer's ground. In T. Kravchuk & A. Groysman (Eds.), *Book of papers and abstracts of the 2nd International conference "Science, Technology, and Art Relations – STAR"* (pp. 65-80). Tel Aviv, Israel. URL: http://engine-ers.org.il/_Uploads/12583STAR2-PapersAbstracts.pdf.
- [2] Costa RE, Shimp CP. (2011). Methods courses and texts in psychology: "text-book science" and "tourist brochures". *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 31(1), 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021575>
- [3] Hofstee WKB, Martin M, Moor C, & Pervin LA. (2012). Yes, of course, but *European Psychologist*, 17(1), 28-30. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000081>
- [4] Nisbett RE, Peng K, Choi I, Norenzayan A. (2001). Culture and systems of thought: Holistic versus analytic cognition. *Psychological Review*, 108, 291-310. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.2.291>
- [5] Robinson DN. (2000). Philosophy of psychology. *American Psychologist*, 55(9), 1018-1021. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.9.1018>
- [6] McGuire WJ. (2004). A Perspectivist approach to theory construction. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 8, 2, 173-182. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0802_11
- [7] Almstrom C. (2006). A three-worldview of system justification theory. *Journal of Scientific Psychology*, 9, 6-8.
- [8] Tay L, Diener E. (2011). Needs and subjective well-being around the world. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 2, 354-365. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023779>
- [9] Echterhoff GE, Higgins T, Levine JM. (2009). Shared reality: Experiencing commonality with others' inner states about the world. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 4, 5, 496-521. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01161.x>
- [10] Merlin VS. (1986). Essay on the integral study of the individuality. Moscow: Pedagogika. (In Russian).
- [11] Magnusson D. (2001). The holistic-interactionistic paradigm: Some directions for empirical developmental research. *European Psychologist*, 6, 153-162. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040.6.3.153>
- [12] Pervin LA. (2001). A dynamic systems approach to personality. *European Psychologist*, 6, 3, 172-176. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040.6.3.172>
- [13] Hofmann W, Friese M, Strack F. (2009). Impulse and self-control from a dual-systems perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4, 2, 162-176. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01116.x>
- [14] Dorfman L. Ya. (1993). *Metaindividual world: Methodological and theoretical issues*. Moscow: Smysl. (In Russian, English Summary).
- [15] Dorfman L. (1995). *Metaindividual world*. *Studia Psychologica*, 37, 4, 279-286.
- [16] Dorfman L. Ya. (1997). *Emotion in the arts: Theoretical and empirical considerations*. Moscow: Smysl. (In Russian, English Summary).
- [17] Dorfman L. (2005). A metaindividual model of creativity. In P. Locher, C. Martindale, & L. Dorfman (Eds.), *New directions in aesthetics, creativity, and the arts* (pp. 105-122). Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- [18] Dorfman L. Ya. (2010). The metaindividual world: Theory, implication, and empirical evidence. *Perm State Training University Bulletin. Series 1. Psychology*, 1-2, 30-51. (In Russian).
- [19] Dorfman L. Ya. (2015). A renovation of the metaindividual world. *Integrative perspective in humanities*, 1, 1, 72-101.
- [20] Witherington DC, Crichton JA. (2007). Frameworks for understanding emotions and their development: Functionalist and dynamic systems approaches. *Emotion*, 7(3), 628-637. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.7.3.628>
- [21] Echterhoff GE, Higgins T, Levine JM. (2009). Shared reality: Experiencing commonality with others' inner states about the world. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 4, 5, 496-521. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01161.x>
- [22] Mischel W, Shoda Y. (1998). Reconciling processing dynamics and personality dispositions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 229-258. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.229>
- [23] James W. (1904/1976). *Does consciousness exist? Essays in radical empiricism* (pp. 3-19). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [24] Dorfman L. Ya. (2004). Self-conception: Differentiation and integration. In L. Ya. Dorfman (Ed.), *The integral individuality, self-conception, and personality* (pp. 96-123). Moscow: Smysl. (In Russian).
- [25] Dorfman L. Ya. (2007). The meta-individual and plural patterns of creativity. In V. M. Petrov & A. V. Kharuto (Eds.), *Information, Time, and Creativity* (pp. 73-79). Moscow: State Institute of the Arts Studies, Moscow State Conservatory named after P. I. Tchaikovsky. (In Russian).
- [26] Dorfman L. Ya, & Tokareva GV. (2013). Emotional preferences and the plural self of a performing musician. *Philol. Culture*. 1, 235-241. (In Russian).
- [27] Dorfman L. Ya, & Zlokazov KV. (2017). A meta-individual pattern of destructive patterns. Report 1. *Psychology. J. Higher School. Econ.* 14, 105-122. (In Russian).
- [28] Piaget J. (1977). The role of action in the development of thinking. In *Knowledge and development* (pp. 17-42). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-2547-5_2
- [29] Staats AW. (1996). *Behavior and personality: psychological behaviorism*. New York: Springer.
- [30] Eysenck HJ. (1967). *The Biological Basis of Personality*. Springfield, IL: Thomas.
- [31] Avital T. (2003). *Art versus nonart: Art out of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (UK).
- [32] Dorfman L. Ya. (2010). The metaindividual world: Theory, implication, and empirical evidence. *Perm State Training University Bulletin. Series 1. Psychology*, 1-2, 30-51. (In Russian).
- [33] Dorfman L. Ya, Savinkin PI. (2012). Sergeants' estimations of personality traits of officers and cadets examined at the military university of the Russian internal troops. *Education and Society*, 5(76), 50-54. (In Russian).
- [34] Dorfman L, Ogorodnikova A. (2007). Plural self, plural achievement motives, and creative thinking. In L. Dorfman, C. Martindale, V. Petrov (Eds.), *Aesthetics and Innovation*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 125-160.
- [35] Dorfman L. Ya, Zubakin MV. (2008). New data on empirical referents of the metaindividual world's subdomains. In B. A. Viatkin (Ed.), *XXIII Merlin's Readings Activity-Individuality-Agency*. Perm: Perm State Training University, 35-37. (In Russian).
- [36] Van der Weiden A, Ruys KI, Aarts H. (2013). A matter of matching: How goals and primes affect self-agency experiences. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 142(3), 954-966. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030079>
- [37] Pierce JL, Kostova T, Dirks KT. (2003). The state of psychological ownership: Integrating and extending a century of research. *Review of General Psychology*, 7, 1, 84-107. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.7.1.84>
- [38] Mead GH. (2009). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- [39] Echterhoff GE, Higgins T, Levine JM. (2009). Shared reality: Experiencing commonality with others' inner states about the world. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 4, 5, 496-521. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01161.x>
- [40] Deci EL, Ryan RM. (2012). Self-determination theory. In P. A. M. V. Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1, 416-437. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249215.n21>
- [41] Blatt SJ. (2008). *Polarities of experience: Relatedness and self-definition in personality development, psychopathology, and the therapeutic process*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- [42] Dorfman L. Ya, Zubakin, M. V. (2008). New data on empirical referents of the metaindividual world's subdomains. In B. A. Viatkin (Ed.), *XXIII Merlin's Readings: "Activity-individuality-Agency."* Perm: Perm State Training University, 35-37. (In Russian).

Received on 10-12-2018

Accepted on 26-12-2018

Published on 31-12-2018

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12974/2313-1047.2018.05.4>

© 2018 Dorfman and Barashkova; Licensee Savvy Science Publisher.

This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted, non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.