

# On the Dialectic of the Evolving Self: Intrinsic Linkages Between Social-Emotional and Cognitive Development

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## Abstract

In this article, I outline the intrinsic links between Kegan's social-emotional self (1982) and findings by Basseches (1984), Bhaskar (1993), and myself (2005, 2008, 2015) on the cognitive self, -- links that so far cognitive science has not been able to shed light on. I see insight into these links as crucial not only for academic research but for educational reform, therapeutic assistance to people in distress, and organizational team work.

The article is in two parts, a theoretical and practical one. At the beginning, I demonstrate by example the importance of seeing social-emotional and cognitive maturity as the result of a unified consciousness. In the theoretical part, I draw conclusions from validated hypotheses about adult development, while in the practical part I substantiate these conclusions empirically, showing how dialectical thought forms drive social-emotional development.

## **Part I**

The balance of emotional and cognitive development in human life has for hundreds of years been an educational goal of Western society, It has been an important ingredient of the wisdom literature as well as the philosophy of education since Rousseau and has shaped great literature. Despite the fact that over the last 40 years scientific insight into the socio-emotional and cognitive strands of consciousness has been decisively deepened by adult developmental research, the balance between emotion and cognition is still being discussed either in psychological, psychoanalytical, human-resources or anachronistic philosophical terms, rather than in terms of an epistemology of human development. This failure shows up particularly glaringly in the leadership studies that are never linked to what we have learned about how adults develop over their life span.

When we say that adults' mental *growth* is characterized by two *intrinsically related* lines of development, we mean that the two lines

- (a) define a person's *frame of reference* (world view) and thus
- (b) determine his/her *theory of action*.

When we analytically distinguish theory of action from what the person espouses in speech, following Argyris (1992), and closely look at the espousal itself, we get a chance to probe the present developmental self-positioning of the person speaking. Such insight will help us consult to, or coach, the person since by way of developmental listening we are learning about how the person presently constructs the social and physical world both emotionally and intellectually.

The example below will make clear what I mean.

## Example

*When we bought Acme's service business, it was clear to me that one of the immediate advantages would be in building a more efficient network. By integrating product and service sales, we become a more complete operation, and customers will see us in a new light. However, I think we also become more vulnerable to a lack of integration until we can define that new business model, and manage re-training and re-directing our sales force. Even then, perhaps customers may feel we're not as focused on our huge new service operation as was Acme.*

*This would be my assessment, and I wish my boss would see it this way. From my perspective, he does not fully appreciate that we are juggling many more things than before and risk over-extending ourselves. He fails to get the big picture, in my view. In this situation it is hard for me to make decisions, and when I make them I am often inclined to wait for his input and that can sometimes stop me in my tracks.*

*But then I remind myself that it doesn't make sense to wait for him even if the decision could wait. I would only punish him then for not making up my mind, and so we would end up unhappy both of us. Urgent situations would never get resolved then.*

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In listening to what is said here, a developmentally schooled coach or consultant will receive both a social-emotional **and** a cognitive message that **profiles the speaker developmentally**. The schooled listener will understand the following:

- **Social-emotionally**, the speaker is torn between his loyalty to himself and the **internalized other** he calls "my boss" (Kegan level L-4/3) *which makes taking decisions on his own an agony, but is a necessary step toward a firmer, "self-authoring", ground from which to act* (Lahey et al, 1988, 57).
- **Cognitively**, the speaker is in the first phase of developing **dialectical thinking**, shown by his **use of Context and Relationship thought forms** (Basseches 1984; Laske 1999, 2008, 2015). Her beginning use of dialectic is indicated by her pointing to the vulnerability of complex systems (line 4, DTF thought form 21) and to the need to pay attention to how customers view the new corporate entity that has emerged from the merger (lines 6-7, DTF thought form 17).

In responding to this client, the helper has to decide whether to intervene **social-emotionally or cognitively**, and **in what order**, and **whether to switch from one to the other**.

Consulting or coaching in which the structural aspects of what is said by clients are not recognized is **deficient** in terms of **developmental listening and thinking**, and **therefore less effective** than it could, or pretends to, be.

## Part I: Theory

In listening to the client above,

let's remember that s(he) started out, at birth, as an undifferentiated solipsist (*in this case, an unawareness that other minds exist*).

Only through setting forth *her own "Other"* (alter ego) in **consciousness** and **gradually uniting with it** can she mature to a point where the **notion of balance between emotion and intellect acquires salience**.

The ***movement in consciousness*** that ***originates in the self's splitting itself between self and other*** manifests the dialectic of the natural world (Bhaskar, 1993).

As this shows, to speak of a **"balance" between emotional and cognitive development** one needs both ***to separate and to link*** the two dimensions.

This is difficult to do in a culture where **meaning-making** and **sense-making** (cognition) are typically reduced to one another, whereby the question of their balance becomes mute.

The fact that **both developmental dimensions exist in their own right** is then denied, to the effect that the *notion of the unity of consciousness as a developmental form is lost*.

As a sad result of this terrible simplification the question of how **emotion (*meaning-making*)** and **thinking (*sense-making*)** *mature in tandem and move, or fail to move, into balance*, can then not even be posed.

This is quite different in **CDF** (Constructive Developmental Framework), where *these two dimensions* are acknowledged from the start as **different as well as existing in deep interaction with each other**. ***They could not be or do one without the other!***

The question that needs to be posed thus is this:

Once it has been shown empirically that **the social-emotional ("ED") and cognitive dimension ("CD") are of equal importance**, what, in terms of an *overarching structure* could be *linking them* that would *give meaning to the notion of their "balance"*?

A second question thus quickly follows:

What is this **overarching structure**?

I propose in this article that this *structure is formed by the interaction of the four moments of dialectic*, outlined in two previous publications (Laske 2008 and 2015).

Once this proposition is on the table, a third question arises:

What ***specifically*** is it that the **unfolding of the four moments of dialectic in human consciousness generates and links**, both in the *social-emotional* realm of ED and the *cognitive* realm of CD?

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**My proposal in this article is to turn the question posed to the side of**  
**understanding *social- emotional development progressions***  
**as driven by cognitive ones**  
***articulated by the four moments of dialectic***

and their associated thought forms.

**Social emotional levels**, introduced by Kegan (1982). are a way of naming and identifying "stages" or "levels" of *meaning making*.

According to (Lahey et al. 1988), these levels, *identified empirically through semi-structured interview*, show a step-wise increase **from the full expression of a "main" level**, such as L-2 (adolescence), **to the next main level**, such as L-3 (early to middle adulthood).

The progression from one social-emotional level (X, e.g., L-2) to the subsequent one (Y, e.g., L-3) is then thought to occur along **a trajectory across which the higher level gains in ascendance**, such as from X [e.g., L-2] to X(Y) [e.g., L-2(3)] → X/Y [e.g., L-2/3] → Y/X [L-3/2] → Y(X) [e.g., L-3(2)] → Y (e.g., L-3), in short:

**2→2(3)→2/3→3/2→2(3)→3.**

This L-2-L-3(2) social-emotional progression describes the so-called "*instrumental*" range. A structurally equivalent progression holds for the subsequent ranges of moving from L3→L4 (*other-dependent* range) and L4→L5 (*self-authoring* range). All of these ranges describe **degrees of loss of ego-centrism**, resulting in a **larger and deeper (social) world** opening up for the individual.

However, *the progression shown only states results*; it does **not** reveal its underlying **structure**. It is thus a mere *abstraction* from very complex cognitive processes that feed back on a person's meaning-making.

Here the question arises:

Could the ingenious analytic linearization of a complex multidimensional process, shown above, **be viewed in terms of a transformation articulated by the four moments of dialectic** (Bhaskar's M→E→L→D) and their associated thought forms (C→P→R→T)?

Not only could it, **it should be** viewed in that way since **there is no other non-behavioral methodological approach to adult-developmental transformations that occur over individuals' life span!**

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So far, I have introduced two different notations:

- a "**result** notation", e.g., L-2→3
- a **developmental or exploratory** notation, C→P→R→T (the epistemological [how we know what we know] form of Bhaskar's M→E→L→D).

The first notation is analytical. It simply allows us *to state and converse about* a social-emotional finding (result),

while the second asks a question, which is (e.g.), "in the social-emotional range L2→L3, *how and how far do the four moments of dialectic (MELD) -- as a dimension of human consciousness -- determine the social-emotional transformation that occurs over an individuals' lifespan?*"

The table below facilitates seeing the matching of the two notations here proposed:

<u>CDF</u>	<u>Bhaskar (MELD)</u>		
<u>C</u> Context	1M <b>M</b> oment	[first <u>m</u> oment]	<i>non-identity</i>
<u>P</u> Process	2E <b>E</b> dge	[second <u>e</u> dge]	<i>negativity</i>
<u>R</u> Relationship	3L <b>L</b> evel	[third <u>l</u> evel]	<i>totality</i>
<u>T</u> Transformation	4D <b>D</b> imensio	[fourth <u>d</u> imension]	<i>human transformative praxis</i>

Table 1. Correspondence of **Bhaskar's Moments** and **CDF classes of thought forms**

As seen, the *assumption* here made is that the **ontological moments (MELD, 1993)** map into **consciousness** as **epistemological classes of thought forms**, CPRT (Laske 2008, 2015).

By this mapping is meant that *in the movement of adult consciousness*  
from Understanding (U) to Reason (R) via Dialectic (D)

increasingly numerable and potent *thought forms* arise for an individual by which s(he)  
*constructs* a -- for him or her -- "real" world, whose degree of "reality" *depends on*  
*the level of dialectical thinking capability* (Laske 2008).

This is shown more succinctly below:

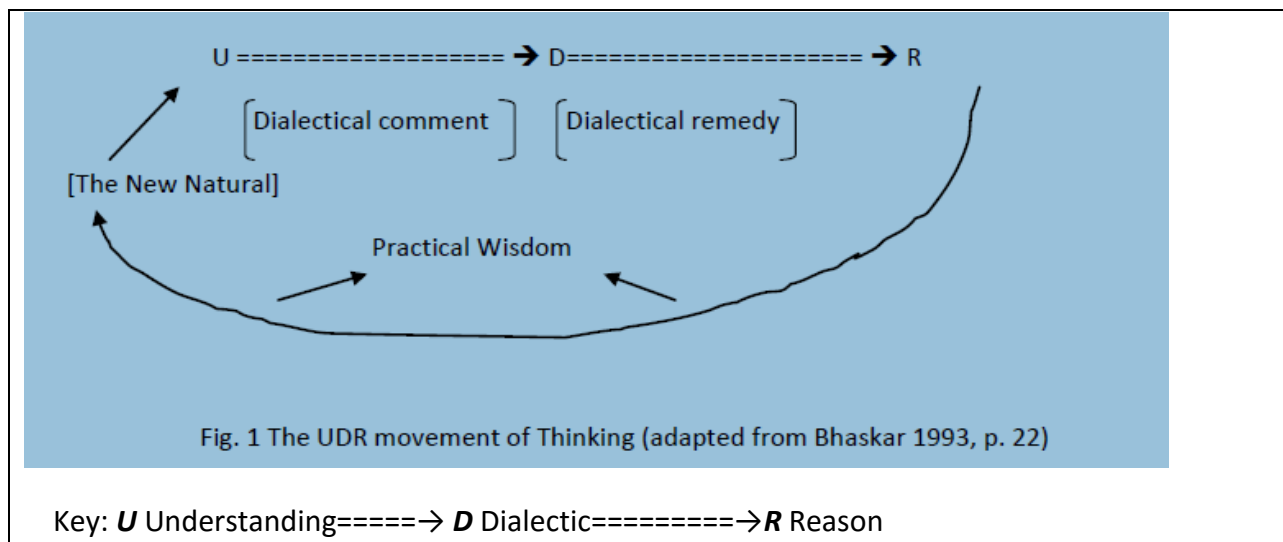


Fig. 1 The **UDR movement of adult consciousness** leading to the **integration of formal-logical Understanding** in dialectical thinking, together constituting **Practical Wisdom (PW)** in which they unite.

Based on the hypothesis of a movement *from formal-logical Understanding to dialectical Reason* and *further Practical Wisdom*, we can now articulate the question just asked a little better and can extend it to all adult social-emotional ranges (L2-L5):

**"In the social-emotional ranges L2→L5, *how and how far do the four moments of dialectic (MELD)* -- as a cognitive dimension of human consciousness -- *determine the social-emotional transformation that occurs over an individuals' lifespan?*"**

When we view each of the four levels as starting points of a movement toward the next higher level, the **overarching dynamic of social-emotional development** comes into view:

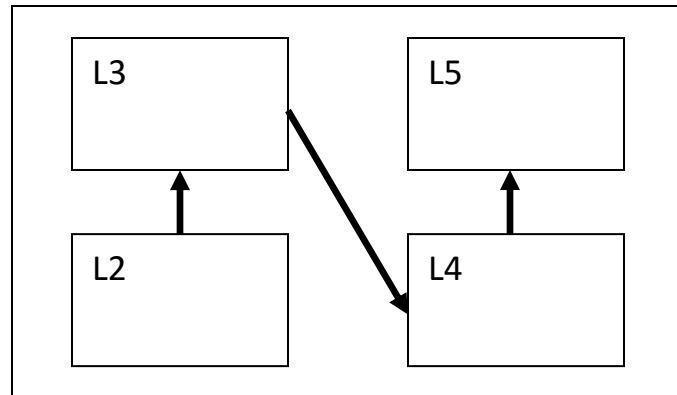


Fig. 2 Individual social-emotional ranges as sub-worlds of a holistic dynamic of adult social-emotional development

Empirical research shows that **dialectical thinking matures over four phases**, defined by a **"fluidity index"** indicating the complexity of thinking in each phase.

(Thus "phase 4" stands for "mature dialectical thinking".)

When looked at from a meta-level, empirical research findings also show that

in each of these phases, one after the other class of thought forms comes into its own, roughly in the sequence of C→P→R→T.

Thus, while *associated thought forms from all four classes are present from the beginning*, **competent use of them occurs in the sequence** indicated (Basseches 1984; Laske 2008).

When we now incorporate the dynamic of the moments of dialectic (MELD) and their associated classes of thought forms (CPRT) -- M→E→L→D and C→P→R→T, respectively -- in that of social-emotional development, our research questions becomes even more transparent:

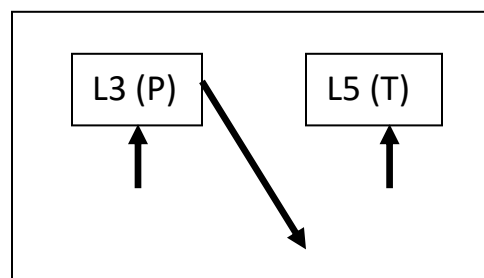




Fig. 3 Hypothesis regarding the gradual acquisition of dialectical thought forms in tandem with social-emotional development

This rudimentary research hypothesis says:

- **Social-emotional development of adult meaning-making**, first articulated by Kegan (1982), is based on the *ontological progression of M→E→I→D* that in *human consciousness* appears as one of *increasingly complex thought forms (TFs)*.

When we add to this the insight that the *cognitive C→R→R→T* progression *occurs in four measurable phases based on a "fluidity index"* which measures the number of thought forms used in a 1-hr structured interview (Basseches 2008, Laske 2008), we can add the following corollary:

- **When moving to higher social-emotional ranges, L-2→3 to L-3→4 and L4→5**, the adult individual steadily increases his/her *capability* of thinking "dialectically", in terms of the four moments of dialectic  
by which the ontological MELD *sequence* is instantiated in the adult mind *in the form of thought forms*.

At this point, an important further clarification regarding the four moments of dialectic suggests itself. Based on Bhaskar's MELD feeding into the thought form progression CPRT across the adult life span, with potent side effects in adults' social-emotional development:

1M	2E		C	P
3L	4D		R	T

Fig. 4 Mapping of MELD onto CPRT

the total cognitive dynamic underlying adults' social-emotional development over the life span presents itself as follows:

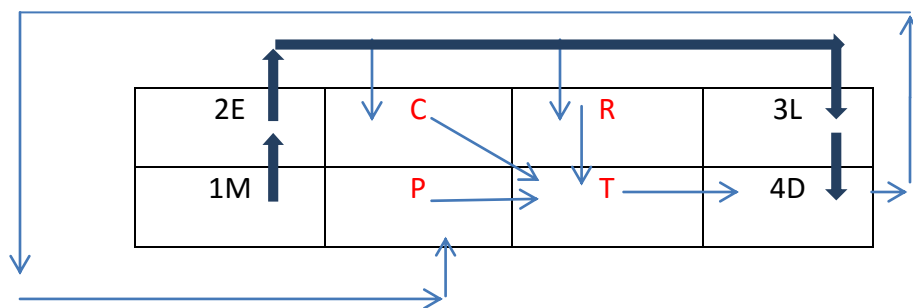


Fig. 5 The dialectic of social-emotional development

spelled out in **classes of dialectical thought forms**

Fig. 5 associates Bhaskar's MELD with the classes of thought forms of the *Constructive Developmental Framework* (Laske 2008, 2015). The (ontological) moments of dialectic in the *outer* quadrants, applied to human consciousness, encase the four classes of thought forms in the *inner* quadrants.

As shown, there is *both* a move from 1M to 2E, 3L, and 4D (as outlined by Bhaskar),  
and a parallel "inner" movement of "thinking"

from *context-focused* (C) to *process-oriented* (P) to *relationship-oriented thinking* (R).

The movement leads to the use of transformational thought forms

in fully mature dialectical thinking (T),

which amounts to what in Fig. 1 was referred to as *Practical Wisdom*  
*as a new kind of common sense in late adulthood.*

The outer arrows emerging from 4D indicate the "**snake bite of dialectic**" that is based on the fact that *transformational thought forms (T) are both the result and the origin of dialectical thinking.*

(There is no way of thinking in transformational thought forms without having first mastered the other three thought form classes CPR, which themselves can therefore be viewed as incomplete expressions of transformational thought forms).

In *social-emotional* terms this means that the progression  $L2 \rightarrow L5$  -- more precisely, the entire social-emotional progression  $L1 \rightarrow L5$  -- **is driven by the core dialectic of the human mind** which **manifests differently in social-emotional "stories" about the self and as "concepts"** used to **configure the real world in one's thinking.**

What is *not clearly shown in Fig. 5* is further detailed in Fig. 6. We need to distinguish a **local** from a **global** dynamic in social-emotional development. The first, local one, is taking place in each of the three ranges ( $L2 \rightarrow L3$ ;  $L3 \rightarrow L4$ ; and  $L4 \rightarrow L5$ ) individually, while the second, meta-level dynamic comprises all four adult levels in their unity, indicated below by encasing the movement between individual levels in their common ground (consciousness):

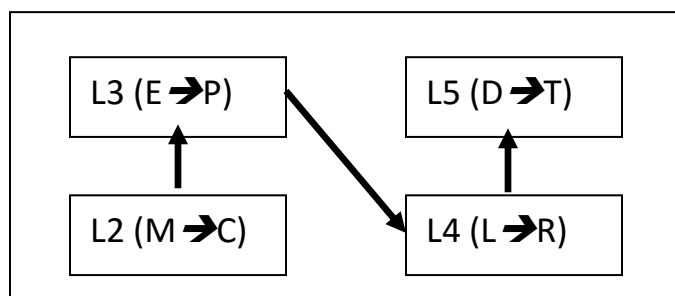


Fig. 6 Meta-level dynamic of social-emotional development  
 (social-emotional common ground) directing the direct-level progression



of adult meaning making in the individual ranges L2→L3; L3→L4; L4→L5  
[where “→” stands for the ontological movement informing epistemological results]

In other words, **adults' cognitive development toward dialectic, *running in parallel with social-emotional development in a unified consciousness*, is a meta-level movement driving social-emotional development in the individual ranges from L2→L3, L3→L4, to L4→L5.**

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What is the relevance of distinguishing a meta-level from a direct-level dynamic in adult development?

In simplest terms, this distinction allows for **complexities in how dialectical thought forms empirically surface in social-emotional development**, making possible many different, even **divergent, cognitive trajectories as determinants of one and the same level of meaning-making** (as present research insights generated through CDF require).

The distinction just made allows for deviations from the straight MELD path of CPRT.

The way that different CPRT thought forms (historically) emerge in different individuals' meaning-making, *however different they may be* from one individual to another, *integrates with the overarching movement from context-bound to transformational thinking (C→P→R→T)* that drives meaning-making.  
(This is itself an example of *dialectical context thinking* that honors different configurations of consciousness].

Returning to the example with which we began, we would expect a person at Kegan level L-4/3 to be **cognitively less developed** in terms of her **Fluidity Index** than a person at L-4(3), and certainly than person at L-4(3).

Although CDF assessments show a wide variety of cognitive profiles *for the same social-emotional profile*, and also show a spread of cognitive over social-emotional dominance and vice versa – thus an imbalance of the two developmental strands --,

empirical research findings make it seem *unlikely* that a person could even maintain a social-emotional center of gravity of L-4/3, for instance, *without a “commensurate” ability to exercise dialectical thought forms.*

**How much dialectical thinking is requisite** at any level is, of course, also a function of a person's *Risk-Clarity-Potential Index (RCP)* that in CDF specifies the proportion of levels lower and higher than the center of gravity.

For instance L-4/3 {2:7:6} versus L-4/3 {6:7:2}  
where the first, L-4/3 {2:7:6}, shows a greater developmental *potential (for future growth)*,  
and the second, L-4/3 {6:7:2} a larger developmental *risk (of regression)*.

In short, **social-emotional movements have a *cognitive, dialectical structure*.**

### Summary of Part I

Using developmental notation customary both in the social-emotional and cognitive research field, I have formulated the following research hypotheses:

- that social-emotional development (of meaning-making) **is driven by cognitive development toward dialectical thinking (transformational thinking)**
- that there exists an **over-arching cognitive dialectic of the social-emotional progression L2→L5** that allows for deviations in **the way dialectical thought forms manifest for different individuals in the individual ranges of L2→L3, L3→L4→L5.**


It is the task of *dialectical epistemology (integral thinking)* to substantiate empirically these two related hypotheses.

In order to pursue this task, the developmental researcher needs to delve into the **content** of **social-emotional stories** and bring to light their **cognitive structure** in terms of *the four thought form classes* (CPRT) that epistemologically instantiate *the four ontological moments of dialectic* (MELD). As a result, the integrally thinking researcher can contribute to insight into **the unity of human consciousness**, which according to present limited insight is seen as bifurcated into two strands: social-emotional and cognitive.

We can spell out *this illicit fission between the two dimensions of consciousness* by reference to the **short table of thought forms** presented in Laske 2015:

**DIALECTIC – *p,e,l* explicators of each of 12 dialectical moments**

	<u>C</u> ontext ( <i>M</i> )	<u>P</u> rocess ( <i>E</i> )	<u>R</u> elationship ( <i>L</i> )	<u>T</u> ransformation ( <i>D</i> )
<b><i>p</i></b>	Cp Relationship between part(s) and a whole	Pp Emergence and inclusion of opposites	Rp Bringing elements into relationship	Tp Limits of system stability
<b><i>e</i></b>	Ce Structure and stability of a system	Pe Patterns of interaction	Re Structure of relationship	Te Developmental movement of systems
<b><i>l</i></b>	Cl Multiple contexts and frames of reference	Pl Embeddedness in process	Rl Patterns of interaction and influence	Tl Comparison and coordination of systems; emergence of new entities



<b>INTEGRATION</b>
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Table 2: DTF\* classes of **thought forms** simplified  
(p=pointing, e=elaborating, l=linking)

In the table, each of the **four moments of dialectic** is instantiated by three (instead of 7, as in Laske 2008) thought forms that progressively explicate *each* moment, in three steps:  
pointing → elaborating → linking (p-e-l).

The table shows that as one moves from M→E→L→D, dialectical thinking increases.  
(DTF\* interviews make this progression measurable in terms of a *Fluidity Index*  
based on the number used, and coordination achieved between, individual thought forms.)

[\*DTF = Dialectical Thought Forms]

In terms of Table 2, understanding how *cognitive development determines social-emotional development* **results from cognitive science practiced as a dialectical discipline** that presently does not exist.

With the help of Table 2, four main principles of such a science can be circumscribed:

1. **M-- Cp: ED and CD are integral parts of consciousness (Cp), a whole**

that is unified by the category of differentiation introducing variety and depth.

*A major characteristic of consciousness is **alterity** which gives rise to a plethora of manifestations of "thoughts", some social-emotional, some cognitive (Ce). Although these manifestations appear in two different forms, both forms are partaking of a **common frame** of reference **creating a single "world view" (CI)**.*

Being stratified, ***consciousness shifts its emotional-intellectual balance over the individual life span***. The separation of the two components of consciousness amounts to illicit fission that fails to explain its structure and stability, amounting to de-stratification.

2. **E-- Pp: Consciousness is based on the emergence and inclusion of opposites (Pp)**

giving rise to patterns of interaction between emotion and intellect (**Pe**) that result in their mutual embedding as well as inclusion in a larger process, consciousness itself (**PI**).

It is unified by the category of absence and potential, spanning negation, contradiction, and critique in the sense of Sartre's *être pour so* ("being for-itself"). Its main theme is *the presence of the past and future in the present, **both in thought and the world's reality***.

Its dialectic is one of transition, interaction, opposition, reversal, and virtualization whose absence leads to painting the world in a single color (Bhaskar's categorical

monovalence).

**3. L-- Rp: Consciousness is the common ground**

of even the most exclusive and “alien” **thoughts**, *holding what is not there or not yet there* within a totality of potential (**Rp**).

Its theme is unity in diversity, internal relatedness, the source of critique of illicit separation and fission and the error of reduction to isolated elements and multiples (**Re**).

The dialectic of ED and CD is therefore reciprocal, intrinsic, based on the constitutive relationship of transformation that supersedes all defensive blockage of otherness (**RI**).

**4. D-- Tp: Consciousness, as a system, has limits of stability** - expressing that it unfolds its developmental potential in small steps, across the entire individual life span (**Tp**).

Its stability is created exclusively by *unceasing developmental motion and coordination of opposites* giving rise to a *multiplicity of perspectives* (**Te**).

Through the coordination of the ED and CD systems as opposites, new perspectives on the world emerge that are *initially unknown to the developing individual* (**TI**).

Its theme is stability through developmental movement, attention to coordination and change in a developmental direction, the multiplicity of perspectives defining elements of the real world as concrete universals.

Dialectical Principles Summary:

1. **M-- Cp:** ED and CD are integral parts of consciousness (**Cp**), a whole
2. **E-- Pp:** Consciousness is based on the emergence and inclusion of opposites (**Pp**)
3. **L-- Rp:** Consciousness is the common ground
4. **D-- Tp:** Consciousness, as a system, has limits of stability - expressing that it unfolds its developmental potential in small steps, across the entire individual life span (**Tp**)

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Returning to the initial example of a person at Kegan-level L-4/3 in phase 1 of dialectical thinking (showing *incipient use of Context and Relationship thought forms*),

the topic of **a cognitive science based on dialectical thought** should be evident:

to explain what in **Fig. 7**, below, is suggested as

**an unceasing interchange between social-emotional Stance and cognitive Tools**

as the source of the Experiences,

both of themselves and the world, that individuals make.

Consequently, this discipline is a **science of human experience**,

**not** of either human “emotions” or “thoughts”

*which are mere side effects of a holistic transformation of consciousness.*

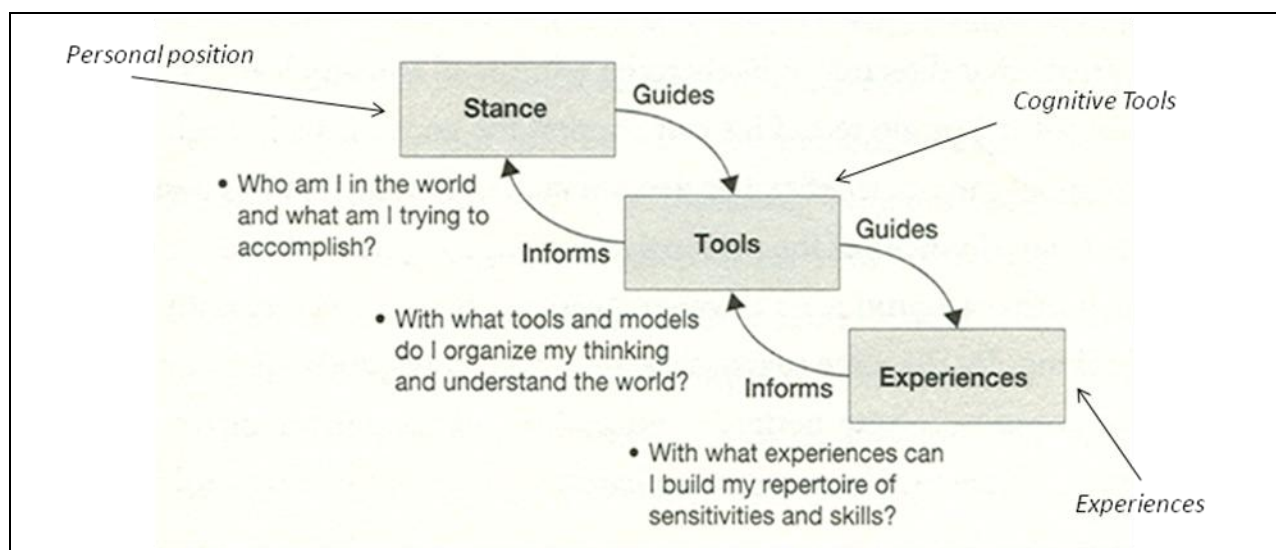


Fig. 7: **Social-emotional stance and cognitive tools together create human experience** (taken from Laske vol. 2 of *Measuring Hidden Dimensions*, 2008, 221).

At the present time, we are **hindered** from developing such a science *by the dominance of formal logical and monological thinking in the sciences, thus an absence of new and adventurous dialogical thinking about language, mind, and world* (Linell 2009).

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I have shown that **social-emotional** development is best documented by stories about the self's meaning-making. Such stories have **a cognitive structure that developmental thinking and listening can reveal by analyzing them in terms of dialectical thought forms**.

Accordingly, below I present analyses of selected social-emotional stories from Lahey et al (1988). I aim to show that while isolated stories are, dialectically speaking, merely "content", **when presented in developmental succession they reveal their thought form structure**.

## Part II: Practice

Social-emotional stories told by clients in a semi-structured interview *focus on emotional content* through whose developmental analysis (following Lahey et al. 1988) one can discern in what range of Kegan-levels an interviewee presently **makes meaning of herself as an integral part of the social world** ("social-emotional profile").

The interviewer accomplishes the analysis of the interview by way of narrowing down the conversation to **1 of 4-5 client-chosen projective prompts** (verbal stimuli such as "Success"), one at a time.

Each **prompt** chosen by the client leads to an *hypothesis* as to *what is the correct intermediate level* to be assigned to *the mini-story emerging from the prompt*. Clients find it

easy to follow this partly self-defined protocol since any prompt chosen functions like a projective image.

The **interviewer tests each mini-story emerging from a prompt** until his/her intermediate-level hypothesis is clear, ***first informally in the interview*** (to know how to carry on) and ***definitively in listening to the recorded session in its entirety.***

In this way, 15 “score-able” mini-stories are co-constructed by interviewer and interviewee, each of which can be unequivocally assigned to one of the intermediate levels in the client’s total range, such as L-3/4 → L4/3 → L4(3).

A good interview is experienced by the client as *therapeutic* since s(he) it has *enabled her to articulate meaning-making issues in an atmosphere of respect, intimacy and trust* (like in a therapy session by Carl Rogers).

In *most* cases, stories fall into a typical range of three intermediate levels although there are exceptions. This then allows us to arrive at the answers as to which of the social-emotional levels L-2 to L-5 in the range analysis is each of the 15 representative social-emotional stories selected by the interviewer to be assigned to.

These answers are useful because they not only tell us a client’s present *Center of Gravity*, but also deliver an index, called RCP (Risk-Clarity-Potential Index; Laske 2005) that *indicates the proportional weight of each intermediate level* in a client’s social-emotional range.

An example of assigning 15 mini-stories falling within a client’s range would be:

<u>L-3/4</u>	<u>L-4/3</u>	<u>L-4(3)</u>
3	7	5

This would indicate that of 15 stories told during a 1-hr interview,  
 3 exemplified L-3/4,  
 7 exemplified L-4/3,  
 and 5 exemplified L4(3).

This analysis would lead to an **RCP of L-4/3 {3:7:4}**,

indicating that the speaker's *present Center of Gravity* is L-4/3 (weight = 7),  
 and that the **developmental risk (R)** at level L-3/4 is 3,  
 while the **developmental potential associated with the center (P)** is 5.

The empirical finding - that the **Risk (of regressing to L-3/4)**

is lower than the Potential (of moving to L-4(3)) - is an actionable one:  
 It can direct the design of a coaching and mentoring plan,

if not also one of teaching social skills.

As will be evident, an empirical finding such as:

L-3/4	L-4/3	L-4(3)
5	7	3

would be quite **different**, since the RCP of L-4/3 {5:7:3} indicates that the respective individual's developmental *risk* (5) is higher than his/her potential (3) to move to a subsequent social-emotional level.

Accordingly, *the stories (answers) elicited by the prompts* chosen by the interviewee in this case would be considerably different: **the same center of gravity (L-4/3) would be held by the interviewee in a less confident and developmentally secure way.**

Since *social-emotional stories focus on emotional content*, not cognitive structure as in cognitive interviews, it is typically **difficult to discern a clear thought form structure** in such stories. However, this can be helped. Instead of focusing on individual stories, we can **focus on the progression** from one story to another, such as one situated at L-3/4 to one situated at L-4/3.

We are then **looking for the thought form structure not of the story itself** as much as that **of the progression from one story to another**. In short, **moves in thought from one social-emotional story to another always have a discernible thought form structure.**

Below, based on the interpretation of “main” Kegan levels, I will move to a meta-level to the analysis of individual interviews. This enables me to **focus on what is the cognitive effort required, in terms of thought forms, to move from one level to another.**

First step toward discerning thought form structure in social-emotional stories

In order to acquire even a **superficial sense of the four main social-emotional levels** this analysis will move between, the reader will benefit from perusing a **brief characterization of each level** in the **Appendix**. This will facilitate following the text below.

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In my experience, a developmentally schooled listener can hear individuals **“talking themselves into”** higher meaning-making levels than they presently reside on.

The verbosity of such self-boosting is uncanny; only a developmentally schooled listener can both appreciate and debunk it. The movement is embedded in the language-suffused social world that is largely about *meaning, not truth* (Jaques 2002), and often about *meaning posturing as truth*.

The crux of the transformational journey from L-2 to L-5 is **loss of ego-centrism**,

to speak with J. Piaget. At each subsequent level individuals hold, not only a higher level of meaning-making (Kegan 1982; Laske 2005), but a commensurately *more complex cognitive* picture of the real (not just the social) world.

**Cognitive complexity** is measured by way of a cognitive interview evaluated in terms of Bhaskar's **MELD** and its associated classes of **thought forms** (Laske 2008). To understand the **thought form structure of social-emotional movements** from level to level, one best focuses, first, on a particular level and then on the characteristics of the journey to a subsequent, higher, level.

For this purpose - below - the reader finds a summary of markers of adult development over the life span, followed by a short description of the developmental journey "upward".

In each of the journeys discussed, a **presently held notion** of, and **perspective** on, *oneself* relative to the social world is being **subverted by a more holistic and systemic world view** that has inexorably **been growing in consciousness**.

This subversion has all the earmarks of a **dialectical process** since **what was once "other than me" is now becoming "me"**.

Two movements are involved,  
 an ontological (ontogenetic) one outside of consciousness that underlies its transformation; and one tagged to it **epistemologically** that is striving to become conscious.

Since dialectical thinking is in no way restricted to the social world but seeks truth in the broader physical universe, *the self-boosting* mentioned must be the result of a broader cognitive process that is independent of meaning-making.

In terms of CDF, this process is misconstrued if cognition – "sense-making" -- is identified with meaning-making, which amounts to an *ontological category error* (Bhaskar 1993).

In CDF, therefore, a clear distinction is made between-meaning making and sense-making, **the former being a socialized form of the latter**.

A further required distinction is that between **ontology** and **epistemology**, or **between what is and what is interpreted as being through language**.

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In preparation for the analysis of selected social-emotional stories from each of the three ranges (L2→3, L3→4, L4→5), in the next step we dwell on the journey from L-2 onward, focusing on each journey's essence in terms of the four moments of dialectic:

**how, in terms of each moment of dialectic, do these journeys unfold?**

In order to answer this question, let us consider in tandem



- (a) a short description of the essence of the four main social-emotional levels and
- (b) the essential characteristics of the journey from those levels *upward*.

## L-2, Instrumental Level

- **Essence of this stage:** *As a self - subject to my needs, wishes, and interests - I relate to another person in terms of possible consequences for my world view. I “know” you in terms of **how helpful or harmful you can be to me**, and am thus **unable to consider your independent view at the same time that I am taking my own into account**.*

**Journey toward level 3:** *is about **bringing inside the self** others’ perspective. My new perspective now includes my ability to **imagine your taking a perspective on me**, and to **bring inside myself the mediation of these separate perspectives**, -- which previously were negotiated only as a matter of social consequence in the external world.*

### The social-emotional journey of adults

We can research **consciousness** as any other reality by using dialectic. The sequence  $C \rightarrow P \rightarrow R \rightarrow T$  can thus serve as the explication of the four moments of dialectic  $M \rightarrow E \rightarrow L \rightarrow D$  in human consciousness, where *the arrows point to the unfolding of adult cognition* over the life span. This sequence provides us with a dynamic view of how **the changing relationship between Stance (Level) and Tools (Phase)** in Fig. 7 plays out in individuals’ real life.

Although  $C \rightarrow P \rightarrow R \rightarrow T$  will *not* explicitly show us the ramifications of how a specific individual moves from one thought form class to another, *it indicates the drift of the movement toward transformational thinking*.

The sequence also does *not* show clearly how the intrinsic relation between ED (Stance) and CD (Tools) in Fig. 7 changes from level to level within the three social-emotional ranges (L2-L3  $\rightarrow$  L3-L4  $\rightarrow$  L4  $\rightarrow$  5).

However, it does give us a first inkling (hypothesis) of the micro-dynamic structure of human consciousness that cognitive science has so far left unexplored.

In order to describe the dialectical movement through the three social-emotional ranges, below we circle through Table 2 (of the **thought forms**) for each of them.

By so doing we symbolically move through Fig. 7 (above) which points to how the social-emotional EXPERIENCE of life and work **is created in consciousness**.

(In terms of conventional integral thinking, this amounts to the unfolding of UL (upper left quadrant) both in terms of Stance and Tools relative to AQAL as a constitutive relationship holding all quadrants together **in human experience**.)

### The dialectic of the journey toward L-3

In this first circling through the **dialectical thought forms** (Table 2),

the movement **starts** from an “adolescent” consciousness that is stuck in its own desires and interests on account of which it uses others as instruments of its own (immediate) gratification.

The movement **beyond this**, “the stronger eats the weaker” Hobbsian position, is focused on “bringing inside” what is both absent from and opposite to Me.

Starting on this journey, I cannot but adopt emergence and inclusion of opposites in my own development (Pp, Table 2, above), nor can I resist elaborating this mind opener into **Pe** as the foundation of **patterns of interaction**: I am now part of a pattern of interaction that leads to my **socialization**.

The **further** I proceed in this, the more I am becoming aware of being embedded in a change process with others that is itself embedded in a larger social process (PI).

Thus, by acquiring mind openers of class **P**, I cannot but enter more deeply into **Cp**, gaining clarity of the relationship between myself and the larger social and physical world.

This contributes to my having a larger “big picture”

and appreciating the stability of my identity away from my mere needs and interests (Ce), and increasingly *enables me to hold in mind multiple contexts in which I can be myself without losing myself in others (CI).*

I am also beginning to see myself somewhat objectively, as “myself not my self”.

Having been active in bringing myself and others into relationship (Rp), I now learn about what is the structure of the relationship by which I **share common ground with others** (Re). This opens me up to **new patterns** of interactions and influence I was previously incapable of (RI).

As I instantiate **in my mental growth** the **mind openers** of thought form classes C, P, and R, I eventually experience the limits of stability of my own and others’ identity for the first time, aware of the possibility of the loss of my first, immature self (Tp), especially in personal loss (Pp).

From this experience new sub-entities emerge for me, both as potentials **in myself** (Te) and opportunities **outside of me** (TI).

I am in full transformation as I enter L-3, by way of developmental “meta-enablers” socializing me.

### L-3, Other-Dependent Level

- **Essence of this stage:** *My self is made up by the expectations of physical or internalized others (family, religious or peer group), and I lose myself when losing membership in, and the support of, the group.*
- **Journey toward stage 4:** *Starting with the distinction between physical others, internalized others, and ‘myself,’ individuals inch toward a sense of what is “other than me;” they don’t get social help in this, and are thus on their own.*

### The dialectic of the journey to L-4

This journey, again, **starts** with a **Process step** that helps me get beyond the *internalized others* who have run my life *under the guise of my own self* **because I could not separate them from who I really am.**

The antithesis between myself and internalized others is now firmly established:

I now “know” others *as others*, something I can do only to the extent that I know myself.

Not only can I therefore distinguish between internalized and physical others,

I can respect others for being what they are, namely, in their difference from me (Pp).

This advance immediately **broadens my way of communicating with myself and others.**  
It also **broadens my perspective on being part of a whole.**

This whole is now composed of independent others whom I have to respect (Cp).

This makes it possible for me to understand the structure and stability not only personal systems (Ce) but systems more generally.

As a result, I **can now elaborate multiple contexts, not only cognitively but also social-emotionally, even within myself (CI).**

I am shown how negativity\* (Pp) by itself alters the context which I am and in which I exist.

[\*In dialectics, “negativity” refers to “absence”, as something that not only denotes the past and the outside of a thing but equally its unrealized potential. Without absence, there is no space for any kind of development to take place, nor even any developmental potential.]

Being now “autonomous”, bringing elements into relationship (Rp) is becoming difficult for me in a new way.

Why should I establish relationships with others than myself, being a self sufficient universe of my own?

I am learning the structure of relationship the hard way (Re), by failure.

This eventually makes me insightful about patterns of interaction and influence, with my own influence becoming increasingly subtle (RI).

I vaguely begin to see the limits of stability of systems (Tp) and my own developmental movement (Te), as well as that of other systems in which I am embedded, but painfully so, due to my seemingly unassailable autonomy.

I am now a “manager” since I manage myself very well.

However, the time will come where I have to abandon this hard-won autonomy in order **not to get stuck** in developmental arrest (TI) as a prisoner of my glorious independent self.

### **L-4, Self-Authoring Level**

- **Essence of this stage:** *I am **identified with my own value system** as the root of my 'integrity' (my highest value, and the grounding of my 'being in control')*
- **Journey toward stage 5:** *Starting with the distinction between my own identity and that of others, and feeling a keen need to work with others as 'midwives' of my own development, I gradually **begin to see the limits** of my own character, history, assumptions, certitudes, and self-constructed identity, and therefore **the limits up to which I can impose my values and perspectives on others.***

### The dialectic of the journey to L-5

Being thus under development, I have now acquired the mind openers of Table 2 twice over, first moving from L2 to L3, and then from L3 to L4.

My **cognitively mediated social-emotional development** in turn enhances my ability to use new cognitive tools.

*What in my consciousness drives me further, **there being no societal forcing function that would oblige me to go on?***

Bhaskar speaks of **absences being stronger than presences**, exemplified by human desire for which **what is not there is more "real" than what is there.**

This desire is not simply "emotional". It is rather the very essence of consciousness from the start.

However, this "ARA" tendency of consciousness is built on MELD, not the other way around as present integral theories (in their denial of ontology) suggest.

In this position, I presently find myself in a self-built cage, that of **autonomy.**

To break out of it is difficult because it is "my" cage, **based on "my" achievement.**

But here again, **opposites emerge and beg to be included (Pp):**

*I have to break out of myself.*

The patterns of interaction that now matter most for me are those informing selected intimate others that shake me out of my stupor of autonomy (Pe). (Only 25% of individuals manage to do so.)

### I have to acknowledge my limitations

and will do so should I be lucky enough to find those few others who can be midwives on behalf of my own development.

Only then will I understand that my consciousness is embedded in social processes to whom I owe the illusion of autonomy (PI) on which my competences are based.

But these competences are merely something I "have" without ever "being" them, and it is now being that is becoming decisive.

I am now at a point where to bring elements into relationships, especially between myself and others,

can no longer be achieved without my *becoming conscious of* what I am NOT or NOT YET.

As a result, the ***perspective*** on what I am now **shifts from part to whole (Cp)**

and insight is gained into the fact that the **stability** of a structure like my person **is entirely dynamic**, *stable only by being in unceasing motion (Ce)*.

***This insight revolutionizes Context for me:***

there now is a multiplicity of contexts that I need to consider.

I increasingly **need to master different frames of reference** *which outwardly are "NOT ME"*.

I can do so only by thinking \*with\* others and differently than others at the same time (CI).

**At this point, I can begin to lead teams.**

(Since most team leaders don't reach this level of development, most **teams succumb to social-emotional clashes within them** *while their task process is marred by cognitive failures*, and little collaborative intelligence actually emerges.)

The really productive relationships in which I live now **are intimate**.

They include professional, not just private, relationships since private and professional self have merged: in my role, I am my size of person. **I am no longer holding anything back, whether my limitations nor my strengths.**

This intimacy is **naturally mutual**, but only between selected few. Others I previously knew have fallen away from me *since they did not show themselves capable of such intimacy (Rp)*. They are *not* my kin *since their development got arrested*. It's becoming a lonelier world for me.

However, the **structure of relationships** I am in now is one of **curiosity about myself** more than anything else (Re): ***I only thought I knew myself***. This insight enriches and deepens the patterns of interaction I am now drawn into. **My influence is no longer that of my factual personality, but one of the inner and outer work I have done on myself (RI)**.

I also know death better now, or at least surmise it more clearly.

**The limits of systems stability in the world are becoming clearer to me** by the day from an **awareness of my own body**: there will be a world after I am gone (Tp).

I have had the opportunity of contributing to this world, ***in ways not many others yet fully understand*** (prior to my death). *The developmental movement I am part of* becomes "ontological" and "cosmic". I open into a very large world that is *newly mine and simultaneously independent of me (Te)*, **in a unity of identity and difference** previously difficult to grasp.

It is a **world in unceasing flux**, notwithstanding that it is also “eternal”. I can now **coordinate many different systems, emotional and intellectual, moral and aesthetic**, in a few chosen fields I care to know and am active in.

New ways of seeing the world keep emerging in me that previously I could have imagined (TI).

### L-5, Self-Aware Level

- **Essence of this stage:** *subject-object separation is lessened by insight into the constraints imposed on meaning-making by natural language (Cook-Greuter's construct awareness).*
- **Journey beyond this stage:** *in Kegan's system, this is the ultimate stage.*

Thinking in terms of Bhaskar's work,

an individual walks through  $M \rightarrow E \rightarrow L \rightarrow D$  as his or ontological ground.

S(he) has to circle through it again in each social-emotional range.

*In each of them, the thought forms take on a different social-emotional meaning for her.*

**Depending on what range s(he) arrives at as her ultimate one,**

an individual's ARA (spirituality; enchantment; non-duality) will look different.

What s(he) thought, spoke and wrote about ARA **before reaching her highest level of cognition will fail to walk the talk:** s(he) has only talked the walk.

Arriving at, or close to, L-5, my relationship to the whole is again transformed (Cp):

I am bewildered by *alterity*:

the utter **endlessness of variations of what exists** is increasingly inscrutable (Ce).

Also, **the tenacity of less developed frames of reference around me** becomes painful (CI),

the **more so in cultures void of dialectical sense-making** (that therefore use weak metaphors instead).

### How, in this position, can I be of help?

My notion of helping now is that it is, as *Edgar Schein* has said, the most difficult thing to do. How to “help” a person between L2-L3 and L3-4? Is it worth trying? I can always help others regarding their physical and social needs **but I cannot help them in the sense of process consultation before knowing developmentally whom I am helping.**

Although part of a “language-suffused world”, I now can see through to the limitations of *linguistic constructs as leaving out much of what is real in the world*. Interacting with yourself outside of language now reshapes how you interact with others, all of whom are now ME, manifestations of human consciousness in a multitude of forms of experience.

There is no longer a need to “bring” things into relationship, because relationships have always been there, and it’s only you in your immaturity who had to “bring” them to life (Rp).  
Structures of relationship are firmly established not only in you but the world. No longer can you fail to see the world as “intransitive”, outside and independent of you (Re).

More than ever, you are transforming more than just forming.

“Side effects” of aging show you the limits of stability in a new light:  
 your integrity now becomes inseparable from that of your body (Tp).  
 There is now an awareness of many developmental strands in you, not just one,  
 and those manifesting in the external world are bewildering in their variety (Te);  
 it seems imperative to draw them together in all of their complexity.  
 However, **new vistas on who you are (or have been) constantly emerge,**  
 and *holding them together in what still goes under your name is all you can try to do (TI).*

**You have finally become a person and transcended your persona.**

## Conclusion

In this article, I have undertaken to demonstrate **the unity of social-emotional and cognitive adult development** by laying bare **the structure of the adult progression of meaning-making in terms of dialectical thought forms.**

I have treated forms of thought not only as instruments or tools **for thinking** but as actual forces in the real world, and **thus as generative mechanisms** of the *unfolding of consciousness.*

This has enabled me to demonstrate that *when we circle through the simplified table of thought forms in each of the three social-emotional ranges (L2 to L5),* **both the four moments of dialectic (MELD) and their associated forms of thought (CPRT) take on a different appearance and meaning for the individual.**

**The individual both uses thought forms and “is used by them”,** in the sense that *as they arise in consciousness they determine not only how the individual “thinks” but “is”, and thus “sees” the world.*

In this sense, we have seen **consciousness as an integral part of the real world** *which it is trying to understand,* a paradoxical undertaking.

To understand its ***complexity requires dialectical thinking***.

We have seen lastly, by implication, that so far cognitive science, *based as it is on formal logical thinking*, **cannot show us what we would really like to understand:**  
how our consciousness unfolds from birth to death as part of the real world not of our making.

The conclusion is that **only a dialogical cognitive science based on dialectic** could be of help in our quest for such an understanding.

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(Note: There is an appendix following the References))

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## Appendix

### Instrumental (L-2), Other-dependent (L-3), Self-authoring (I-4), Self-aware (L-5)

#### The *instrumental* level (L-2)

- **Distribution:** *about 10% of adults*
- **Advance over Stage 1:** *A distinction can be made between what something seems and what it is. This requires the **ability to separate oneself from one's perception** (stage 1), **of taking one's perceptions as object** (stage 2).*
- **Essence of this stage:** *As a self subject to my needs, wishes, and interests, I relate to another person in terms of possible consequences for my world view. I "know" you in terms of how helpful you can be to me, and **am thus unable to consider your independent view** at the same time that I am taking my own into account.*
- **Instrumentalism:** *The ultimate concern is with whether the person will lose a source of support or help for herself. The person's **own interest constitutes the ground from which (s)he attends to others' perspective**.*
- **Pervasive limitation:** *a 'split universe,' where each person's knowing is separate from the others' knowing.*

#### Associated journey to the subsequent level, L-3

- **Journey toward level 3:** *is about bringing inside the self others' perspective. My new perspective now includes my ability to imagine your taking a perspective on me, and to bring inside myself the mediation of these separate perspectives, -- which previously were negotiated only as a matter of social consequence in the external world.*
- **Developmental risk:** *loss of imagined self containment*
- **Meaning of 'internalizing another's perspective':** *ability to hold more than a single view:*
  - *First, a bringing inside the self another's or others' perspectives which were before considered only from the viewpoint of my own independent enterprises.*
  - *Second, an ability to derive my own thoughts and feelings as a direct consequence of how the other is thinking and feeling, and not **solely as a consequence** of what the other will **DO in response to my actions***

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#### The *other-dependent* level (L-3)

- **Distribution:** *between 50-60% of adults live (**and remain**) at this stage.*
- **Advance over Stage 2:** *theory of self now includes others' perspective*

- **Essence of this stage:** My self is made up by the expectations of physical or internalized others (family, religious or peer group), and I lose myself when losing membership in, and the support of, the group.
- **Conventionalism:** The ultimate concern is with whether I am adhering to what is expected of me. Being 'good' means following the rules of an institution larger than myself I have strongly **internalized**, and without which I will be "at a loss"
- **Pervasive limitation:** I cannot distinguish my points of view from those of physical, and especially **internalized**, others; consequently, I have no 'theory of self' independent of what I have absorbed from the social surround, whether by adherence to, or strict negation of, existing conventions. My guilt is about not being sanctioned by others, not about failing my own standards.

#### Associated journey to the subsequent level, L-4

- **Journey toward stage 4:** starting with the distinction between physical others, internalized others, and 'myself,' individuals inch toward a sense of what is "other than me;" they don't get social help in this, and are thus on their own.
- **Developmental risk:** loss of imagined safety as member of a physical and/or internalized group, thus loss of the communal or shared self
- **Meaning of 'forming a theory of self:'**
  - First, people must internally distance themselves from their need of being acknowledged and accepted by the community; they must be able to 'go it alone' if their own inner voice tells them to do so
  - Second, people must develop a better and better notion of their uniqueness, of what makes them different from others, and find the courage to make that difference known to others while respecting others' otherness
  - Third, people must develop an ethical theory of integrity of self

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#### The self-authoring level (L-4)

- **Distribution:** between 20 and 25% of adults live (**and remain**) at this stage.
- **Advance over Stage 3:** I can articulate a coherent theory of self in terms of my values & principles potentially different from consensus
- **Essence of this stage:** I am identified with my own value system as the root of my 'integrity' (my highest value, and the grounding of my 'being in control')
- **Self-authoring:** The ultimate concern is whether I **safeguard my integrity by following my own values and principles**
- **Pervasive limitation:** I do not have an objective, 'outside' view of my own ways of acting on my principles. Therefore, I can only do "single loop learning," examining outcomes

but not assumptions lying beyond my own value perspective. Also, I can 'respect' others for their differences, but cannot truly enter into their universe of discourse beyond what is 'understandable' to me on the grounds of my own values and principles. Therefore, as a change agent I act according to norms excluding multiple perspectives, intent on shaping my group and organization in harmony with my own principles.

Associated journey to the **self-aware** subsequent level, L-5

- **Journey toward stage 5:** starting with the distinction between my own identity and that of others, and feeling **a keen need to work with others as 'midwives' of my own development**, I gradually begin to see the limits of my own character, history, assumptions, certitudes, and self-constructed identity, and therefore the limits up to which I can impose my values and perspectives on others.
- **Developmental risk:** loss of the self-authoring self, by risking exposure of my own limitations to others' intimate participation in my self-development
- **Meaning of 'abandoning my self-authored self' ['being in the flow']:**
  - First, people **must be shaken out of their unconscious identity** with their life history and "successes," to grasp the limitedness of their own universe
  - Second, people must embrace knowledge sources **other than intellect**, such as 'heart' and 'spirit,' thereby bringing a **sacrifice of mere rationality**; but they can give up only as much rationality as they have previously acquired
  - Third, people must **extend what is 'real' for them to a multi-perspectival view** in which many certainties can be balanced in search for the authentic action required at a particular moment

Associated journey beyond the **self-aware** level, L5

- **Journey toward higher stages:** as far we know today, developmental stages extend further to "**post-autonomous**" stages where **subject-object separation is lessened by insight** into the constraints imposed **on meaning-making by natural language** (Cook-Greuter's construct awareness).
- **Developmental risk:** journey into **spirituality** beyond existing developmental grounding is fraught with risk of overextending existing resources
- **Meaning of 'universal embeddedness'**
  - First, keen '**construct awareness**,' meaning **pervasive awareness of the limitation of language in capturing what is real**
  - Second, insight into one's own **linguaging as a way of limiting awareness** for oneself and others
  - Third, **loss of the permanent object world by further de-centering from self (subject)**
  - Fourth, **holistic** rather than linear experience of **causality**

- Fifth, immersion in the **phenomenal flux**, and access to layers and **layers of symbolic abstraction**