

CDF: A Social-Science Framework For Understanding Human Agency

CDF as a Bridge to Third Wave Critical Realism

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December 2021

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Avant-Propos

- In this talk, I establish a link between Bhaskar's Critical Realism (CR) and the Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF) and situate CDF within CR's social ontology. CDF is a synthesis of developmental theories extant in the late 1990s, put together by me for the sake of providing three empirical 'profiles' of a person at a specific level maturity, 2 of which are developmental, and 1 of which is behavioral in the sense of organizational psychology. This triplicity of profiles makes CDF different from 'developmental theory' which is still chasing after single developmental profiles without ever viewing them as linked and in a broader social-science context.
- To make it easier for you to follow my argument, I ask you now to *de-center* from the customary assumption that human existence provides its *own* absolute standard for what is 'real' in the world, by which assumption you place yourself in Heidegger's 'zuhanden' world, or world that is 'at hand', whereas by de-centering from that assumption, you follow Bhaskar's hypothesis **that human existence is a contingent outcome of natural and social forces that provides no guarantee either of the survival or a standard level of maturity of human beings.** Through this de-centering you arrive at Heidegger's 'vorhanden' world, namely, the real world shown to us by the natural and social sciences.
- In this talk, I follow Bhaskar's brilliant 1979 demonstration of the *possibility of naturalism*, by which is meant that it is possible to research social reality in a way no different from the natural sciences once one is cognizant of the fact that social reality has not only 'material' but also 'ideational' (or 'conceptual') aspects. (So when we speak of 'how people think' we speak of encountering social reality in terms of the interpretations that people have put on it, which are, as consultants and coaches know, exceedingly hard to change.)
- It is these interpretations whose developmental and behavioral structure we research with the aid of CDF tools.

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Intent and Approach

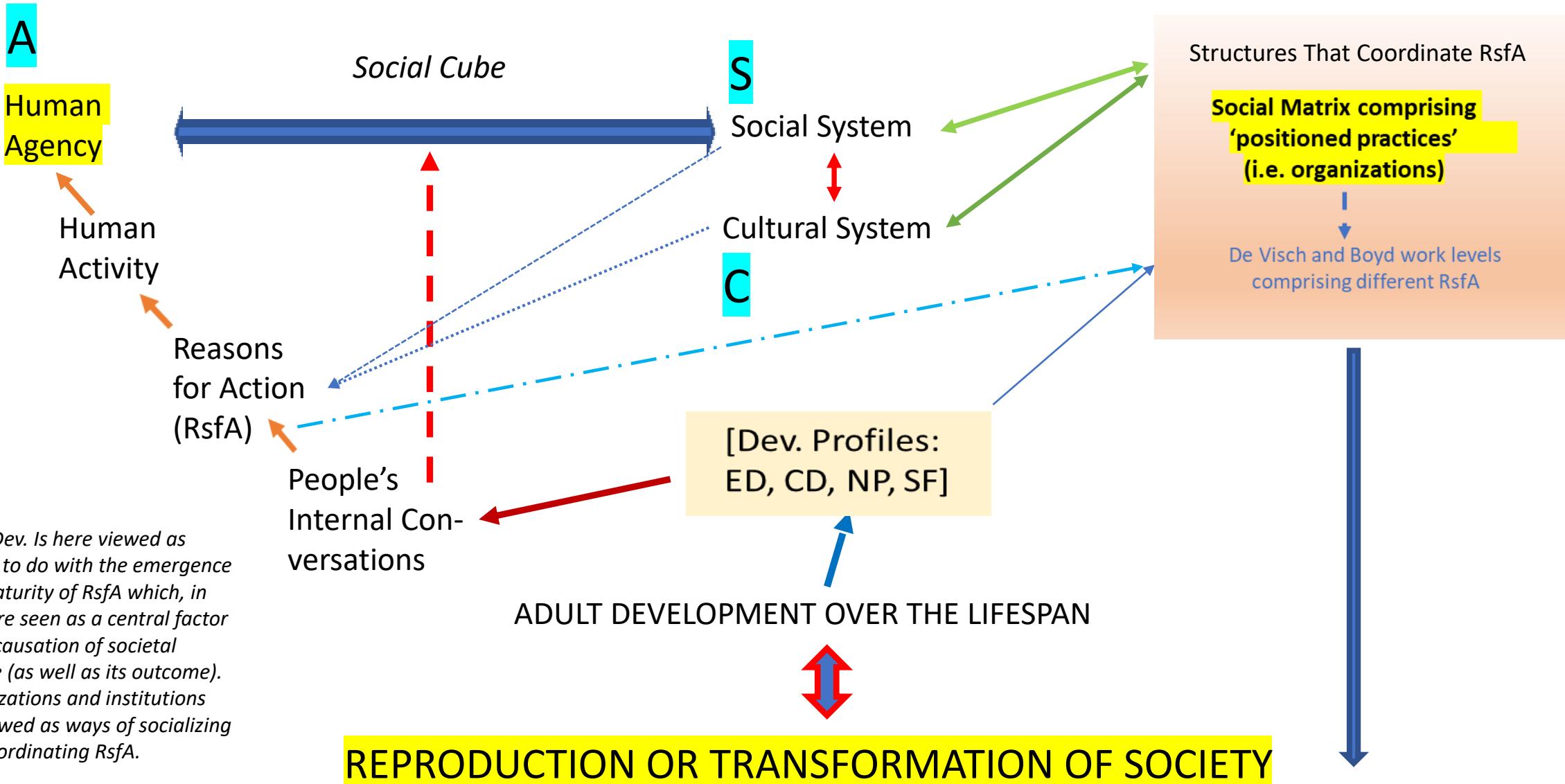
The Constructive-Developmental Framework (CDF) as a Social-Science Framework for Understanding Human Agency

- Up to now, adult-developmental research (referred to as ‘developmental psychology’) has been treated as a stand-alone scientific discipline unconcerned about how society reproduces and transforms itself, and out of touch with how human activities figure into society’s unceasing transformation.
- In contrast to this perspective, Bhaskar’s approach to the social sciences centers on the question of how the human mind, seen as an efficacious causal force, can be considered as the crucial determinant of societal transformation.
- For this reason, the notion of **Human Agency** holds central place in Bhaskar’s social ontology in which the social agent is seen as ‘standing over against’ social and cultural structure, so that the question arises: how structure and agency might relate to each other.

Continued ...

- In this presentation I am intending to show that the Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF), in contrast to 'developmental psychology', is a social science framework for understanding Human Agency in greater depth than has so far been possible, namely, by focusing -- not on a single profile of a person -- but on the *interrelationship* between a person's several CDF profiles, each of them documenting a different ontological stratum of the person at an identical time point.
- **In short, I view CDF as a framework for understanding human agency *developmentally*.**
- Based on the teaching, assessment, and consultancy work I have done with CDF, I show that by using CDF tools, Human Agency can be understood at a deeper causal level than Critical Realism itself has so far been able to do.
- This leads me to suggesting that the time for a 'Third Wave' of CR (after the waves established by Bhaskar in 1979 and 1993) has come.
- This suggestion includes an extension of Bhaskar's MELD dialectic to Basseches' and Laske's epistemic dialectic as part of Bhaskar's Social Cube and Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA).

Concept Map



Adult Dev. is here viewed as having to do with the emergence and maturity of RsfA which, in turn, are seen as a central factor in the causation of societal change (as well as its outcome). Organizations and institutions are viewed as ways of socializing and coordinating RsfA.

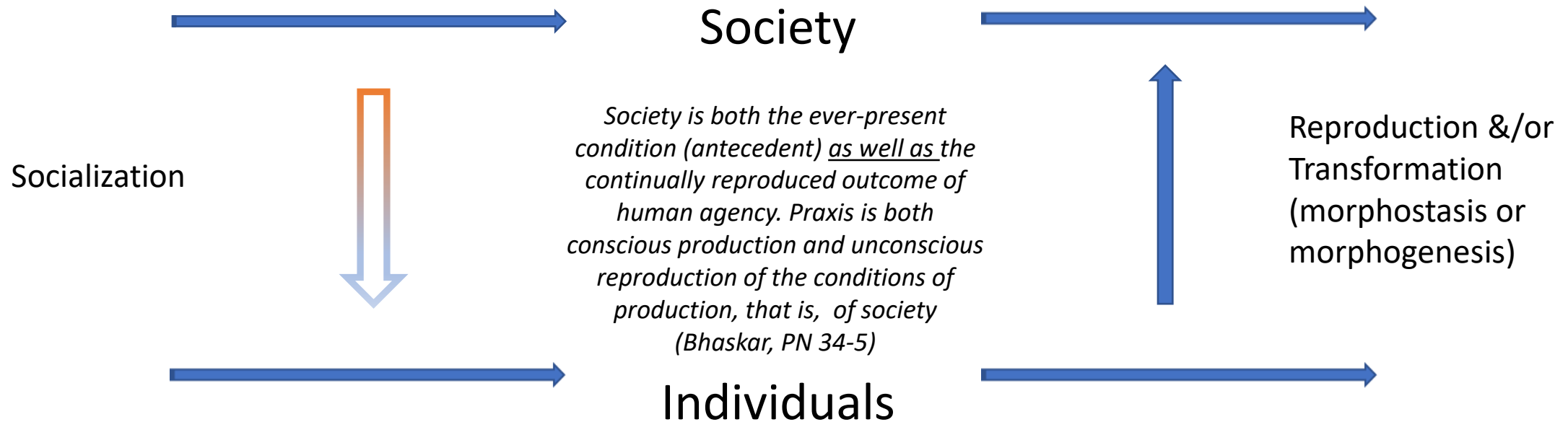
Introduction to Social Ontology

Bhaskar's Social Ontology is Based on a Causal Theory of 'Mind'

- Bhaskar's writings about social science equate to a causal theory of mind that shows:
 - The mind is causally efficacious in the social and natural world, in a way no different from, water leaking into and thereby damaging a house.
 - Therefore, there is the 'possibility of naturalism' such that social science is no different from the natural science, EXCEPT that social, in contrast to physical, reality (social life) is not simply 'material' but also 'conceptual' or 'ideational').
 - 'Ideational' means that social and cultural reality are open to different interpretations by human agents, and that their interpretations form part of the social and cultural reality they refer to; interpretations are thus a dimension of reality on a par with what they interpret.
- In 2003, M. Archer hypothesized (and tried to substantiate empirically) that it is people's 'internal conversations' that form the bridge between 'Structure' and 'Agency' for which she gives mere content examples.
- The CDF hypothesis is that people's internal conversations are *developmentally* structured, thus change over people's lifespan, in that they are grounded in an ED, CD, and NP (behavioral) profile. (Conceivably, one can speak of a spiritual (SF) using John Fowler's (1981) 'Stages of Faith' (1981) (SF)].

Use of CDF Refines Bhaskar's Model of Social Transformation

In terms of Bhaskar's model, the individual is 'thrown' into, and develops on account of, society and, due to his/her agency, can change society as well as him- or herself.



Surprisingly, Bhaskar has little to say about the **internal structure of Human Agency**. CDF shows how social actors generate and execute reasons for action (RsfA) based on their *developmentally structured* internal conversations, and thereby causally co-determine the ways in which society reproduces and/or transforms itself (as well as they do themselves).

Clarifying What the Social Sciences Do

- There is no way to do research without an ontology (i.e., a notion of what the world is like outside of human thinking). Even if we deny having an ontology, in every thought “about” something we postulate that the world exists independently of human thinking. It is thus both more honest and more effective to be aware of the ontology one is following – positivistic, hermeneutic, a mix of the two, or another.
- Bhaskar, in his work in the philosophy of science, spelled out in his 1979 “The Possibility of Naturalism” that in order to understand *what the sciences are doing*, we need to formulate a three-level, not a single or two-level, ontology.
- Critical Realism ontology is a stark critique of David Hume’s and positivists’ assumption that what the sciences try to understand are (constant) **conjunctions of events shaped by laws**. In response to this ‘positivistic’ assumption, Bhaskar shows that it only holds for closed, not for open, systems like nature and society.
- It is the hallmark of the empirical sciences that they attempt to turn the open system that is the world into an assemblage of closed systems by way of experiments, or, in qualitative research, by way of ‘interviews’, ‘questionnaires’, etc.).
- In Bhaskar’s view, this closed-system approach to the real world is flawed since it reduces the world’s complexity and cannot do justice to what Bhaskar refers to as its ‘alethic truth’, in contrast to ‘human truth’.
- On account of this argumentation, in the framework of Critical Realism, we view the ‘real world’ as comprising three, not two, dimensions, as shown below.

THE REAL WORLD IS A LAYERED WORLD

Perceived

Empirical Domain

Observations/experiences

Domain of Human Agency including empirical research

If events are perceived

Actual Domain

Events & non-events enabled or constrained by real domain

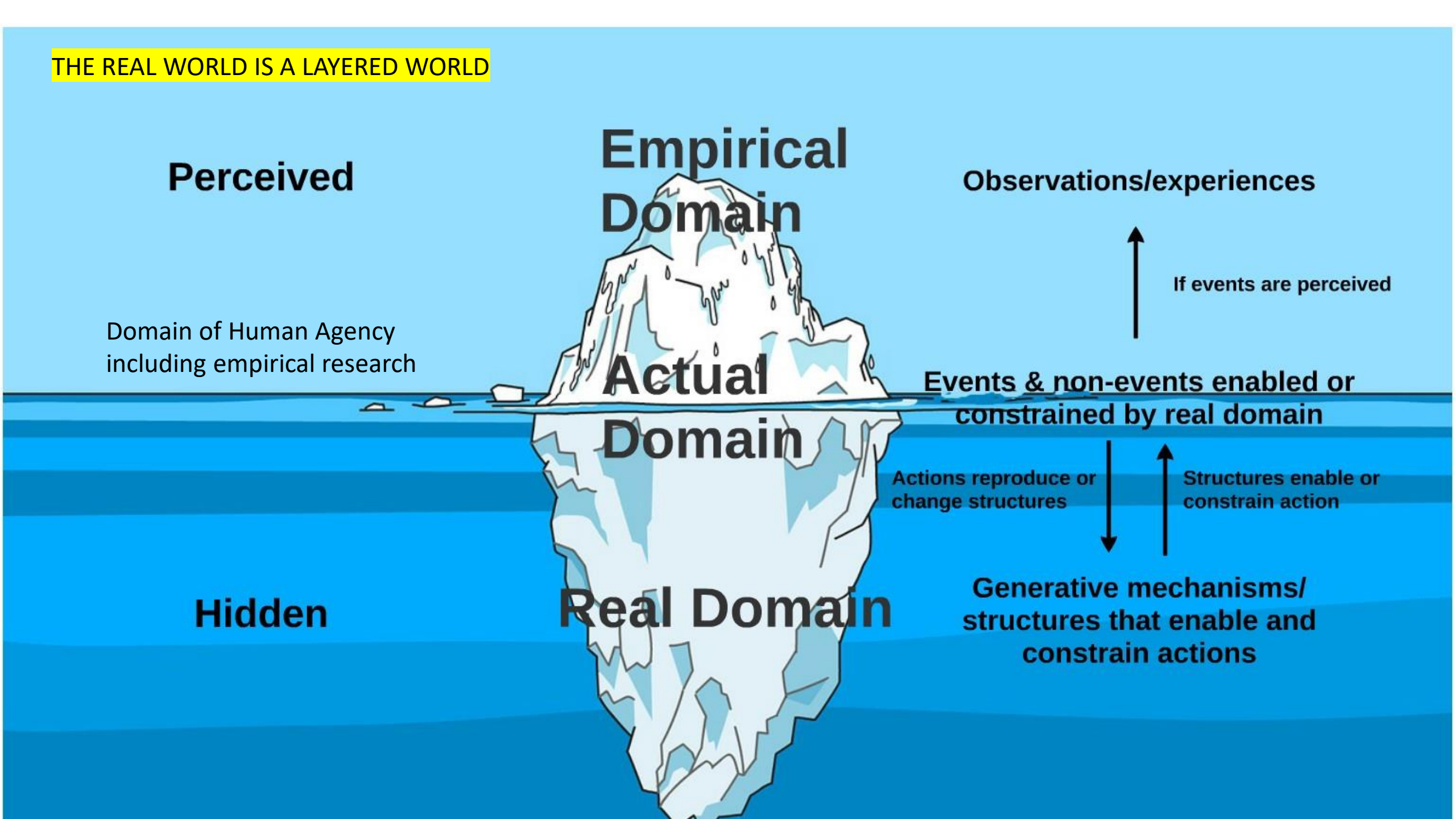
Actions reproduce or change structures

Structures enable or constrain action

Hidden

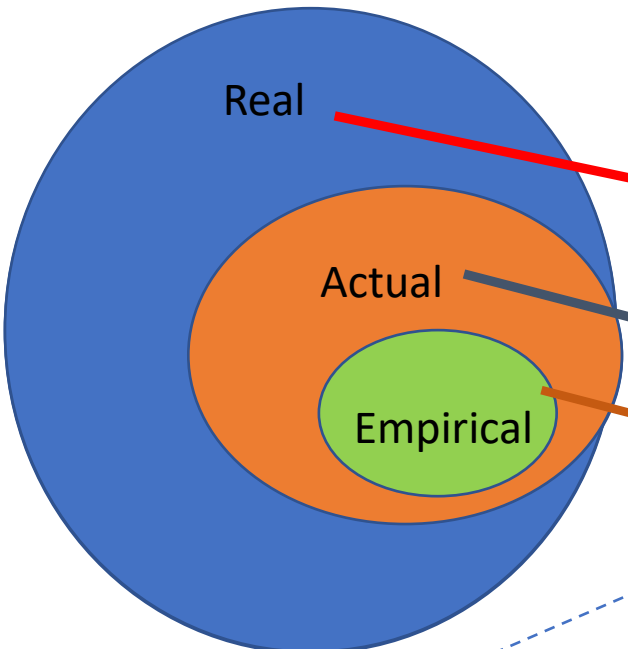
Real Domain

Generative mechanisms/ structures that enable and constrain actions



Three, Not Two, Dimensions of Reality

Based on his refutation of the notion of *laws of nature* determining 'constant conjunctions of events', as hypothesized by David Hume (1711-1776), Bhaskar concluded that it is necessary to distinguish three levels of social and cultural reality: (1) generative mechanisms [alethic truth], (2) events and entities ['actualities'], and (3) scientific and personal experiences:



3 Levels of Depth of Reality	Domain of the Real	Domain of the Actual	Domain of Empirical Experience (behavioral science)
Generative Mechanisms [e.g., dev. structures]	X		
Events & Entities	X	X	
Experiences (e.g., behavioral traits)	X	X	X

Generative mechanism create both events and entities and their personal and scientific experiences.

In view of this, '**Actualism**' is unacceptable since it assumes that there are no generative structures, just states of affair, locating causes and effects solely at the level of events and entities. '**Empiricism**' is equally unacceptable since it denies the reality of generative mechanisms and reduces actualities to human 'behavioral', experiences.

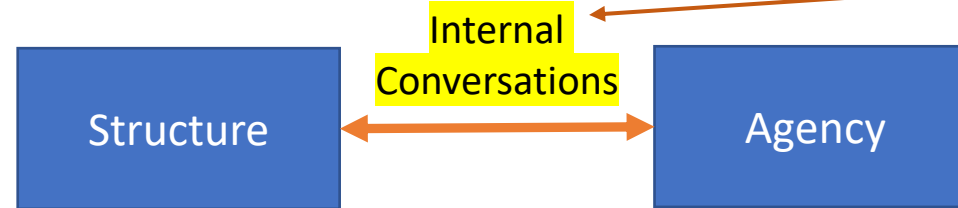
Beware of Ideologies!

Human Activity Viewed From Within Social Ontology

- We can view Critical Realism as an ontological model of how social systems work that stand in a reciprocal relationship with human activities.
- Human activity is viewed as ‘intentional’ to the extent that it is guided by **Reasons for Action** (RsfA).
- RsfA appear in the shape of people’s *needs, beliefs, and rational arguments* and manifest as tendencies and propensities that are integral parts of a personal world view.
- In terms of research, RsfA are **intransitive** objects of the social sciences that investigate such objects based on **transitive** (historically changing) methodologies.
- Epistemically, RsfA are largely unknown to the social actors who ‘have’ them, and even when spelled out in language, they often do not correspond to what the actors are aiming for relative to the social world. (This is because ‘Mind’ is de-centered from, and thus does not equate with, ‘consciousness’, even less with ‘rationality’).
- When acted upon, RsfA encounter social and cultural *constraints and supports* which, since they are part of society as an open system, are impossible to predict (as are the unintended consequences of the actions RsfA are guiding).
- In CDF we ask: “what is the developmental structure of RsfA?”

Structure vs. Agency: A View From CDF

Gedankenexperiments linking 'human freedom' to 'maturity of RsfA'



Human meaning making and sense making

Critical Realism teaches that social and cultural systems precede and thus pre-shape people's actions but that as carriers of human agency, people are free to choose RsfA to either reproduce or transform social and cultural structures. **However, CR does not tell us how RsfA emerge over the lifespan, nor what specific forms they take in specific projects, and how human agency can coordinate and coach them.** This leads to some interesting issues regarding the practical use of CDF in dealing with RsfA.

Issue 1: If, as CR teaches, **human agency** (HA) is neither fully determined by society nor by nature, **in what way do the RsfA HA is guided by safeguard its freedom, and how is the maturity of these RsfA linked to that freedom?**

CDF Hypothesis: Human residual freedom (i.e., the incomplete determination of human action by society and nature) hinges on the **maturity** of RsfA.

Issue 2: If, as CDF suggests, **the maturity of human agency** is the outcome of adult development over the lifespan, and if it influences the structure of people's internal conversations producing RsfA, **in what sense does human agency encounter social and cultural systems differently at different levels of maturity of its RsfA?**

CDF Hypothesis: Human actions guided by mature RsfA are more highly cognizant of social and cultural constraints and supports triggered by them, especially in the pursuit of more highly socialized and coordinated RsfA (as organizations attempt to establish).

Issue 3: **What is the --- more than metaphorical -- meaning of "bridging S and A"?**

CDF Hypothesis: S and A are bridged by people anytime they put into practice their RsfA, such as when launching a work or life project, i.e., when the maturity of RsfA becomes an issue.

Shedding Light on Bhaskar's Social Cube, the Foundation of Four Moments of MELD Dialectic

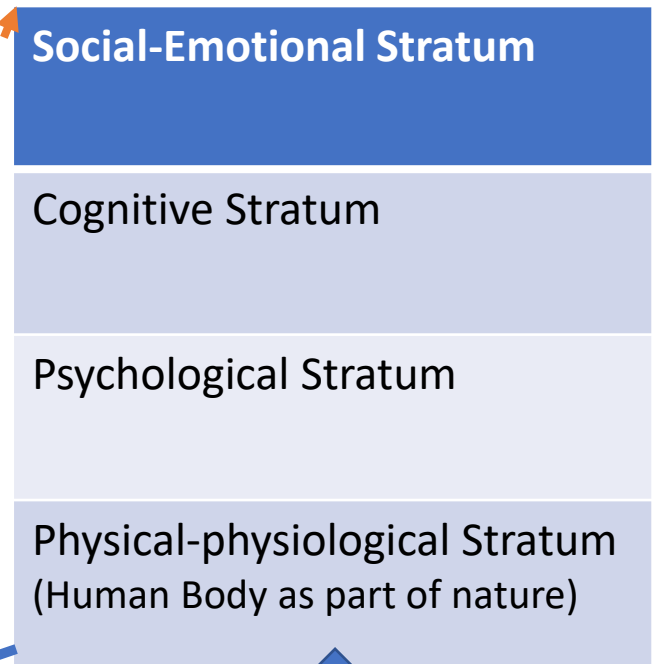
The Four Moments of Bhaskarian Dialectic Constituted by the *Social Cube* (Whose Stratum 4 is Explicated by CDF)

Bhaskar's Social Cube

CDF Explicates Stratum 4 of the Social Cube

Social forms that are preconditions of the intentional activities and 'thinking' of social agents

4D
3L
1M
2E



CDF



MELD: Moments of Dialectic

Users of CDF

Establish Mini-Theories of Human Agency, Respecting the Irreducibility of Different Strata of Personality

- Through CDF, we explore (a) the emergence, over the adult lifespan, of ‘mind’ from ‘matter’; more specifically, that of causally efficacious generative structures called RsfA and (b) develop hypotheses for how humans proceed from ‘possible’ to ‘real’ [efficacious] RsfA.
- We view RsfA as emerging from unceasing *internal conversations* within individuals, whose ED-CD-NP structure of mind determines their **quality** in the sense of ‘maturity’.
- While CDF measures of maturity concern what people **SAY**, the maturity of their **Doing, and Making** is equally involved, and therefore is not only a psychological, but a social and political, issue.
- CDF, which provides **mini-theories of human agency**, poses two major research topics :
 - **Theoretical:** What are the causal effects of what people SAY on what they DO and MAKE (rather than ‘decide’) for the sake of reproducing or transforming the social and cultural reality?
 - **Practical:** What is the scope, and what are the forms, of human practices that are successful in modifying internal conversations, for the sake of shifting their degree of maturity as a factor in contributing to societal change?

Summary of Reasons for Action (RsfA)

- Reasons for action (RsfA) appear in the shape of people's needs, beliefs, and rational arguments; according to Bhaskar, they manifest as tendencies and propensities, and are integral parts of a world view and culture.
- Such reasons are mostly unknown to the social actors who 'have' them, and even when spelled out in language, they often do not correspond to what they are demonstrably aiming for. ('Mind' is de-centered from, and thus does not equate with, 'consciousness', not to speak of 'rationality').
- In social ontology 'naturalism', RsfA are considered as causally efficacious, in a way no different from natural causes (like water damaging a house). In CDF, RsfA are viewed as causally emerging from developmentally structured states of mind.
- When acted upon, RsfA encounter ('trigger') social and cultural *constraints and supports*, that is, **social forms [see the Social Cube]** that precede thought and action – (and are, as parts of an open system, impossible to predict as are their unintended consequences).
- In CDF, we view RsfA as **outcomes of developmentally structured *interpretations of social and physical reality*** that (themselves) form a part of the social reality they stands over against, and view them as caused by, as well causing, that reality.

Toward a Social Science of RsfA

Synthesizing Developmental Profiles to Understand RsfA

- In CDF, we establish individual developmental profiles to be able to hypothesize RsfA that characterize a person's intentional activities.
- RsfA do not derive from a single CDF profile but from the relationships between profiles within a single consciousness.
- *Retroduction*, an 'inference in induction leading to a hypothesis', is needed to 'discover' such reasons by separating and linking CDF profiles and analyzing their relationship.
- **An example from a recent assessment highlights what is needed:** an individual with a profile of **ED = 4(3) {5:9:1}**, a CD (CPRT) score) of **[51, 18, 22, 12 (%)]**, an NP *Effectiveness Index* of **44 (low effectiveness)** and *Distortion Index* of **33 (medium distortion of the external workplace)** is likely to show an "inability to commit", both to his/her own possible RsfA and to those of the organizational praxis s(he) is identified with (something that can be corroborated in terms of interview content).
- The task in working with CDF as a social science framework is to establish a *Pragmatics for hypothesizing and testing RfAs* which must honor the following injunctions:
 - People have a single, unified consciousness.
 - Through their internal conversations, individuals have access to a large number of possible RsfA that they select from when launching actions.
 - Actions are shaped by an interaction of developmental with social and cultural structures, and these structures enable the individual to arrive at 'real', i.e., efficacious, RfAs.
 - **What we need to understand is:** how an individual arrives at real RfAs (outside of mere 'reflexivity').

Understanding RsfA Based on Linking CDF Profiles

CDF Outcome Example

- ED [social-emotional score] = 4(3) {5:9:1} (unstable center of gravity at the espousal stage of self authoring, difficulty to commit to own RsfA and those of the organizational practice the individual is identified with); **issue: 'what should I do and for whom'?**
- CD [cognitive score] = [51, 18, 22, 12 (CPRT %)] (weak Process and Relationship thinking with even weaker transformational thinking, relative to logical thinking); **issue: 'what can I do and what are my options'?**
- NP (behavioral score #1) *Effectiveness Index* of 44 (= low effectiveness in harnessing and using one's own agency, also in interactions with others); **issue: 'how am I doing'?**
- NP (behavioral score #2) *Distortion Index* of 33 (= medium distortion of the social and cultural structures defining the individual's external workplace, which are antecedent to his/her actions)

ED progression:
3(4) → 3/4 → 4/3 → 4(3) → 4

Beliefs about the social world

Rational Arguments

Internal, in addition to external, needs

RsfA

Social
and
Cultural
Reality

Organizations Socialize and Coordinate RsfA

[blind to insight into developmental levels they are associated with]

- By way of a *social matrix* comprising a large number of ‘positioned practices’ (Bhaskar), human activity gets channeled into **work under the cultural influence** of social, economic and management theories.
- Positioned practices accumulate in ‘industries’ and are continuously reproduced and, at times, transformed, in terms of what present social and cultural forms require or permit.
- Intentionality thus socialized (de-personalized) is constrained by ‘roles’, i.e., social-world niches that become independent of the individuals acting in them and define social classes.
- Human intentionality is **socialized** toward greater than personal purposes, through ‘practices’ established long ago, often hardened into closed systems, that precede role holders.
- Social roles differ in terms of culturally shaped work levels that intersect with developmental levels (De Visch, Boyd).
- Within roles, *external* and *internal* workplaces arise (thus a difference between *Job 1* and *Job 2*), the former in the form of plants, administrative structures, software packages, and their social concomitants, the latter as a result of individual role-holders’ conceptualization of their work in a specific role [a good demonstration of both the ‘material’ and ‘ideational’ aspects of social reality].
- Consequently, individual role holders need to negotiate within themselves, through their internal conversations, how to align personal (‘life’) and role (‘work’) intentions, goals, and responsibilities, and do so *dependent on their developmental profile* (which undergoes a further transformation in teams where internal conversations are largely “averaged”).

On the Pragmatics of Coordinating RsfA (Stratum 2 of the Social Cube)

- **At the present time, society's material transactions with nature are largely shaped by socially and culturally 'closed' systems rooted in positivistic theories of nature, society, and human agency & development.**
- Managerial and consultative theories and practices generate cultural *schemes for coordinating RsfA* in specific 'positioned-practices' ("industries") that remain largely **unaligned with the best available knowledge of the structure of human agency** (which is, moreover, treated as subordinate to 'technology' issues).
- **Most of the difficulties of 'applying' developmental insights in organizational contexts are caused by a lack of scientifically anchored mappings from psychological and sociological to organizational ways of thinking.**
- What shows up as a lack of vocabulary for translating developmental findings into management agendas is rooted in the formation of role systems as (artificially) closed systems and the psychological impact of such systems on human agency.
- As a result, the generative structures defining 'human resources' remain insufficiently acknowledged and integrated into organizational and institutional functioning.
- **Needed is a new science of people and technical resources management that is informed of social ontology and the developmental and dialectical thinking that it requires.**

Most Professional Practices Are Out of Touch with Each Other and Social Ontology

- Most professional practices, based on specialized, 'expert' knowledge rooted in logical or systems thinking, are not only not talking to each other; they are also estranged from the social sciences, not to speak of a social ontology.
- Like the empirical sciences, these practices establish closed systems for the sake of efficiency and control, just as commercial organizations do, and increasingly have come to be beholden to such organizations in the very way they operate.
- One might view this situation as a by-product of an interaction of social and cultural systems characterized by being stymied by barriers to reaching higher levels of adult development (beyond Kegan-stage 4(3)) and cognitive-developmental arrest at the level of logical thinking), -- which barriers keep the reproduction of the social system from ever even veering toward significant transformations.
- This has not been seen since hindrances to a thorough transformation of society are usually attributed to barriers grounded in social forms created by those long dead (social inertia), rather than viewing them (equally or even preponderantly) as an outcome of how adult development over the lifespan is stifled by the social system in which it takes place.
- In their present form, systems of elementary as well as 'higher' education, having become increasingly task- and job-bound, are a major culprit responsible for this situation.

A Note on the Use of Dialectic in Social Science

In 1937, Max Horkheimer, in an essay on 'Traditional and Critical Theory' (of Society), introduced *Critical Theory*, naming dialectic as a methodological tool for the social sciences

It is time to renew this bold move, making use of **Kohlberg School dialectics** (Basseches & Laske) as part of social ontology, to avoid all sorts of 'conflation' of Structure and Agency still rampant in social and managerial science.

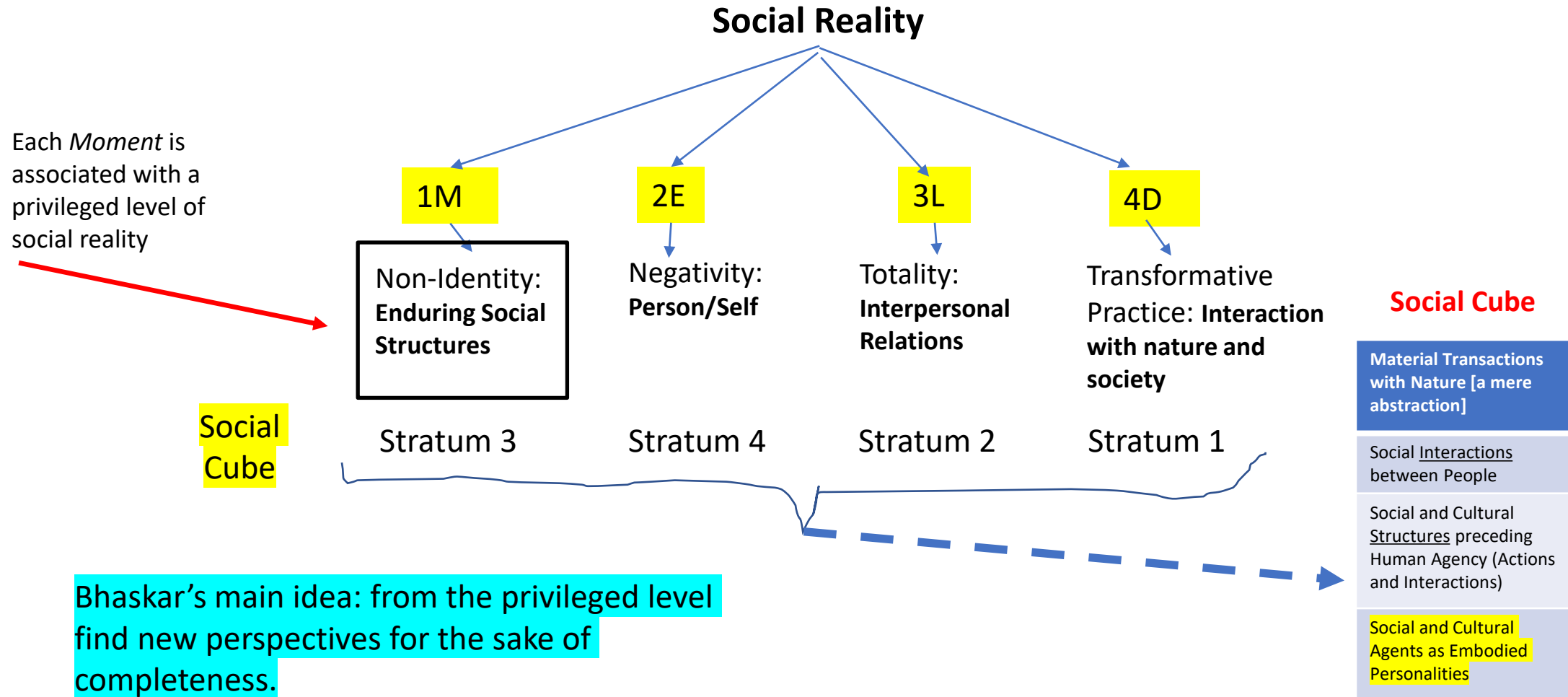
Downward conflation: S → A [Emile Durkheim]

Upward conflation: A → S [Max Weber]

Central Conflation: S ↔ A [Frankfurt School, including Habermas]

Critical Realism's 'Dual Analysis': S // A

Bhaskar's Dialectic is Content-Bound, Reflecting His Social Cube



Thoughts on ‘Thinking’ within Bhaskar’s Social Cube

- Logical and dialectical thinking are not free-floating capabilities but have a ‘material’ aspect represented by antecedent social forms that cause practitioners and their activities to be “overreached” by social being.
- The *material* aspect of thought lies in the ‘positioned-practices’ (‘industries’) of a shifting social matrix which determine what human agents can cause to happen from within society’s Social Cube.
- It behooves users and teachers of dialectic to ask: “what are the enduring social structures based on which people ‘think’”?, thereby engaging with social and cultural antecedents that shape the potential outcomes of thinking.
- Teaching dialectical thinking *without* positioning oneself and one’s students in a social-ontology framework is hazardous since it invites committing **the epistemic fallacy**, of reducing ‘what is’ to ‘what we *think* is’.
- Conclusion: it is not ‘*knowledge of*’ *TFs or schemata*, but their causally efficacious use *within specific social practices, at a concrete place and time*, that marks the competent dialectical thinker.

Bhaskar’s Social Cube

1 Material Transactions with Nature via organizations, etc.

2 Social Interactions between People

3 Social and Cultural Structures preceding Human Agency

4 Social and Cultural Agents as Embodied Personalities

Desiderata of a Third Wave Critical Realism

CDF Both Refines and Critiques Critical Realism and Suggests the Need for a 'Third-Wave' Critical Realism

- Bhaskar's conceptualization of the reproduction & transformation of society is **flawed** on account of his neglect of adult development over the human lifespan as a core ingredient of human agency and, consequently, societal change.
- Bhaskar's theorizing **misses** the important set of adult-developmental determinants of intentional activity (and its RsfA) characteristic of social agents on Stratum 4 of the Social Cube.
- Due to this omission, the relationships that define the intrinsic and reciprocal relationships between the four strata of the Social Cube are **oversimplified**, and so is his notion of how a society reproduces and/or transforms itself (TMSA).
- Bhaskar's MELD dialectic lacks the acknowledgement that the root of **epistemic** dialectic is found in Stratum 4 of the Social Cube.
- This lack hinders him (and M. Archer) from formulating a sophisticated theory of human agency and of cultural systems, and from understanding the relationship between social and cultural systems more deeply.

Desiderata of Third Wave Critical Realism

Insights from CDF have the potential to *enrich* Critical Realism in the direction of realizing the following desiderata:

- (a) a deeper notion of 'human agency'
- (b) a richer notion of 'cultural system' (works, not only ideas)
- (c) a deeper understanding of the interaction between social and cultural systems
- (d) a better understanding of the impact of people's internal conversations on cultural, not only social, systems.
- (e) a better theoretical grounding of managing positioned-practices within the social matrix of society

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