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Tapping the Humanistic Potential of Self-Determination Theory: Awakening to Paradox

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Self-determination theory (SDT) is a contemporary macrotheory of motivation, personality, and wellness that has accumulated a large empirical research base. Many of its basic principles are humanistic in character, but there is little literature on it from within the ranks of humanistic psychology. This article presents an overview of the theory designed specifically for a humanistic audience and considers SDT's potential as a contemporary variant of humanistic psychology. SDT's core concept of autonomy is compared with the humanistic notion of willing, which formally introduces paradox as a fundamental aspect of self-development. Paradox is then pursued as a theme that can be used to tap the humanistic potential of SDT. Subsequent analyses focus on various integrative strengths or virtues derived from Knowles's (1986) existential-phenomenological interpretation of Eriksonian (1963) developmental theory, certain optimal forms of experience, happiness, and well-being. We conclude with some exploratory remarks concerning motivation, personality, and the paradoxical bipolarity of human nature.

Keywords: self-determination theory, humanistic psychology, autonomy, well-being, motivation

In their introduction to an *American Psychologist* special edition on positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) singled out Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (SDT) as having a conspicuous connection to humanistic psychology. In their words, "Ryan and Deci's contribution shows that the promises of . . . humanistic psychology . . . can generate a vital program of empirical research" (p. 10). To be sure, there are many similarities between humanistic psychology and SDT, and an examination of Ryan and Deci's citations suggests that they are conceptual concordant. For example, one can find references to Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Henry Murray,

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Kurt Lewin, the relational psychoanalytic humanism of Heinz Kohut, and the philosophical phenomenologies of Alexander Pfänder and Paul Ricoeur (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Connell, 1989).

More recently, Patterson and Joseph (2007) convincingly detailed numerous conceptual parallels between SDT and the work of Carl Rogers. As they noted, Rogers's person-centered viewpoint and SDT share an organismic focus, stressing the human developmental striving for personal organization. Further, Rogers's organismic valuing process (OVP), locus of evaluation, necessary and sufficient conditions for growth, and conditional self-regard directly parallel SDT's notions of the sources of motivation, perceived locus of causality (PLOC), basic needs, and contingent self-esteem, respectively. Other authors have also singled out the merits of SDT amid a contemporary research landscape wherein humanistic principles are being systematically supported (e.g., Krieger, 2002; Murphy, Joseph, Demetriou, & Karimi-Mofrad, 2017; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Given SDT's notable success as a program of research within this landscape, it is thus regrettable that there has not been more literature to discuss the specifically humanistic potential of SDT. To illustrate, a search of *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *Journal of Humanistic Psychiatry*, *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *Phenomenology & Practice*, *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, and *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* in August 2017 resulted in only six published articles that appear to bear a concentration on SDT as such (i.e., Cooper, 2013; Murphy et al., 2017; Patterson & Joseph, 2007; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001; Watts, Cashwell, & Schweiger, 2004; Wichmann, 2011).

As is obvious, the creators of SDT have not brought any portion of their ongoing investigations to the humanistic community via the medium of its primary journals. Accordingly, the current article aims to make a general contribution to the explicitly humanistic literature on SDT that is inclusive of, but not limited to observations concerning its patently Rogerian character. We will begin with a general overview of SDT, focusing on aspects of the theory that are highly consonant with a humanistic perspective for our readership. We will attempt to be as generous as possible in this regard, but our coverage cannot be exhaustive due to space constraints, that is, in this section we will paint in broad strokes rather than detailing the specifics of each of SDT's minitheories. Thereafter, we will consider several aspects of SDT in a more deliberately evaluative manner. This portion of our analysis will be an attempt to consider some of the ways in which an explicitly humanistic perspective in psychology that is not restricted to Rogerian thinking might contribute to the growth and development of SDT. In the spirit of certain previous works (e.g., DeRobertis, 2010; Mruk, 2008), our intent is to build bridges to productive dialogue (or at least remove unnecessary barriers to such a dialogue). Given the nature (and ambitiousness) of such an endeavor, this work can only be construed as a beginning and a contribution to an area of dialogue that is still in its infancy.

Self-Determination Theory as a Contemporary Variant of Humanistic Psychology

The most fundamental thing to understand and appreciate about SDT is the breadth of its scope. Deci and Ryan (2008b) refer to SDT as a *macrotheory*. To date, six domain specific minitheories have been derived from this broad perspective, that is, Cognitive Evaluation Theory, Organismic Integration Theory, Causality Orientations Theory, Basic

Psychological Needs Theory, Goal Contents Theory, and Relationships Motivation Theory. As Deci and Ryan (2008b) explained:

As a macrotheory of human motivation, self-determination theory (SDT) addresses such basic issues as personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, energy and vitality, nonconscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behavior, and well-being. Further, the theory has been applied to issues within a wide range of life domains. (p. 182)

The breadth of SDT, encompassing these associated foci, suggests a contemporary variant of humanistic thought in psychology.

Historical perspective lends support to the suggestion of SDT being a contemporary variant of humanistic thought on several accounts. First, humanistic psychology rose to prominence by emerging as a “third force,” that is, third option to both the strictures of experimental/behavioral thought and classical psychoanalysis, both of which maintained highly reductionistic and/or deterministic as well as hedonistic points of view (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017a; Maslow, 1999). Following humanistic psychology’s heyday, SDT established itself as a new voice in opposition to myopically reward-based views of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2004).

Second, as an emerging viewpoint, humanistic psychology also found itself at odds with the functionalistic computationalism of the cognitive revolution (e.g., Knowles, 1986; Wertz, 1983). Similarly, SDT diverged from traditional cognitivism on the grounds that it has tended to gloss over the notion of human needs to adopt a narrow focus on functionally defined goals and the efficacy with which they are pursued (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To illustrate, from a cognitive perspective, goal-setting theory (e.g., Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 1990) focuses on how motivation and successful task performance are mediated by the extent to which goals are complex (neither too easy nor too difficult), SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound), and associated with appropriate feedback. In contrast, humanistic psychologists’ focus on life goals involves the extent to which individuals’ lives are fulfilling rather than leading to “the resignation of a heap of unordered experiences, many disappointments, or in the despair of failure”—with the former mediated by intentionality, resilience, and ongoing self-reflective appraisal regarding the degree to which individuals live in accordance with their values (Bühler, 1967, p. 50).

Third, congruent with the humanistic perspective, SDT challenges psychological modalities (e.g., behavioral, social learning/social-cognitive, social constructionist) that deny the possibility of an inherent tendency toward active worldly engagement and growth, noting that as long as such a tendency is denied, human beings can only hope to be little more than controllers of behavior at best (Ryan & Deci, 2004). This critique has extended to such well-known thinkers as Albert Bandura, who has denied human autonomy in his agentic viewpoint (Bandura, 1989, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2004, 2006). For Bandura (2008), people do *not* act as “autonomous” agents (p. 93).

Of course, proponents of both humanistic psychology and SDT concede that behavior can result from forces beyond the scope of one’s own volition. Both broad motivational vantage points (i.e., those that cast behavior as being more autonomous and those that see it as more controlled or heteronomous) have their supporting evidence (Ricoeur, 1966; Ryan & Deci, 2004, 2006). To account for the evidence presented by both sides of this conceptual divide, Ryan and Deci have proposed a continuum ranging from greater to lesser magnitudes of “internalization” (e.g., Rigby, Deci, Patrick, & Ryan, 1992; Ryan &

Connell, 1989). Accordingly, SDT assesses motivation in terms of both quality/kind and magnitude, in conjunction with a model that describes the PLOC for one's actions (Ryan & Connell, 1989). In a supportive environment, individuals are disposed to actively pursue aims and goals imbued with varying valences issuing from their inherent, yet emergent and individually colored organizational tendencies and associated growth needs. In such instances, motivation has what Allport (1955) called a relatively *proprie* character. In contrast, when environmental conditions are not supportive, behavior is subject to varying degrees of self-alienation.

Deci and Ryan (2000) acknowledged that this approach to motivation and personality was anticipated by Kurt Lewin, Henry Murray, Heinz Kohut, and Abraham Maslow (among others, e.g., see Bland & DeRobertis, 2017a, 2017b; DeRobertis, 2008). In the methodologically pluralistic spirit of humanistic psychology, Deci and Ryan (2000; Ryan & Deci, 2004, 2017) have included a place for qualitatively disposed data collection methods in their empirical work (e.g., diary procedures), and they also have noted as foundational the relevance of phenomenology. In the meantime, they have asserted that their more traditional employment of experimental methods has been carried out without accepting the mechanistic or efficient causal metatheories that have typically been associated with those methods (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Holistic Orientation: An Organismic Dialectical Viewpoint

In proposing a motivational continuum that is predicated upon the relationship between an organism's inherent growth tendencies and ecological field, SDT has advanced an *organismic dialectical* viewpoint in psychology (Ryan & Deci, 2004). A space is thereby cleared for the possibility of genuine developmental change, rather than change being precluded in advance on the basis of an abstract, all-determining "nature" or "nurture." Comparable to humanistic models employing a dynamic systems perspective (see Bland & DeRobertis, 2017b), general control parameters are held to provide "soft" or "loose" architectural assembly to guide the unfolding of organismic development (Thelen & Smith, 1994, p. 83). In Rogerian (1959) terminology, the organism is bestowed with a general actualizing tendency, but the organismic congruence that founds *self*-actualization is *not* guaranteed in advance of facilitative social conditions.

According to SDT, motives and goals imbued with compelling and sustainable intrinsic organismic value stand in contrast to those aspirations focused on "shallow values" (e.g., materialism, wealth, greed, image, fame, selfishness, objectified sexuality, exploitation of others, and ecological destructiveness), which are considered more extrinsic to the organism's development in comparison (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). However, it is important to recognize the nuances of speaking of behavior in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic orientations, insofar as intrinsic goal framing is only *relative* to extrinsic goal framing and no-goal framing (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Although "external rewards" are generally considered to be extrinsic to growth, from the point of view of SDT, not all rewards are equal and/or undermine intrinsic motivation. To illustrate, positive feedback, though technically external in origination, can facilitate a positive internalization process that is consonant with intrinsic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Praise, when it supports an internal PLOC and perceived competence (in a situation in which individuals feel that they have genuine autonomy), allows for the internalization of social values that beget positive outcomes for general well-being and activities like engagement in learning typically associated with intrinsic motivation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Hence, SDT has come to transcend the dichotomous notion of *intrinsic versus extrinsic* motivation. Harter (1981) introduced this polar conceptualization, which was subsequently imported into SDT in its early days (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Then called cognitive evaluation theory, the bifurcation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators eventually became problematic. As (Gagné & Deci, 2005) put it, “The simple dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation made the theory difficult to apply to work settings. Differentiating extrinsic motivation into types that differ in their degree of autonomy led to self-determination theory” (p. 331). Moreover, there is no one-to-one correlation or identification of intrinsic with “internal” and extrinsic with “external.” *Intrinsic* and *extrinsic* are ways of naming different qualities of engagement and motivation, whereas the terminology of *internal* and *external* refers to the organism’s PLOC, which is but a parallel issue. Extrinsic motivation can be external, introjected, identified, or integrated in nature, and the PLOC for each of these is held to be external, somewhat external, somewhat internal, and internal respectively (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Ultimately, the concepts of *internal* and *external* are simply spatial metaphors used to express characteristics of world-relational consciousness (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Internal and external orientations with respect to PLOC recapitulate the Rogerian “gradient of autonomy” of the phenomenal field and should not be looked upon as the endorsement of a dualist metaphysic (Rogers, 1951, p. 498; Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 759).

Wellness Orientation: Volition in Context

On the whole, the gradient of autonomy has become the dominant conceptual housing of SDT insofar as empirical evidence has shown that “it is more meaningful to look at autonomous versus controlled motivation than . . . intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation” (Chemolli & Gagné, 2014, p. 578). Accordingly, the intrinsic-extrinsic continuum of motivation and its parallel continuum of internalization (with regard to one’s PLOC) have been enveloped within a grander continuum ranging from relatively autonomous to relatively controlled motivation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). In Deci and Ryan’s (2008b) words, “The most central distinction in SDT is between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation” (p. 182). Autonomous motivation is made possible when one is capable of endorsing one’s actions at the highest level of reflection (Dworkin, 1988; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Autonomous motivation is thus person-centered in nature, standing in contrast with amotivation and an externalized, impersonal causality orientation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Transitioning to the language of autonomy, one must again remember to avoid approaching SDT in an all-or-nothing manner. Ryan and Deci have been careful to note the positive transformational potential of *autonomous extrinsic motivation* in human functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Further, the architects of SDT have noted the existence of cumulative motivational amalgams, one more autonomous and the other more controlled (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Williams, Grow, Freedman, Ryan, & Deci, 1996).

In line with the organismic dialectical viewpoint in SDT, autonomy is not conceptually set against the world-relating tendencies of the human being in an inherently dichotomous or antagonistic manner. Its conceptual base is rooted in the work of Angyal (1965), who characterized the organismic striving for harmonious, integrated functioning as involving both autonomy and homonomy (i.e., a tending toward integration of oneself with others). Accordingly, SDT is guided by a notion of healthy development that envisions the *complementary* functioning of self-relatedness and other-relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2004). Comparable to Maslow (1999), in SDT, autonomy is made possible by autonomy supportive social environments that promote behavior experienced as both chosen and

inherently rewarding rather than controlled by pressures and/or superficial reinforcements (Rigby et al., 1992; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Further, comparable to humanistic thought at large (see Koydemir, Şimşek, & Demir, 2014), autonomy is *not* to be thought of as the heir of individualism, as expressed by concepts such as independence or locus of control (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

By advancing a notion of healthy (autonomous) human functioning that explicitly rejects theoretical individualism, SDT is imbued with enhanced cross-cultural potential. Its focus on *autonomous motivation* is actually shorthand for a threefold interrelationship between autonomy, competence, and relatedness (together considered to be the most fundamental needs motivating human behavior), which research has suggested can be seen in individualist and collectivist societies alike (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Ryan and Deci (2000b). Regrettably, the need for relatedness (the exemplar of homonomy) has not received the attention and support that autonomy and competence have been granted with respect to SDT's basic needs over the course of its development. That said, this relative disparity has been recognized, and the importance of relatedness for human well-being has been noted (e.g., Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005), specifically by way of relationships motivation theory and in relation to eudaimonia.

In effect, SDT has developed a wellness orientation that has maintained the critical role of health-promoting environmental contexts, with autonomy playing the most pronounced role in this conceptualization, followed by competence and relatedness respectively. Thus, a health-promoting environmental context consists of factors such as optimal challenges, effectance-promoting feedback, and freedom from demeaning evaluations (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). This assertion is backed by data suggesting that the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness leads to the best outcomes in terms of the performance of specific skills and reports of general well-being. Conversely, the deprivation of these needs has been linked to the poorest performance and mental health outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2004; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995).

Growth Orientation: Personal Integration and the Realization of One's Daimon

SDT's health and wellness orientation is simultaneously a growth orientation. Its investigations have focused on the satisfaction versus frustration of innate psychological needs and inherent *growth* tendencies (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Experiences of autonomy (again, understood as the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs) are fundamental for internalization, which optimally allows values and regulatory processes to become part of a person's *ongoing integrative functioning* (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Here, the similarities to Rogerian thinking are quite pronounced. According to Rogers, the developing organism is born with a motivational predisposition: the "actualizing tendency" (1959, p. 196). Always dependent upon a nurturing social environment, the actualizing tendency is the innate propensity of the organism to effectively (i.e., competently) develop and consolidate its biological and psychological capacities for becoming an autonomous, prosocial contributor to an interpersonal field of interaction (DeRobertis, 2008; Rogers, 1951).

For Rogers, the emergence and development of an organized *self*-actualizing tendency is the quintessential expression of this autonomy. A self-actualizing person is self-motivated to seek fulfillment in life. Concretely, this means that one experiences oneself as a fully functioning person, a person who has confidence in one's own skills, perceptions, and evaluations while being able to prize others for being the unique individuals that

they are at the same time (Rogers, 1959, 1961, 1980). Likewise, in SDT, autonomy belongs to the broader domains of selfhood and self-development. When satisfied, autonomy, competence, and relatedness yield enhanced *self*-motivation and support the *self*-authorship of one's own life (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). SDT seeks to examine and articulate individuals' intrinsic propensities to engage in active, curiosity-based world exploration for the purpose of integrating new experiences into a relatively unified self-structure with all its associated cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes and outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000; Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2004).

Humanistic psychologists' conceptualizations of human growth—whether referred to as self-actualization, self-realization, or self-fulfillment—invariably place a premium on the development of the person's prosocial proclivities (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017a, 2017b; DeRobertis, 2012b). Similarly, SDT suggests that the human motives and goals imbued with compelling and sustainable intrinsic organismic value are those that support integrity, personal growth, and generativity with an inherent connection to *relationships and community* (Ryan et al., 2008; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). In other words, SDT shares humanistic psychology's impetus to revive the Aristotelian notion that human beings are social and political animals by their nature. To put the matter more strongly, SDT is explicitly indebted to Aristotle by way of a *eudaimonic* view of human health that has been articulated using the Rogerian language of *the fully functioning person* (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Ryan & Deci, 2004). Although Rogers used the term self-actualization, the language of SDT has come closer to that of self-fulfillment and self-realization:

Well-being is not so much an outcome or end state as it is a process of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature—that is, of fulfilling one's virtuous potentials and living as one was inherently intended to live. (Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 2)

For SDT, eudaimonia cannot be reduced to the status of an appraisal of satisfaction, such as a positive feeling, mental state, or cognition in a static sense. The spontaneous interest and inherent satisfaction that begins in infancy as little more than pleasure, enjoyment, and fun must blossom into a more mature value-laden growth orientation reflective of the phrase, “This activity gives me my strongest feeling that this is who I really am” (Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 4). Eudaimonia denotes a vitalizing *way* of living. Eudaimonia is a notion employed to indicate a *process* view of well-being highlighting moderation and the pursuit of excellence in the realization of a complete human life (i.e., the fulfillment of our “most authentic or highest natures,” Ryan et al., 2008, p. 143).

Comparable with humanistic thought (Maslow, 1999; May, 1969), leading a eudaimonic life thus means endorsing the kinds of actions that are ends in themselves. That is, it is not merely about what one does, but rather *why*, on a deeper level, one engages in a particular activity that is most salient in conceptualizing optimal functioning. Motivations of a eudaimonic nature are genuinely prosocial, contemplative, rational, grounded in volition, and reflect the true self. Thus far, SDT research (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2008a) has indicated that a eudaimonic lifestyle is positively related to numerous outcomes that ought to ring familiar to the humanistic ear: intimacy, mindfulness (i.e., acting with awareness), positive affect, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, vitality, physical health, high levels of inner peace, frequent experiences of moral elevation, a deep appreciation of life, feeling connected with oneself and a greater whole that transcends oneself, having a sense of where one fits in to a bigger picture, physical health, and a sense of meaning in one's life.

Self-Determination Theory and Humanistic Psychology: Deepening the Dialogue

On the Developmental Realization of the Human *Autos*

In many ways, SDT's notion of autonomy is inherently harmonious with the phenomenology of willing as conceived within humanistic psychology. By accessing the philosophical phenomenologies of Pfänder (1967) and Ricoeur (1966), the creators of SDT have established a rudimentary basis for this harmony (e.g., see Ryan & Deci, 2006). For instance, SDT bears a noteworthy resemblance to what one finds in Knowles's (1986) existential-phenomenological interpretation of Eriksonian developmental theory through the lens of the Heideggerian Care Structure.

According to SDT, autonomy is founded upon a broad-based sensory openness operating from within the orthogenetically structured (i.e., differential-integrative) developmental process of human growth (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). The emergence of autonomy provides the fundamental basis for the development of an integrated sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Advances in competence are incapable of sustaining human growth without a motivational affiliation with the experience of personal autonomy. Relationality without the human *autos* is empty, devoid of the fullness of relationship and the ownership that one associates with a genuine sense of social responsibility (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Along similar lines, Knowles (1986) maintained that self-development has its developmental origins in world-openness and the emergence of willing. Human beings experience themselves as *most* themselves when functioning in harmonized-vitalized bodies, when capable of rationality and thinking clearly, and when conspicuously open to others, but no one of these characteristics guarantees a fully functioning person. Their mutual appearance in wholeheartedly engaged worldly interface bespeaks a higher integrative propensity for which the term *self* is designated.

Knowles's work brings several lines of humanistic-experiential inquiry on the will (Assagioli & Miller, 1972; May, 1969; Shapiro, 1965; van Kaam, 1966) to bear in a *psychological* phenomenology of its essential structure. In doing so, it affords SDT an opportunity for direct interface with humanistic psychology and the development of an enriched, refined narrative with which to derive insight with regard to its work in the area of autonomy. From a phenomenological point of view, *genuine* autonomy is autonomy conceived as expressive of the will, which exceeds what can be captured by Deci and Ryan's (2000) use of the cognitivist term "self-regulation" (p. 235; Ryan & Deci, 2006). Autonomy as expressive of the will lies between two poles of lived experience. At one pole, one finds phenomena like willfulness, will-power, and control. At the other pole, one finds their counterpoints: will-lessness, wishing, and release (Knowles, 1986). This is the experiential basis upon which autonomy emerges as an intentional orientation capable of diverse acts of creative-productive flourish and receptive dwelling that play out across the span of the two aforementioned poles. In other words, phenomenological psychological description shows willing to have a highly dynamic-dialectic, *paradoxical* structure that smoothly incorporates what would otherwise appear to be opposing modes of engagement. Genuine autonomy implicates a *twofold freedom*. As Knowles (1986) put it, "Discipline frees one for whereas letting go frees one from and . . . both are necessary for the genuine experience of will" (p. 61).

This description is conceptually incompatible SDT inasmuch as Ryan and Deci (2000c) have maintained, "We do not believe there is free will" (Ryan & Deci, 2000c, p. 330). According to Deci and Ryan (2000), autonomy "concerns the experience of

integration and freedom” (p. 231), yet to accept the freedom of the will is to endorse the possibility of behavior that is “totally independent of external influences” (Ryan & Deci, 2000c, p. 330). In contrast, we maintain that SDT’s lingering conceptual antinomy of free will versus determinism and causality is transcended by way of a hermeneutic, always-situated freedom (May, 1962; Valle & Halling, 1989).

To be sure, Knowles’s interpretive dialogue with Erik Erikson represents a divergence from SDT that holds the promise of broad productive potential. SDT has established itself as a theory that revolves around a notion of autonomy that is not restricted to a specific stage of development. Autonomy is held to emerge as a vital, growth-promoting strength at the very beginning of life and subsequently evolves and expands out across the life span. This assertion (which we find to be sound in and of itself) served as the basis upon which SDT has been distanced from Erikson’s (1963) work, which envisioned the rise of autonomy to prominence at the second stage of development (Ryan, 1993). But what if, following Knowles (1986), Erikson is read in a more nuanced manner, relinquishing the popular but erroneous assumption of absolute stage exclusivity? For Erikson (1963), the issues of each stage are never completely resolved, nor do they ever lose developmental significance (Knowles, 1986). Rather, the developmental tasks associated with a particular moment in the life span serve as a framework for contextualizing what is at stake in their respective normative crises. And what if one were to adopt the existential-humanistic developmental view that formalized stages are socioculturally emergent heuristic devices (Bühler, 1968; DeRobertis, 2012b) and, further, that what are normally considered time-specific developmental issues are “worked on in some manner during all the major periods of development” (DeRobertis, 2008, p. 199)? Suddenly, Erikson’s notion of autonomy takes on a renewed relevance and deserves a second look.

What Knowles (1986) discovered is that one would find in Erikson the proto-phenomenological identification of numerous virtues supportive of self-development, each thus playing an important role in the development of autonomy throughout the life span. These virtues are hope, will, imagination, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom (Knowles, 1986)—all of which are contingent upon the successful negotiation of creatively situating autonomy within the constraints of contextual influence and existential givens. SDT has shed light on several of these virtues within the purview of its basic needs: willing (as autonomous functioning), competence, and love (by way of relatedness). In this section we will discuss the additional virtues of hope, fidelity, and imagination. In the next section, we will touch upon competence while discussing the issue of awareness in autonomous functioning. Because Knowles (1986) considered care and wisdom to be the exemplars of health in the mature portion of the life span, we will follow-up with a section on human well-being that will implicate these two virtues.

Moving forward, we suggest that SDT’s above noted developmental conceptualization maintaining an inherent relationship between sensory openness and autonomy ought to be exploited as a new avenue of theoretical engagement with the foundational psychology of *hope* in its many forms throughout the life span (Carotta et al., 2017; Howell & Larsen, 2015; Knowles, 1986; Verbraak, 2000). As Knowles (1986) noted, hope is synonymous with perceptual openness and, more importantly, is *not* to be confused with what Ryan and Deci (2000c) have called “safety-security” (p. 324). Whereas the latter denotes the deficiency-remediating relief of a person in response to the containment or removal of a danger, hope has a positive experiential and existential meaning for personal integration, that is, the ability to remain open to possibilities *in spite of* one’s vulnerability in the face of danger. This is hope’s paradoxical nature: openness *and* vulnerability coexist simultaneously. Like the will, hope has a “both-and” structure, which Knowles (1986) has

shown to be common to all of the integrative virtues identified by Erikson. This is what differentiates these strengths from the biological and ego-driven adaptational tendencies of the so-called “inauthentic self,” both of which operate according to an “either/or” structure (e.g., one is either safe or in danger, one is either in-control or passive, etc.).

The emergence of paradox within one’s repertoire of world-relations thus distinguishes those virtues most closely associated with self-development from other developmental supports. This can be further illustrated via a consideration of the integrative strength of fidelity, which Erikson discussed in relation to the transition into adulthood. Fidelity has an affiliation with SDT’s notion of relationality by way of the generic qualities of engagement and commitment. However, these concepts alone stop short of a full phenomenological explication of fidelity. As Knowles (1986) reminds us, the *making* of a commitment or promise is not enough for human maturity. Promises must be *kept*, bringing up the critical issue of follow-through. More importantly, fidelity bears a dynamic meaning housed within a paradoxical structure: the risking of an uncertain self in the moment of a spontaneous dedication or devotion through which one ultimately has to find oneself. The paradox is, in other words, “having to know oneself in order to be committed and of knowing oneself only through commitment” (Knowles, 1986, p. 152). The paradoxical element of developmental risk and growth-oriented struggle can contribute existential depth and breadth to SDT’s considerations of the complexities and nuances involved in introjection and identification, whether counterproductive or growth enhancing.

In many ways, SDT appears quite poised to become more explicitly engaging of paradox, not the least of which being its ideas concerning the complementary functioning of autonomy and homonomy in healthy self-development (which finds recent support from phenomenological psychological research on motivation in learning, DeRobertis, 2017). The latest examples of this readiness can be found in SDT’s considerations of *imagination* and *benevolence* (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Concerning the former, Ryan and Deci (2017) have formally and explicitly introduced the imagination as a uniquely human quality into SDT’s ongoing investigations of video game play (e.g., Przybylski, Weinstein, Murayama, Lynch, & Ryan, 2012; Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). In doing so, they have alluded to the paradoxical within the imagination by noting that imagining temporarily frees one from the confines of reality (*vis-à-vis* the virtual) while having potential ramifications for coping with one’s real life circumstances.

We contend that SDT would benefit from the development of its narrative on the productive potentials of the imagination further, as the imagination appears to be the unarticulated connective tissue that binds together its most fundamental principles, that is, needs, autonomy, motivation, relatedness, competence, and integration. Human becoming is anchored in an immediately lived, highly affective imagination, “a sort of crossroads of formless affectivity and voluntary attitudes” that probes the world for an as-yet absent reality in search of real need satisfaction, thereby mediating between *need* and *autonomy* (DeRobertis, 2017; Ricoeur, 1978). From the outset, then, the imagination shows itself to be intimately bound up with the coconstitution of *motivation* (Knowles, 1986; van Kaam, 1972). The imagination’s mediating function is made more fecund, complexified ad infinitum in fact, when joined with the powers of language and the addition of symbolically mediated imagining. The imagination, as the “inventiveness” of the will, catalyzes diverse acts of world coconstitution and cocreativity, facilitating the realization of autonomy as wholehearted involvement or participation (DeRobertis, 2017; Ricoeur, 1978, p. 19). As vital to the emergence of role taking and human empathy, the imagination is that which preserves the otherness of the other in SDT’s autonomous *relatedness* (Ricoeur,

1978, 1992). The imagination also mediates between autonomy and *competence* by allowing one to form an image of what might be competently done in the proximal or distant future (Knowles, 1986). Finally, human growth, for Ryan and Deci (2000b), is an ongoing integrative process. In phenomenological terms, human growth is the evolving temporal unfolding of one's integrative world-openness. The imagination, as the *unity-building-power* of human existence, is thus central to human development at every turn (Murray, 1986, 2001).

With respect to the study of benevolence (e.g., Martela & Ryan, 2016), SDT is taking a turn toward what humanistic psychologists would consider the more patently self-transcendent aspects of motivation (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017a, 2017b; DeRobertis, 2008, 2012b, 2017; Frankl, 1978), which are by their very nature inherently paradoxical (i.e., the self transcending itself). To be sure, without an appreciation of this aspect of human existence, it is difficult to see how SDT could adequately conceptualize the evolution and maturation of love (e.g., D-love vs. B-Love) or care. Thus, even if benevolence fails to emerge as a new, distinct basic need, its very consideration demonstrates a theoretical trajectory that promises to bring SDT still closer to the heart of humanistic psychology.

On Awareness and Autonomous Functioning

Our final comments with regard to the issue of autonomy concern SDT's view of awareness in autonomous motivation in particular. Deci and Ryan (2008b) have noted, "SDT has always maintained that the development of integrated, autonomous functioning depends on awareness" (p. 184). As phenomenologically informed researchers, humanistic psychologists are attuned to many subtle levels of dynamic awareness, ranging from the highly embodied and embedded to the highly salient and highly abstract. Accordingly, we have found ourselves compelled to inquire as to how SDT has envisioned the role of awareness in autonomous motivation.

Highlighting the process of vitalizing self-regulation, Ryan and Deci (2008) provided a description of autonomy that implicates awareness in a very general, theoretically pliable manner: "Autonomy is defined as the self-endorsement of one's actions, the extent to which one assents to or feels a sense of choice concerning one's behaviors" (p. 707). This is a conceptualization that is applicable from the earliest days of human development and the emergence of a core sense of self. Ryan and Deci (2017) have further observed that conscious reflection is not an absolute necessity for all gradients of autonomous action. A person might develop an "automatized" behavior as a kind of habit of efficiency to compensate for the natural limitations of cognitive processing (Ryan & Deci, 2006, p. 1573). Here, the core issue of autonomy concerns the *compatibility* of a motive or behavior with the self or, in Rogerian terms, their *congruence*. Yet, what is repeatedly reinforced throughout the SDT literature is a notion that follows the philosophy of Dworkin (1988), wherein the role of awareness in autonomy implicates an endorsement of action at "the highest level of reflection" (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 6; Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 334). Stated somewhat differently, "True autonomy entails endorsement of one's actions at the highest order of reflection" (Ryan & Deci, 2006, p. 1562). Within SDT, reflectivity is regularly handled as the counterpoint to (and antidote for) nonreflective involvement, which is less conducive to autonomy. This conceptual bifurcation is, to our mind, an opportunity for SDT to once again embrace paradox, this time with respect to the roles of awareness and competence in autonomous functioning. This involves

entertaining the proposal that there are alternatives to this bifurcation appearing in certain “optimal” forms of experience.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that the regularly utilized, more reflective approach to awareness in autonomous functioning makes sense given SDT’s evolving focus on eudaimonia as describing a *general way of being*. “Eudaimonia . . . necessitates the exercise of reflective capacities, in which one considers the meaning and value of one’s way of living” (Ryan et al., 2008, p. 158). With respect to eudaimonia, mindfulness, and authenticity alike, the importance of reflection is granted at the level of a total lifestyle. However, when one transitions to an analysis of moment-to-moment functioning, the issues of reflection and endorsement can become more complicated. As Knowles (1986) observed, “To be conscious of willing would mean to be self-conscious and not willing at all” (pp. 66–67). Flow theory can be used to illustrate this issue from within the SDT literature (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Deci and Ryan (2000) have noted several points of conceptual “correspondence” with flow theory, such as a focus on intrinsic motivation and a reliance on phenomenological reflection for establishing the importance of personal experience and functional significance as supports for motivation (p. 260). At the same time, Deci and Ryan (2000) have been critical of flow theory on several grounds. In their words: “Perhaps the most important [divergence] is that flow theory does not have a formal concept of autonomy, instead basing intrinsic motivation only in optimal challenge (which, as a concept, is relevant primarily to competence rather than autonomy)” (p. 261). Relevant as this critique is, it quietly passes over a central aspect of flow that is problematic for endorsing actions at the highest levels of reflection. Flow is associated with the autotelic personality, it implicates a heightened sense of personal control or agency over a situation, and it simultaneously evidences a *paradoxical loss of reflective self-consciousness* (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001).

A comparable paradoxical relation has been found in a more recent phenomenological psychological investigation of the emergence of paradigmatic creative experience in childhood (DeRobertis, 2017). Self-expression and self-discovery as qualities of personal renewal were found to be inherent to the phenomenon, differentiating it from mere productivity and newness for the sake of novelty alone. However, in full sway, the experience of paradigmatic creativity in childhood is lived amid a dissolution of ego boundaries complimented by a *minimization of self-conscious awareness*. The child finds himself or herself swept up in a productive experiential and actional flow wherein perceptions emerge as particularly vivid and powerful. The child becomes so task focused that he or she loses a sense of time, his or her surroundings, and/or his or her own body.

To be sure, humanistic psychologists have noted the sometimes-complicated, paradoxical relationship between autonomy and reflective awareness in optimal experience from several lines of inquiry. In the area of learning, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) rendered a phenomenological psychological description of skill acquisition in the process of training that showed it to progress through five phases. In the first three stages of this form of learning, the learner is quite reflective and engaged in information processing as traditionally conceived within cognitive psychology. However, at the two highest levels of learning, the learner begins to exhibit a kind of rapid, fluid, involved manner of making choices that is nonetheless intelligent. The learner’s repertoire of experienced situations will eventually become so vast that each specific situation immediately dictates an intuitively appropriate action. The qualitative shift that is salient at stage four involves the appearance of skillful behavior that is nondeliberative. When the reflective monitoring of ongoing performance regularly operates at a minimum level amid fluid performance, one

has reached the fifth and final stage. Here, the learner experiences a “flow,” which indicates peak performance (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 40).

According to the Dreyfus model, the experiences of selection and choice at highest, most competent levels of performance transcend a strict dependence upon reflective awareness. Reflective awareness is not wholly eliminated as a possibility, but it is no longer center stage of task involvement. Rather, learning is intuitive, involving acquired wisdom and the ability to make prudent judgments in response to contextual cues. It involves felt, nonthematic awareness and the ability to discriminate between what is vital and what is inessential, even in ambiguous situations. Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ description is thus comparable to Heidegger’s (1962) notion of the ready-to-hand, Frankl’s (1978) concept of self-transcending performance, Koffka’s (1931) Gestalt-developmental descriptions of learning, Colaizzi’s (1971) phenomenological psychological description of skill acquisition, and Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) descriptions of the intentional arc as a dynamical framework for interpreting skilled action.

May’s (1979) phenomenological analysis of ecstatic experience is also worth noting. Ecstasy is an extraordinary sort of experience of abandon, its experiential opposites being the states of panic and being spellbound. With the latter phenomena, “the person acts blindly, irrationally, without free choice” (May, 1979, p. 197). In contrast, ecstasy implicates autonomy as *self-chosen abandon*. Ecstasy displays a *paradoxical* heightening of awareness. In ecstasy, one experiences increased vision. An increased sharpness of reason and judgment “wells up from subconscious levels,” such that ecstasy involves “more than conscious, intellectual awareness. . . . But ecstasy is not irrational, it is trans-rational” (May, 1979, p. 197). It involves thinking with the whole of one’s being, including one’s bodily attunement. Thus, “Self-awareness is the conscious, intellectual aspect of self-relatedness. But it is not the whole of it” (May, 1979, p. 196). May (1979) goes on:

Self-relatedness includes subconscious levels as well as conscious awareness. When you commit yourself to love, for example, or to some other form of passion or to a fight or to an ideal, you ought to be, if you are to be successful in your love or fight, related to yourself on many different levels at once. True, conscious awareness is present in your commitment; but also you experience subconscious and even unconscious powers in yourself. This self-relatedness is present in self-chosen abandon; it means acting as a whole; it is the experience of “I throw myself into this.” (pp. 196–197)

May’s work in the area of ecstasy finds interesting parallels in Maslow’s (1999) proto-phenomenological descriptions of B-cognition in peak experiences, in which a premium is placed on B-values, including *autonomy*. B-Cognition is strongly idiographic, *yet the attainment of autonomy in peak experiences is paradoxically experienced in its transcendence of itself*. In contrast to SDT’s emphasis on intrinsic needs motivation, B-cognition is *not* motivated by “*needing*” (Maslow, 1999, p. 90). During peak experiences, the subject experiences a degree of productive, nonpathological disorientation in time and space. At the same time, polarities and conflicts are creatively integrated, resulting in a greater sense of experiential oneness. SDT extols the virtues of action for its own accord rather than extrinsic benefit (i.e., performance contingent rewards; Ryan et al., 2008). A peak experience is the quintessential self-validating, self-justifying moment, *but it is simultaneously* “self-forgetful” (Maslow, 1999, p. 90).

From these considerations, it appears that when it comes to the most advanced forms of human world-engagement, autonomy’s relationship to endorsement “at the highest order of reflection” is not at all a straightforward issue. Accordingly, we recommend

revisiting Ryan and Deci's (2008) more pliable approach associated with vitalizing self-regulation and placing it in an explicit dynamic-dialectical relation with their more reflective approach to secure a place for paradoxical awareness within SDT. This, we hold, will make SDT more consonant with humanistic thought and create an opportunity for SDT to more effectively accommodate optimal forms of experience in its research efforts. This will ensure the conceptual integration of autonomy into the full fabric of human being-in-the-world, including its "farther reaches," which bring the paradoxical nature of autonomy into relief. With the mutual nurturance of learning and creativity, autonomy matures into a kind of situated-freedom wherein the imagination, having been captured by the allure of meaning fulfillment within a value-laden field of worldly interchange, aligns to the productive *surrender* of creative fidelity (DeRobertis, 2017).

On Well-Being

Paradox appears all the more important to our discussion given SDT's focus on human well-being, which is framed in the language of eudaimonia. Before we focus on the issue of paradox, however, a point of divergence between SDT and humanistic psychology should be addressed. Within humanistic psychology, Aristotle is interpreted as having identified eudaimonia as the way of genuine human happiness standing in contrast to the hedonistic viewpoint. "Happiness" is only considered a misleading rendering of eudaimonia if it is identified with pleasure (see Irwin, 1985, p. 407). In contrast, SDT proceeds on the basis of this very identification:

Research on well-being can be thought of as falling into two traditions. In one—the hedonistic tradition—the focus is on happiness, generally defined as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. In the other—the eudaimonic tradition—the focus is on living life in a full and deeply satisfying way. (Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 1)

Thus, some conceptual clarification is required. SDT and humanistic psychology are in agreement that hedonic conceptions of health are inadequate for human well-being. They are in further agreement that eudaimonia is *not* happiness in the way that it has come to be understood in the contemporary Western American sense, which is hedonistic and generally ego-driven. However, from a humanistic perspective, it is an error to equate happiness with hedonics and establish a correlative bifurcation between happiness and eudaimonia. As revealed by phenomenological analysis, eudaimonia is structurally commensurate with a particular typological variant of happiness (Strasser, 1977).

Strasser (1977) found that happiness comes in many forms, such as contentment, good fortune, harmony, rapture, release, and transcending anticipation or beatitude (DeRobertis, 2016). Irrespective of the particular form of its manifestation, happiness shows itself to be paradoxical in nature. All happiness is rooted in an experience of *incomplete completion*. The experience of happiness emerges from a "crystallized piece of eternity," fully realized, yet paradoxically unable to effect completion in toto (Strasser, 1977, p. 346). Temporally situated life events must transpire to bring about happiness, but while the events that give rise to happiness transition into new occurrences, happiness itself is not a mere result, such as one finds in pleasure and enjoyment. Happiness forever points in the direction of an "always more to come."

Human happiness is thus a certain (paradoxical) concretized infinity by its very nature. Accordingly, the most advanced forms of happiness show themselves to be the most paradoxical. This applies to eudaimonia as a kind of happiness as harmony. Strasser (1977) observed that, since ancient Greece, the achievement of harmonious happiness has been conceptualized as "the unification of that which is manifoldly-mixed and in the unity

of those who are differently disposed” (p. 356). Those who have found harmony in life have been able to craft the diverse aspects and processes inherent to their global bio-psycho-social being into “a well-ordered multiple-unity” (p. 356). Happiness emerges as a result of personal prudence and balance, an appreciation of the appropriateness of proportions in any given circumstance, giving rise to “a graceful interplay” of all aspects of one’s daily living (Strasser, 1977, p. 357). The Ancient Greek notion of *sophrosyne* is all-important here, which is a virtue that denotes moderation and self-control guided by knowledge and an appreciation of balance.

These considerations relate to the burgeoning literature on the heroic imagination in humanistic psychology (e.g., Kohen, Langdon, & Riches, 2017), which is now merging with eudaimonic thought in a way that also emphasizes paradox (Franco, Efthimiou, & Zimbardo, 2016). Heroism is seen as the quintessential example of the civic virtue associated with eudaimonia in its acceptance of self-sacrifice (i.e., the self overcoming or overriding its own self-concern). It is equally illustrative of the self-transcendent orientation that is essential to the structure of caring as described by Knowles (1986). This vision of well-being “offers an interpretation of the eudaimonic, alongside the heroic, as paradox—it is process and outcome, suffering and joy, downfall and transcendence, weakness and strength, simultaneously” (Franco et al., 2016, p. 338). Stated more descriptively:

Paradoxically, although the hero may be acutely aware that the situation calling for heroic action may push them over the edge, into the void (death, destruction, loss, etc.), for heroes, achieving one’s highest state may only be possible when the stakes are so high, thus in part explaining the appetitive desire to enter into the heart of crisis situations. Thus, for heroic actors, fighting against the void and a complementary knowing, appreciation of, and even communion with the void are necessary antecedents for *entelechy* to be achieved. (Franco et al., 2016, p. 344)

Heroic eudaimonia thus illustrates the highest powers of the imagination in its capacity to mediate opposition: “in moving to accept death, we affirm life, risking only what we must” (Franco et al., 2016, p. 343). In confronting the experiential reality of heroism, Franco et al. (2016) have brought “timeless phronetic wisdom in praxis” or prudence of judgment to bear in the psychology of eudaimonia as necessary for productively encountering paradox (pp. 337–338). SDT stands to derive productive benefits from an encounter with this emerging area of inquiry, which we contend will create an avenue for SDT to adopt an explicit focus on *sophrosyne* in its eudaimonic perspective on well-being and begin to develop a more appreciative view of the role of nonbeing in the unfolding of human existence as well.

Concluding Remarks: Motivation, Personality, and Paradox

Before closing, a few words ought to be said concerning motivation and personality. After all, SDT “is a macro-theory of human motivation, personality development, and well-being” (Ryan, 2009, p. 1). Needless to say, humanistic authors have been concerned with these topics since the early days of its emergence (e.g., Allport, 1937; Lee, 1961; Lewin, 1935; Maslow, 1943; Murray, 1938). To the uninitiated, SDT’s view of motivation can appear highly original, if not unique in character (e.g., Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016). However, humanistic psychologists will recognize in SDT’s view of motivation many familiar Rogerian and Maslowian themes. From Rogers comes the central notion of a *gradient of autonomy* that develops “in the direction of socialization,

broadly defined” (Rogers, 1951, p. 488). Competence is a less obvious, but no less important theme in Rogers’s perspective, as is evident from his emphasis on the importance of effective learning in human growth (e.g., Rogers, 1969). The themes of relatedness and competence are equally critical to Maslow’s view of motivation, which highlights belonging, D-love, B-love, and self-esteem (which phenomenological analysis has shown consists of worthiness *and competence*, Mruk, 2008). With Maslow one also finds a parallel in SDT’s emphasis on intrinsic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The point of theoretical departure for SDT is to arrive at a cluster of intrinsic needs that display the characteristics of both deficiency and growth needs simultaneously (to date, autonomy, competence, and relatedness). To meet these criteria, the deprivation of the need must result in demonstrable negative effects on wellness, whereas its satisfaction must result in clearly evident organismic enhancement. Thus, Ryan and Deci (e.g., 2017) borrow from Maslow, but always with the stipulation of proposing a more parsimonious alternative to his theory of motivation. For Ryan and Deci (2017), what is called “self-actualization” is synonymous with the growth tendency already present at the outset of human development and should *not* be thought of as a need in hierarchical terms. Unfortunately, this is put forth on the basis of the now commonplace introductory textbook distillation of Maslow, which is oversimplified in its presentation of self-actualization as an achievement rather than a set of self-reinforcing values. According to this reading, Maslow proposed a strict hierarchy of needs with sudden changes in motivation akin to something like phases of development (see Bland & DeRobertis, 2017b). A biologically motivated state split off from human psychology is held to rest at the foundation of the hierarchy, while each successive need (including self-actualization) must materialize at a later time. However, Maslow (1987) emphasized that fulfillment of needs is *neither* lockstep *nor* confined to specific ages/phases of life, but rather is a holistic, dynamic-relational process:

[The statement that] if one need is satisfied, then another emerges . . . might give the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100% before the next need emerges. In actual fact, most [individuals] are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time. A more realistic description of the hierarchy would be in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy of prepotency. . . . The emergence [of a new need] is *not a sudden, saltatory phenomenon* [emphasis added], but rather a gradual emergence by slow degrees. (pp. 27–28)

Moreover, Maslow (1967) acknowledged the presence of a striving toward self-actualization from the outset of development, noting that there is an active will toward health, an impulse toward growth and the actualization of human potentialities in almost every newborn baby—which under optimal circumstances will flourish and in the face of adversity is likely to disintegrate. Finally, Maslow both recognized and discussed the nature of exceptions to the organizational structure of the hierarchy (e.g., Maslow, 1987).

These issues aside, it nonetheless remains Ryan and Deci’s prerogative to opt for a need structure that is more theoretically conservative than Maslow’s, and SDT should nowise be dismissed by the humanistic community simply for having adopted a comparatively “narrow band” approach to motivation, to borrow Schneider’s (2011) turn of phrase. Humanistic psychology is full of theoretical and methodological diversity, and it is a celebrated aspect of its tradition, which heralds pluralism. At the end of the day, SDT has produced fine results and ought to be lauded for its contributions to psychology’s database (contributions which we hope to have shown fit in well with the humanistic movement). At the same time, the vibrancy of humanistic psychology depends on

self-examination through ongoing dialogue. To this end, we feel compelled to ask the question as to whether the parsimony of SDT has come at any cost. If this question is answered in the negative, humanistic psychologists may find that their understandings of motivation and personality have suddenly become streamlined, given a new, sleeker look and feel for the 21st Century (e.g., see Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). However, in deference to the rest of the humanistic community, we ask for the reader's patience as we make a few exploratory observations.

Humanistic approaches to motivation, *when they are intended to contribute to the development of a comprehensive theory of personality*, often seek to establish a wider span of conceptual breadth in comparison to SDT, and this is done in part to reserve a place for the findings of both our more depth-oriented and transpersonal affiliates. So, for example, Viktor Frankl (e.g., 1967) adopted the notions of the *will-to-pleasure* and the *will-to-power* from his psychoanalytic heritage while advancing his notion of the *will-to-meaning*. Bühler (1964), drawing on classical psychoanalysis, ego psychology, and humanistic thought alike, proposed a theory of motivation that involved *need satisfaction*, *self-limiting-adaptation*, *the need to uphold internal order*, and *creative expansion* in the pursuit of self-fulfillment. Knowles's aforementioned developmental work (1986) mirrored van Kaam's (1981) approach of recognizing the vital and functional aspects of human behavior gleaned from psychoanalysis as coexisting alongside the more transcendent aims of human life. In our own work (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017b; DeRobertis, 2008, 2012b, 2017), we have noted homeostatic and constancy-promoting adaptational aims as bearing a dynamic (i.e., potentially transformational or discordant) relationship to self-enriching and self-transcending aims. To use the language of Maslow, humanistic macrotheorizing in the area of motivation has long sought to account for the full-breadth of human needs, from deficiency needs and their pathological derivatives to metaneeds and their metapathological derivatives. This, in our estimation, inevitably elicits the following question: Has SDT's parsimony increased the utility of its particular kind of "explanatory power" (Ryan & Deci, 2000c, p. 321) while having limited its ability to capture certain nuances of human motivation—especially those which emphasize paradox? What has been covered thus far may be an indicator of certain limiting effects with respect to optimal functioning and growth.

At the other end of the motivational spectrum, it is worth noting that SDT has had to contend with critiques concerning its ability to adequately account for the deeper, darker aspects of human psychological life for quite some time (Ryan & Deci, 2000c).

Despite the fact that SDT recognizes the existence of "inherent and natural attributes in humans that do not represent intrinsic values" (Ryan et al., 2008, p. 148), these critiques have persisted on both a theoretical and empirical basis (e.g., Cooper, 2013; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Ironically, SDT's involvement in such a controversy provides further evidence of its theoretical consonance with humanistic psychology, as it is here that we find one of the great struggles of the humanistic movement (Bohart, Held, Mendelowitz, & Schneider, 2013). We can sum up this struggle somewhat figuratively as sharing the will to believe in the inherent goodness of humanity along with SDT while standing in the shadow of the Las Vegas shooting on October 1, 2017. The humanistic community has repeatedly found itself faced with the reality of humanity's *bipolar* nature (e.g., DeRobertis, 2015; Schneider, 2011). As Friedman (1982) has noted, both Martin Buber and Rollo May advanced this dynamical conception of human nature and human motivation in their discussions with Carl Rogers on the problem of evil. For Buber and May alike, this bipolarity is dynamic and dialectic, a true "coexistence of contraries" rather than a mere dichotomy (Cassirer, 1977, p. 222). Thus, here again, we are confronted with the

paradoxical, now in its most stark form at the highest, most philosophical-anthropological of levels (Kiser, 2007; Schneider, 1999, 2015a).

Humanistic psychologists advocate that, within the same body, each person possesses, on one hand, the creative potential for transformative resilience (i.e., the ability to “struggle well,” Walsh, 2016, p. 5) and a compassion toward self and others that paves the way for social interest (e.g., see Maslow, 1987, 1999; Schneider, 2015). On the other hand, a person has the capacity for destructiveness via self-absorption as well as violence toward self and others (Fromm, 1973; May, 1972), which reflect a homeostatic clinging to the familiar (Maslow, 1987, 1999) and defensive avoidance of emotional vulnerability (Rogers, 1972). Accordingly, humanistic psychologists suggest that at each moment individuals are presented with choices for which direction (creative or destructive) they take (Frankl, 1959/2006). Moreover, humanistic psychologists (e.g., Fromm, 1947; Maslow, 1987; Schneider, 2017) suggest that the apparent duality of humanity’s so-called “good” and “evil” sides needs to be integrated within a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic-dialectic of human motivation as situated within a sociocultural context.

In a previous publication (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017a), we traced the unfolding of perspectives in humanistic psychology beginning with its effort to reorient psychology as a human science of healthy/optimal functioning, followed by its exploration of both humanity’s shadow via existential psychology and its farther reaches via transpersonal psychology, and then by its venturing into sociocultural discourse via constructivist/postmodern movements. Today, these perspectives have become integrated within a hermeneutic-phenomenological framework that transcends the dichotomy espoused by Ryan and Deci (2000c) between (a) the intrapsychic dialectic between growth and defensive motives in their reading of terror management theory and (b) SDT’s focus on “the dialectic between basic human needs and the conditions that support versus thwart them within families, institutions, and cultures” (p. 321). This framework similarly operates outside SDT’s dichotomy between “life concerns” and death concerns (Ryan & Deci, 2000c, p. 320). As May (1983) put it, human *being* always stands in a dialectical relation with *nonbeing*. Human living is shot through with nothingness (as, paradoxically, both the no-thing-ness of existence and the threat of nonexistence) and can only be comprehensively grasped on that basis (DeRobertis, 2012a). In sum, our dialogue with SDT has serendipitously brought us back to the ongoing task of exposing the meaning of humanistic psychology’s essential holism. Here, this holism has taken the form of a vision of the human person as a developmentally evolving gestalt manifesting paradoxical relations that permeate self, other, and world.

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