ONTOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

A Complex Integral Realist Perspective

Towards a new axial vision

Paul Marshall

A Complex Integral Realist Perspective

Towards a new axial vision

Paul Marshall

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Marshall, Paul A., 1948– author.
Title: A complex integral realist perspective : towards a new axial vision / Paul Marshall.
Description: New York : Routledge, 2016. | Series: Ontological explorations | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016003981| ISBN 9781138803824 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315753485 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: Metatheory. | Critical realism.
Classification: LCC B842 .M33 2016 | DDC 190–dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2016003981

ISBN: 978-1-138-80382-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-75348-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear

Contents

Figures

Tables

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Professor Roy Bhaskar who, from January 2011 until just before his sad passing away in November 2014, supervised the thesis on which this book is based. I learnt from him, and am grateful to him, in so many ways, both intellectually and personally. He dedicated his life to the construction and explication of a philosophy designed to alleviate human suffering, to rid the world of master-slave relations, to promote freedom and pursue truth, to foster the building of a eudaimonistic society, and to empower the realm of nonduality in its struggle against the demi-real for the relative world of duality. And he was always concerned with theory-practice coherence, with living his philosophy in everyday praxis – like philosophy during the Axial Age. His sensibility towards the suffering of others was far more acute than most, and this was reflected not only in his philosophy but also his being. He showed little concern for himself, great kindness to others, and was invariably cheerful. It is not surprising that he was greatly loved by all those who knew him.

I would also like to thank Dr. John O'Regan, who kindly agreed to supervise the final stretch of my thesis after Roy's passing away. He was also a great admirer of Roy, and like Roy encouraged me to follow the avenues that most energized me, as well as making sure I concentrated on completing the thesis. This was precisely the combination I needed. And I would like to thank both Dr. Paddy Walsh, the UCL internal reader of my thesis, for his careful reading and written observations, and my two thesis examiners, Dr. Mervyn Hartwig and Dr. Gary Hampson, for their constructive criticisms, suggestions and comments, both during and after the PhD viva. I have made use of these to refine this final book version.

I am also grateful to all the participants of the various CRIT (critical realism – integral theory) symposiums that have been held since 2011, the year I began my thesis. The symposiums have been, and will no doubt continue to be, enormously enriching on many levels. Both the thesis and book have been informed, broadened and deepened by them. I would also like to thank the participants in the critical realism seminars held at the UCL Institute of Education over the years, over which Roy presided, seminars that helped clarify and deepen my understanding and appreciation of critical realism/metaRealism.

With respect to broadening the focus of this thesis/book, I would like to thank Dr. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens for alerting me to the work of Edgar Morin and complex thought, and Dr. Mervyn Hartwig, for doing the same with regard to Terrence Deacon's work. Complex thought is the third integrative metatheory that I incorporated as the fundamental guides to the thesis/book, and Deacon's work both updates Morin's prescient theory of organization and plays a key role in the new axial vision, especially the 'new axial creation story'.

Without these three integrative metatheories – critical realism/metaRealism, integral theory and complex thought – the thesis/book would be simply inconceivable, and so I would like to express my deep, heartfelt gratitude to their three founders and chief architects: Roy Bhaskar, Ken Wilber and Edgar Morin. Their impressive metatheoretical and philosophical constructions are the result of enormous energy, above all that which emanates from the three axial breakthrough domains: intellectual, moral and spiritual. They are invaluable resources that we would be unwise not to make full use of. Many scholars and scholar-practitioners have refined or extended or applied or begun to cross-fertilize these constructions in their own way – some of whom this thesis/book has been able to include – and I would consequently like to thank them as well.

Finally, I would like to thank the women in my life: My wife Montse, my mother Shirley, and my three sisters, Deborah, Amanda and Claire, without whom this thesis/book would not have been possible. I would like to give special thanks to my wife, who has supported me throughout the research and writing process in so many ways.

Introduction

The developmental unfolding of the book

This book is an extended version of my PhD thesis, which was undertaken at University College London, Institute of Education. The thesis' final subject matter and structure unfolded through a number of stages that began with my Msc dissertation, which aimed at a synthesis of aspects of positive psychology and constructivist developmental psychology (Marshall, 2009). The focus there was on individual flourishing seen through a developmental prism, which was included within the thesis and also within this book. But the focus on individual flourishing later expanded to include human flourishing as a whole and a move towards a eudaimonistic society, while the developmental perspective was enriched by a dialectical approach. Further, the dissertation was informed by just one integrative metatheory (integral theory, above all its developmental perspective), while the thesis and book are informed by three: integral theory, critical realism/metaRealism and complex thought. I came across the second integrative metatheory, critical realism/metaRealism, in the interim between the dissertation and thesis while I was studying dialectical thinking through the *Interdevelopmental Institute* and searching for somewhere to start a PhD. That led me to study at the UCL Institute of Education under the supervision of the founder and chief architect of critical realism/metaRealism, Professor Roy Bhaskar.

My original thesis title was *Towards an Integrated Eudaimonics*, which was to attempt the construction of a model that could capture eudaimonia in all its dimensions. This required both a robust philosophical base upon which the model could rest and a comprehensive vision of human nature. As my research progressed, I realized that the project was far too broad for one thesis, and so I eventually restricted myself to the philosophical base. I already had two comprehensive integrative metatheories on which to build this base, critical realism and integral theory, and was fortunate to find that they both shared an extensive common ground as well as possessing different emphases. This facilitated a process of cross-fertilization and mutual enrichment, which I was later to use in the construction of the philosophical base. At the end of the first year of my thesis work I was fortunate to be able to attend a symposium in San Francisco,

which turned out to be the first of a series of symposium-dialogues between critical realism and integral theory that has continued ever since. Its fruits can be seen in the recently published first *Metatheory* volume (Bhaskar *et al.*, 2016), and a second volume to be published shortly (Bhaskar *et al.*, forthcoming). The history and details of these dialogues is recounted in some detail in the introduction to volume one, and so I will not repeat it here (Hedlund *et al.*, 2016). I will limit myself to saying that both the thesis and this book are deeply informed by, and have greatly benefitted from, these rich and stimulating dialogues. I should also mention that it was at this first symposium that I came across the third integrative metatheory, complex thought, thanks to Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, one of the organizers of the symposium and the main proponent of integral theory in the US academy.

After this symposium I focused on examining how integral theory and critical realism might come together, and the following year published two articles. The first considered the points of connection and divergence between the two philosophies, highlighting their common ground, identifying the particular strengths and shortcomings of both, and pointing to the potential for mutual enrichment based on a joining of their strengths (Marshall, 2012a). The second examined the possibility of an *integral realism*, offering an initial account of the critical realist ontology to an integral theorist audience with an eye to how integral theory might benefit from the adoption of this ontology. A subsequent stage in the unfolding of the thesis and book was with my next article, or rather book chapter, that was completed at the end of 2013 and published as a chapter in volume one of the *Metatheory* books (Marshall, 2016). This involves a more extensive and refined cross-fertilization not only of critical realism/metaRealism and integral theory but also of complex thought. The title, *Towards a Complex Integral Realism*, illustrates its attempt to combine all three integrative metatheories in a mutually enriched union. It isolates the core strengths of each metatheory, pinpoints the common ground they share, examines the possibilities for cross-fertilization and synergy in specific areas, and distills all of this into a number of essential ingredients that a complex integral realism might possess.

With this latest piece of writing the final thesis structure had seemed clear – as had its title: *Towards a Complex Integral Realism*. It was to be divided into three equal parts, the first introducing the three philosophies; the second a cross-fertilization and synthesis of the three philosophies; and the third, applying the three philosophies to human nature. In fact, on the suggestion of Professor Bhaskar, I sent a book proposal to Routledge with this exact format, which was subsequently accepted. And I began working on the third part and gave a couple of presentations on an initial complex integral realist model of human nature at UCL, Institute of Education (IOE), including one at the 2014 IACR (International Association of Critical Realism) conference, which was held at the IOE. But while working on the first part of the thesis over the summer, which included a chapter aimed at placing the three philosophies in historical context, a new structure began to emerge. First I thought of giving greater space to the historical context, and then, at the end of 2014, I became increasingly attracted to the Axial Age and its contemporary significance and relevance to the thesis – especially

after reading Robert Bellah's (2011) evolutionary/developmental take – and consequently delved into an in-depth study of it. And out of that came the final structure of both the thesis and this book.

The structure of the book

The various stages of the thesis' and book's unfolding are summed up in the three article/chapter titles and the final title: *A Meeting of Two Integrative Metatheories* (Marshall, 2012a), *Towards an Integral Realism* (2012b), *Towards a Complex Integral Realism* (2016) and *A Complex Integral Realist Perspective: Towards a New Axial Vision* – each one reaching for a broader integrative synthesis in a 'transcend and include' developmental process. The final structure is as follows. Part I focuses on the Axial Age and subsequent expressions of axiality up until modernity; Part II on modernity and the consolidation, challenge to and remedies for four biases of the western tradition that were first sown in axial Greece; and Part III on the contours of a new axial vision, focusing especially on the three Axial Age breakthrough domains of cognition, ethics and spirituality. Each part consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 examines the Axial Age and its essential features from an evolutionary/developmental perspective, highlighting its three breakthrough domains – especially axial spirituality given its significant influence on two of the integrative philosophies. Chapter 2 homes in on axial Greece, emphasizing its balanced expression of what has variously been called the mental, rational or theoretic structure of consciousness or stage of cognition – in its 'first major wave' – as well as the initial emergence of four biases of the western tradition: analytical over dialectical, epistemology over ontology, presence over absence, and exterior over interior[1]. Chapter 3 then examines the various expressions of axiality, including 'secondary axial breakthroughs' like Christianity and Islam, between the Axial Age and modernity, all rooted in the original Axial Age traditions. In this way Part I covers aspects of premodernity, with Part II then shifting focus to modernity. Chapter 4 begins with an examination of the nature of European modernity, especially its particular expression of the 'second major wave' of the mental/rational/theoretic stage, and traces the consolidation of the four biases through a complex integral realist analysis. Chapter 5 then discusses the various challenges to these biases and the 'paradigm of simplicity' (complex thought) – equivalent to the mental/rational structure – that underlie them, challenges that gained increasing momentum throughout the twentieth century. The final chapter of Part II then considers the various remedies that the three integrative philosophies have provided for these biases, remedies that also pave the way to, and, along with the axial contemplative traditions, posit the main ingredients for, a new paradigm or worldview or vision. The final part then examines the contours of this 'new axial vision'. It begins in Chapter 7 with an outline a new axial cosmovision or 'creation story', rooted in the new cosmology of modern science and interpreted through an integrative metatheoretical lens. The last two chapters are structured around the three axial breakthrough domains, which are updated in the light of modernity,

postmodernity and the three integrative philosophies. Chapter 8 focuses on a 'new axial cognition' and 'new axial ethics', the latter including a sketch of a 'new axial model of human nature'; while Chapter 9 considers a 'new axial spirituality' and 'new axial transformative praxis', the latter also organized around the three axial breakthrough domains.

The three integrative philosophies

This whole book, therefore, is rooted in both the Axial Age and axiality and, above all, in the three integrative philosophies – or a complex integral realism. I have chosen these three philosophies since they are, to both my knowledge and that of the community of scholars focused on integrative metatheories, the most overarching and sophisticated integrative philosophies available today. As such, they provide a host of insights, analyses, frameworks, conceptual tools, and cognitive resources – plus a synthesis of a vast amount of knowledge accrued by modern science in numerous disciplines, a comprehensiveness that is heightened by the focus of each one on different areas – with which to better understand ourselves, society and the world and its evolutionary/developmental unfolding. When their forces are joined together, and given greater strength by reaching back to the immense spiritual energy of the Axial Age, we have a powerful philosophical/metatheoretical base from which to approach more effectively today's urgent problems, as well as to begin to outline some of the preliminary contours of a 'new axial vision'.

There is no space here to provide an overview of the three philosophies – which would require a whole new part to do even minimal justice – although the main text has tried to provide preliminary explanations of some of their key notions as they emerge in specific parts of the book, and a glossary of terms is provided at the end of the book. What I will do in this section, with an eye to providing a basic orientation, is point to a few essential facts, briefly outline the ground they share in common, and highlight their core strengths and specific emphases. This will give an idea of their fundamental compatibility and the rich possibilities of cross-fertilization and synergy that they are open to, a synergy upon which this entire book is founded.

All three philosophies began to be constructed, and were essentially finalized, around the same time – from the mid-1970s to the early-mid 2000s – and each has their founding father and chief architect: Roy Bhaskar (critical realism/metaRealism), Ken Wilber (integral theory) and Edgar Morin (complex thought). They have also all undergone a series of developmental phases, with each subsequent phase building on and deepening – in a more or less preservative sublation – the anterior phases. Critical realism has gone through three major phases – basic or original critical realism (1975–late 1980s), dialectical critical realism (early 1990s) and the philosophy of metaReality (early 2000s); integral theory has moved through five phases, with phase four (1995) representing its first fully mature expression with the AQAL framework; and complex thought emerged as a result of a third 'genetic or paradigmatic reorganisation' of Morin's thinking (starting in the mid-1970s)

(Morin, 1994/2005).[2] Furthermore, their main foci are distributed between psychology, spirituality and individual emancipation (integral theory); philosophy, the social sciences and social emancipation (critical realism); and the physical and biological sciences, a generalized anthropology and human emancipation (complex thought), thus providing a rich and broad knowledge base.

Each philosophy has its core strengths, which naturally tend to coincide with their main areas of focus. Starting with critical realism, there is no doubt that its signature innovation and core strength is its depth ontology. This was outlined in its first sub-phase of transcendental realism and then gradually extended and deepened in subsequent phases to include mind, intentional agency, social structures, and the vast realms of non-being (absence) and non-duality. Unlike the other two metatheories, this core strength emerged at the very beginnings of critical realism, acting as a solid foundation on which the rest of the philosophical edifice was constructed. It serves as the basis for its epistemology, its ethics and emancipation, its approach to interdisciplinarity, its dialectics and spirituality, with the latter two in turn deepening and strengthening its ontology and all the areas based on it. It was established through the use of transcendental argument (from experimental activity) and immanent critique (of empiricism), two philosophical resources it has made extensive use of. While critical realism started from within the philosophy of science and a focus on the natural sciences, its main concern, from its critical naturalism sub-phase on, has been the social sciences and their emancipatory role – and freedom, transformative ethical praxis and social emancipation as a whole. We could therefore say that its core strengths include: its depth ontology, philosophy and philosophical tools, ethics and social emancipation, dialectics and a secular spirituality based on philosophical reflection.

Integral theory's signature innovation and core strength is clearly its AQAL framework, established in its main work, *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality* (1995), and developed in subsequent works to include an integral methodological pluralism. The AQAL framework includes its powerful taxonomy of levels, lines and quadrants. Another core strength is its focus on spirituality, psychology and individual emancipation. Whereas critical realism started with science and ended, in metaReality, with (a secular) spirituality, and while complex thought rejects any form of transcendent spirituality, integral theory began straight off with a powerful embrace of Eastern (and also Western) spirituality, combining it with Western psychology until they eventually coalesced into one of its four key dimensions of reality (the upper-left quadrant). This quadrant possesses a rich mixture of developmental lines taken from constructivist developmental psychology; a structuring of psychopathologies and corresponding therapies; considerations of therapeutic practices and of psychodynamic and shadow work taken from Western depth psychology; a deep analysis of states of consciousness and contemplative phenomenology – drawn from the contemplative core of the axial traditions – and their relation to structures of consciousness; an examination of different personality typologies and a theory of the self – making it integral theory's strongest quadrant and another of its core strengths. It points to

individual emancipation and is backed by a well-developed integral transformative (or life) practice, which is an additional strength of integral theory.

The signature innovation and core strength of complex thought is its (closely connected) complex epistemology and theory of organization, which is based on an examination of the physical and biological sciences. The former involves a deep critique of the 'paradigm of simplicity' and an outline of a 'paradigm of complexity' that makes use of the systems and complexity sciences, critiques of classical science and logic, and the Western dialectical tradition to develop a number of tools and principles with which to capture and honour the complexity of phenomena. It also leads naturally into a transdisciplinarity via a *unitas multiplex* in which the various relatively autonomous disciplines unite to capture this complexity. The latter entails a conception of nature as *physis*, which Morin likens to Spinoza's notion of nature as the 'very source of creation and organization' (Morin with Tager, 2008/2010: 168).[3] He generalizes physis as 'active organisation' that runs through the physio-, bio- and noospheres (or *physis*, *bios* and *anthropos*) and links them together. And it is this organization, not matter, which evolves – into the more complex organizational forms of life and mind. The core strengths of complex thought are thus its focus on the physical and biological sciences, its theory of organization, its epistemology and transdisciplinarity. Other strengths include its biological theory of self and its intense focus on a 'generalised anthropology' (on *homo complexus*), from which stems a complex ethics.

Many of these strengths are deployed and discussed in varying detail in the book. For example, dialectical critical realism's metacritique of western philosophy, based on its depth ontology, is crucial to the analysis of the four biases in both axial Greece and modern philosophy in Chapters 2 and 4; complex thought's critique of the paradigm of simplicity is basic to Chapter 5, while its theory of organization plays an essential role in the new axial 'creation story' of chapter seven; and both integral theory's and the philosophy of metaReality's spiritual approach, rooted in or inspired by the axial contemplative traditions, is fundamental to the critique of the exterior bias in Chapter 6 and to Chapter 9 as a whole. And the combination of integral theory's developmental perspective and critical realism and complex thought's complex dialectical approach lead to a developmental <-> dialectical interface that plays a crucial role throughout the whole book.

As to the common ground they share, one of the first points of convergence to stand out is the *integrative, maximally inclusive and non-reductionist* nature of the three metatheories, their attempt to respect and capture reality in its full complexity and multidimensionality. Integral theory aims to include and integrate as much of reality and human knowledge as possible into a coherent whole (via its signature innovation, the AQAL framework or matrix, backed by its integral methodological pluralism). Critical realism provides an original depth ontology (*its* signature innovation) that is maximally inclusive, embracing as real everything that is causally efficacious in the world, ranging all the way from illusions to the non-dual. And complex thought argues for the use of an open rationality

to dialogue with reality on its own terms, not subjected to some rigid epistemological or rationalized straitjacket, and so respecting phenomena in their full complexity. All three are consequently staunchly anti-reductionist, rejecting the 'paradigm of simplicity's' *exclusive* use of analytical thought, reductionism, rigid formal logic and a specialization bereft of interdisciplinary dialogue. They include the above, once purged of their less wholesome or even pathological aspects,[4] in a more expansive 'union of simplicity and complexity' (complex thought[5]), with analytical thought 'dialectically overreached as a precious gem'[6] (critical realism), and in a 'vision-logic' that 'transcends and includes' formal operational rationality (integral theory).

By moving into complexity, dialectical thinking and vision-logic, each metatheory displays a *'post-formal' cognition*[7] that goes beyond both the atomism of analytical thinking (reduction of wholes to parts) and the holism of systems thinking (reduction of parts to wholes). Such post-formal cognition aims to capture the full complexity of phenomena, respecting their multidimensionality, their multiple ontological strata, their full context and their holistic interrelationships and non-linear causality. It sees phenomena as open systems that undergo transformation and as forming part of larger systems and metasystems, and it is often associated with dialectical thinking. Each metatheory has its particular strengths in this area – dialectical complexity (critical realism and complex thought), AQAL metasytematic taxonomy (integral theory), critique of systems theory (integral theory and complex thought) – that can be combined to enrich each other, which this book attempts to do.

Another example of their integrative, maximally inclusive and post-formal approach is their openness to sources of knowledge beyond empirical science (and philosophical reflection), which, between them, include all established first-, second- and third-person methodologies used in the various sciences, as well as art, poetry and literature, self-introspection, mystical experience and contemplative phenomenology. Such an open epistemological embrace is also reflected in their approach to pre-modernity, with all three, in their own different ways, recognizing and including its insights and contributions to knowledge as well as pointing to elements (e.g. magic and myth) that still form fundamental aspects of modern humanity. All three extract the enduring truths not only of pre-modernity but also of modernity and postmodernity, while at the same time rejecting their falsehoods or less wholesome aspects. They attempt to move beyond both modernity and the postmodern reaction to modernity, beyond the 'flatland' (integral theory), paradigm of simplicity (complex thought) and irrealist, actualist and ontologically monovalent (critical realism) metaphysic that has dominated science and philosophy for so long – i.e. beyond the four biases and towards a new vision, which is the subject of parts two and three.

Another area of resonance, this time rather broad and perhaps with as many differences as similarities, is their *realism and approach to ontology*. Critical realism is clearly the most explicit and unashamedly realist, with its innovative depth ontology forming the cornerstone of its whole edifice. It is a solid, robust ontology that, I believe, has a great deal to offer integral theory and complex

thought, which also clearly presuppose the existence of a mind-independent reality.[8] But because of the general taboo against ontology and its conflation with epistemology (critical realism's epistemic fallacy), both complex thought and integral theory have tended to avoid ontology. Nevertheless, this has also facilitated an emphasis on epistemology in both, leading to a number of insights into the knower/subject's epistemic structures (integral theory) and vulnerability to epistemological distortions (complex thought) that can strengthen critical realism's epistemology and transitive dimension. The possibilities of cross-fertilization between the ontology and epistemology of all three metatheories are especially suggestive. This is not explicitly discussed in this book, but does inform it.[9]

Furthermore, all three have a *stratified vision of reality*, with integral theory forging an ingenious updating and reworking of the Great Chain (Holarchy) of Being through its AQAL framework; critical realism in a three-pronged stratified approach (into the intransitive and transitive dimension; the real, actual and empirical domains; and the multiple strata of reality); and complex thought and integral theory both adopting Teilhard de Chardin's division of reality into the physiosphere, biosphere and noosphere (or complex thought's *physis*, *bios*, *anthropos*), all of which inform this book.

A natural consequence of their non-reductionist, dialectically complex and post-formal approach is an *inter- or transdisciplinarity*. Most open-system phenomena contain a number of dimensions, internal and external causality, multiple ontological strata and complex interrelationships that inevitably require an inter- or transdisciplinarity. An exclusively specialized, disciplinary and reductionist approach to such phenomena (e.g. climate change, well-being or human nature) is clearly inappropriate and violates this complexity. All three metatheories take such an interdisciplinary approach, with complex thought stressing epistemology, critical realism ontology and integral theory enactment (epistemology and methodology). This is touched upon in Chapter 8.

In contrast to much of modern philosophy and science, all three metatheories are *strong defenders of interiority, the subject and agency – and of both universals and particulars (singularity)*. This is absolutely crucial to any philosophy or vision that aims to move beyond modernity and postmodernity, with fundamental ethical and emancipatory implications. Modern science tends to reduce interiors to exteriors (the exterior bias that is discussed especially in Part II), while the abstract universality of modernity ignores singularity; and postmodern philosophy tends to reduce the individual subject (and thus agency) to intersubjective networks, while its championing of diversity and pluralism ignores the universal commonalities that all humans share. Against this, all three metatheories defend interiority (integral theory most elegantly and consistently), a dialectical universality or unitas multiplex that embraces universal commonalities and singularity (with different philosophical, anthropological and developmental approaches[10]), and the 'relative' autonomy of the subject with its own emergent powers and transformative agency (critical realism with a strong philosophical defence and complex thought with a strong scientific one). Pooling together their

different strengths and approaches provides a formidable defence of interiority, the subject and agency, one that plays an essential role in the new axial ethics outlined in Chapter 8.

Interiority is related to *spirituality* and the subject and agency to *ethics and emancipation*, two final, and fundamental, areas in which the three metatheories' possess different emphases within an overall common ground and similar emancipatory concern. They differ, for example, in their main emancipatory focus (individual, social and human emancipation), their praxis (integral; transformative ethical praxis; constant self-examination), their ethical grounding (developmental/Spirit; ontology/dialectics/ground-state; 'ethics without foundation'/faith in certain values) and their spiritual orientation ('reverent' spirituality based on contemplative phenomenology; secular spirituality based on philosophical reflection; immanent spirituality and secular terrestrial religion[11]) – all of which lends itself to a creative tension and synergetic potential. Part III examines a 'new axial ethics', a 'new axial spirituality' and a 'new axial praxis' that draws heavily on these different approaches and their synergy, as well as on aspects of pre-modern axiality. The new axial ethics also includes a preliminary model of human nature, which is likewise based on a cross-fertilization of the three integrative metatheories' approach plus the insights of the axial contemplative traditions.

Such is a brief outline of some essential features of the three philosophies, one which I hope conveys the extensive common ground they all share and enormous potential for synergy they harbour. This book bases its 'new axial vision' on such a synergy, on such a 'complex integral realist perspective' – which it also immerses in the Axial Age's deep fount of spiritual energy.

I have focused exclusively on the strengths of each philosophy, yet they inevitably have their shortcomings. I will not dwell on these since the book is based on a *construction* out of their combined strengths, and obviously makes no use of their weaknesses or shortcomings. Further, many of their weaknesses are covered by the strengths of the others. For example, we could point to complex thought's lack of any spirituality based on deep interiority in a contemplative phenomenological sense and rejection of an absolute realm of nonduality or panentheism. These are all fundamental aspects of the new axial vision outlined here, and are all essential components of the Axial Age, axiality and both integral theory and metaRealism. From such a perspective, this is a shortcoming that virtually all contemporary philosophies in the West possess, but not one that undermines the general vision portrayed here. Or we could point to integral theory's underdeveloped approach to dialectical complexity which can sometimes give an overly linear feel; or the strong social constructionism of its 'post-metaphysical' phase five, which for many commits the epistemic fallacy; or its overemphasis on individual emancipation and consequent individualist tilt; or lack of a sufficiently critical approach to modernity – all of which are offset by the other two philosophies and the use in this book of Gebser's distinction between the efficient and deficient expressions of the mental/rational structure. And with respect to critical realism, we could point to its lack of a developmental

psychological approach, which can sometimes lead to an overly romantic vision of human nature; its general tilt towards social over individual emancipation (and thus praxis); and its overemphasis on the power2 relations of (macro) social structures to the detriment of those that stem from a more individual or micro level.[12] Again, these imbalances can be offset by the emphases of the others. A more specifically critical approach to each philosophy is of course required, and has been undertaken elsewhere (for example, Bhaskar, 2012; Wilber, 2012; Marshall 2012c; Rutzou, 2012, 2014; Hartwig, 2016; Stein, forthcoming), but the approach taken here is one of construction and cross-fertilization, and so inevitably emphasizes the strengths and their synergetic potential.

A note on metatheory and philosophy

I will complete this introduction with a brief word on the terms 'philosophy' and 'metatheory', which I use interchangeably during the book (and above), to describe complex thought, critical realism and integral theory.

While the nature, scope and content of philosophy has changed significantly over the centuries, a broad and uncontroversial definition would be that it involves the systematic use of critical reason to understand the nature of the world (ontology – or metaphysics), to examine our beliefs about and knowledge of the world (epistemology), and to consider our conduct in the world and in relation to other beings (ethics) (e.g. Quinton, 2005). On such a definition all three are comprehensive philosophies, which include not only these three main branches and attempting to integrate them into a coherent whole but also, in varying degrees, the natural, social and human sciences as well as aspects of religion. Each has their particular strengths and emphases, as we have seen, with critical realism's main strength being philosophy as such, which makes it the most philosophically rooted and robust of the three. Nevertheless, while the main focus of complex thought is on the physical and biological sciences and that of integral theory is on the interior human sciences (psychology and contemplative phenomenology), both are also immersed in philosophy and address some of its major themes. Complex thought draws on a number of philosophical sources, especially the dialectical tradition – Heraclitus, Nicholas de Cusa, Pascal, Hegel, Marx, Adorno – as well as Husserl's and Heidegger's reflections on science, and philosophers of science like Popper, Kuhn and Lakatos; and integral theory makes use of a vast range of philosophers, both East and West – some of the most influential being Nagarjuna, Plotinus, Schelling, Hegel, A. N. Whitehead and C. S. Peirce – offering its own predominantly non-dual/spiritual critique of Western philosophy as a whole. And all three are concerned with gaining a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the world, human being and society.

This integrative impulse of all three philosophies is one factor that makes them metatheories as well. Although there are a number of different types of metatheorizing – Edwards (2010) points to four – here we will focus on two: 'overarching' or integrative/big picture; and 'adjudicating'.[13] In relation to the

first, Edwards (2010: 40)[14] outlines a 'holarchy of sense-making' in which a series of increasingly abstract strata recursively interact and inform each other: the empirical or object level (immediate experience and symbolizing); the theoretical level (conceptual understanding and development of middle-range theories and models); the paradigm level (reflection on the relation between different theories); and the metatheoretical level (which attempts to integrate theories and paradigms into a coherent whole). Esbjörn-Hargens (2016) makes use of this framework to develop his own 'orders of disciplinary integration', and combines this with a horizontal dimension based on integral theory's four quadrants/three knowledge domains (first, second and third person; or subjective, intersubjective and objective). His third order, 'integral metatheories', corresponds to Edwards' metatheoretical level and involves approaches that include 'disciplines and theories from all three knowledge domains … in an effort to provide a metaview of reality not just a metaview on some part of reality' (ibid.: 116). He mentions as examples of integral metatheories the three philosophies that are the focus of this book: complex thought, integral theory and critical realism. And by combining the various strengths of each we can reach order four: complex integral realism, upon which the new axial vision discussed in this book is based.

So that constitutes one type of metatheorizing: the attempt to provide a big picture of reality as a whole through the integration of knowledge from many disciplines and domains – to capture reality in its full complexity and multidimensionally. As we have just seen, this type of integrative metatheorizing, which in these three metatheories is staunchly non-reductionist and aims, in their different ways, at maximum inclusivity, is one of the commonalities that all three share. It should be noted that their engagement in such overarching metatheorizing does not, of course, mean that these philosophies believe in the possibility of achieving total knowledge. Morin explicitly endorses Adorno's 'totality is the non-truth' (since it is an impossible task) and dialectical critical realism likewise explicitly rejects a Hegelian closed totality. Integral theory's talk of 'a theory of everything' makes it more susceptible to such criticism, but, like the other two philosophies, it embraces an *open totality* (as well as Gödel's Incompleteness theorem[15]) – which make total knowledge impossible. It is concerned with providing a metatheoretical framework that facilitates a more comprehensive and 'integral' grasp of reality, just as critical realism's maximally inclusive ontology is designed to gain a deeper and fuller account of reality and Morin's position a fuller understanding of the complexity of reality.

Another type of 'adjudicative' metatheorizing involves the critical evaluation of other theories and metatheories. All three integrative metatheories engage in such critique, for example integral theory by focusing on a (meta)theory's integrative inadequacy, complex thought on a (meta)theory's reductionism or inability to account for the complexity of phenomena, and critical realism on a (meta)theory's inadequate ontology. Critical realism is especially well developed in such critique, highlighting the importance of underlabouring for researchers and of immanent critique – especially what it calls Achilles Heel critique, which reveals the inadequacy of a position's fundamental premises.

Critical realism, integral theory and complex thought then, I believe, should be seen as both integrative philosophies and metatheories. The degree to and way in which each one is rooted in either differs, but all three are, in their own unique ways, both.

With this general introduction – which has aimed to describe the developmental unfolding of the book and its essential structure and to provide an orienting guide to the three integrative philosophies/metatheories that it is guided by – the investigation into a potential 'new axial vision' can now proceed, beginning with the remarkable leap in consciousness that occurred during the Axial Age (Part I). This leap was repeated in a different fashion with the emergence of European modernity (Part II), and the best of both, together with a cross-fertilization of the three integrative philosophies, form its essential ingredients (Part III).

Notes

1 I have chosen to use the term 'biases' rather than another in order to stress their relation to the mental structure of consciousness, which, I will argue, has an in-built tendency or bias towards these four orientations. Critical realism would call them categorial errors. Critical realist Mervyn Hartwig, for example, favours categorial error over bias (personal communication, February 2016).

2 The final volume of Morin's opus magnum, La Méthode, was published in 2004. I should note that all quotes of Morin in this thesis from works that have not been translated into English – those with Spanish titles in the references – are my translations from the Spanish translations. The original works are all in French, and while only a few have been translated into English, all Morin's major works, including the six-volume La Méthode, have been translated into Spanish.

3 Nature is no longer the mechanical, inert substance of classical science but once again generative, self-creating and self-organizing, and in that sense re-enchanted (while Morin firmly rejects any transcendent Spirit or notion of God, his view of physis could be argued as being a kind of 'immanent spirituality' à la Spinoza, though thoroughly grounded in science).

4 For example, their rejection of contradiction, ambiguity and uncertainty; their inability to see the limits of formal logic (and determinism), rather than accepting a looser logic that includes a reworked dialectic (critical realism and complex thought); analytical thought's inappropriate use of atomism and decontextualization with respect to complex phenomena; a hyperspecialization in which there is no communication between disciplines and a complete split between the natural and human sciences. See Chapter 4, section on 'Consolidation of the Analytical Bias', for a variety of its 'pathologies'.

5 Morin with Tager, 2008/2010: 147.

6 Bhaskar, 1993: 191.

7 A term used in cognitive developmental psychology to refer to the stage of cognitive development beyond Piaget's formal operational thinking. It involves placing things and events within larger systems and metasystems and so seeing multiple, non-linear causality. It is often equated with dialectical or complex thinking and is an integrative both/and rather than an either/or mode of thought. It sees phenomena as open systems that undergo transformation and can deal with their relationships over time. See, for example, Commons and Bresette, 2006, and Basseches, 2005. It is generally considered to begin with systems thinking and then going beyond that, as all three philosophies here do – they all critique the holism 'subtle reductionism' of systems theory,

for example, either explicitly (complex thought and integral theory) or implicitly (critical realism). Integral theory makes extensive use of cognitive and constructivist developmental psychology models and the term post-formal.

8 This is true especially of complex thought and integral theory until phase four. Integral theory's phase five, however, is more ambivalent here. See Marshall, 2012b and 2016, and Hedlund, 2016.

9 See Marshall, 2012b and 2016; and Hedlund, 2016 for an examination of such possibilities of cross-fertilization.

10 Referring, respectively, to critical realism, complex thought and integral theory.

11 The different emphases in brackets follow, respectively, integral theory, critical realism and complex thought. The 'immanent spirituality' of complex thought is a broad interpretation, not anything explicitly mentioned by Morin.

12 In critical realism power2 refers to relations of exploitation, domination and subjugation. And power1 refers to the causal powers of human agency.

13 Edwards (2010: 39), following Ritzer (2001) and Colomy (1991), points to four types of metatheorizing: the two discussed here – overarching and adjudicating metatheory – and metatheorizing 'for understanding and becoming familiar with the array of extant theories and paradigms across some domain'; and metatheorizing as a 'preparatory exercise to develop new middle-range theory' (2010: 39).

14 Drawing also on Tsoukas and Knudsen (2003) approach to organizational studies.

15 All three philosophies incorporate Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem into their system: Morin (1991) in his critique of formal logic; Bhaskar in his epistemological dialectic; and Wilber (1995) in his IOU ('incomplete or uncertain'/inconsistent) principle. Gödel's theorem states that a conceptual system can be either complete or consistent, but not both. Or, as Morin puts it, 'all conceptual systems necessarily include questions that can only be answered from outside the system' (ibid.: 193). Thus a metasystem is needed when considering any system; and a further metasystem to consider that metasystem – and so on ad infinitum. And in this way, uncertainties and contradictions can be tackled, and knowledge can progress, though it will never be complete. See also Chapter 5 on Gödel and the three integrative metatheories.

This page intentionally left blank

Part I

Axiality in pre-modernity

The purpose of Part I is to situate both the Western tradition and the three integrative metatheories in a larger historical context and to extract the core ingredients of the Axial Age and axiality, ingredients that will form part of the new axial vision outlined in Part III. The Western tradition, and philosophy and science in a more or less recognizably modern form, began with the Axial Age. This was a remarkable period in which humanity, in a number of distinct geographical regions of the world, underwent a shift or leap in consciousness and experienced the first flowering of a new vision of itself and its place in the scheme of things. It was in one of these regions, axial Greece, that the Western tradition was born and its foundations set in place. These foundations were then elaborated in a distinct form through a new shift in consciousness that took place in European modernity. This established a new paradigm or vision of humanity and the world, one that has been undermined now for some time in both philosophy and science and which the three philosophies all aim to move beyond. To do so, they draw varyingly on aspects of axial Greece and the Axial Age as a whole, as well as later expressions of axiality, especially on the contemplative core of the axial religions.[1] In many ways their search for a new vision of humanity and its place in the larger whole, one which rejects fundamental aspects of modernity and incorporates crucial elements of axiality, can be seen as an attempt to construct a new, albeit radically updated, axial vision. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin this process of historical contextualization with the Axial Age.

Chapter 1 examines the vibrant contemporary debate on the Axial Age and outlines some of the features of each of the four main centres. It takes an evolutionary/developmental perspective on the Axial Age, and examines the three main Axial Age breakthroughs (cognitive, moral and spiritual) with a special focus on axial spirituality and the contemplative core of the axial religions, which has inspired both integral theory and the philosophy of metaReality. Chapter 2 then considers axial Greece, focusing on its more balanced expression, in contrast to European modernity, of the mental structure of consciousness; on those features that can inform the new axial vision; and on the elements within the thought of Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle that laid down the foundations for the biases or tendencies that were later consolidated in modern European

thought. For this last focus, it relies on the critical realist metacritique. Finally, Chapter 3 examines a number of expressions of axiality between the two major manifestations of the mental/rational/theoretic stage – between the Axial Age and modernity. These include the primarily cognitive axial developments in the Hellenistic-Roman era; various expressions of axial ethics at the beginning of the common era; the secondary axial breakthroughs of Christianity and Islam; axial philosophical rationality between the tenth and thirteenth centuries; axial spirituality and mysticism between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries in the three monotheistic religions; plus a brief look at Neo-Confucianism. It ends with a look at the transition period from the Middle Ages to modernity, in preparation for Part II's focus on modernity.

Note

1 By the axial religions I mean both those that emerged during the Axial Age – Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Daoism, Confucianism – and those that arose in 'secondary breakthroughs' (Eisenstadt, 1986) or the 'second wave' (e.g. Morris, 2010) of axiality: Christianity and Islam. See below.

1 The Axial Age

First flowering of a new vision

The Axial Age, first studied systematically by Karl Jaspers (1949),[1] comprised a broad period of history between 800 and 200 BCE, pivoting around 500 BCE, that involved a shift in consciousness from *mythos* to *logos* and laid the 'spiritual foundations upon which humanity still subsists' (Jaspers, 1949: 98). It manifested most clearly in four distinct regions[2] – Ancient Israel, India, China and Greece – each one with its own singular expression. In Ancient Israel it gave birth to the prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Elijah) and monotheism; in India to Hinduism (the *Upanisads* and *Bhagavadgita*) and Buddhism (Gautama Buddha); in China to the period of the 'Hundred Schools', primarily Confucianism (Confucius and Mencius) and Daoism (Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi); and in Greece to the flowering of philosophical rationality that culminated in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Like any historical phenomenon it was the result of a complex recursive interplay of many factors, including an increase in social complexity and development; a growing literacy; the use of coinage and the beginnings of a market economy; instability caused by extensive warfare between small states as well as threats from larger early states (like the Achaemenid Empire in the Near East and India) or, in the case of China, a breakdown of political order after the downfall of the Zhou dynasty; and the emergence of autonomous intellectual/religious movements that challenged established practices and assumptions (Bellah, 2005; 2011; Wittrock, 2012). I will focus above all, however, on the shift in consciousness that occurred and resulted in 'major spiritual, moral and intellectual breakthroughs' (Schwartz, 1975a: 1).

The Axial Age debate

Since Jaspers' seminal, but now limited,[3] study, there has developed a rich interdisciplinary focus and debate on the Axial Age. There have been numerous contributions and significant moments in the Axial Age debate, including Eric Voegelin's five-volume *Order and History* (1956–1987) and the Daedalus conference organized by Benjamin Schwartz and published in 1975, but we can perhaps highlight three major landmarks or turns in the debate. First, Jasper's initial *philosophical-normative* focus that sought to unite humanity and promote a common future through a non-exclusionary/non-Eurocentric 'axis' in history

– beyond the exclusivist Western conception of Christ as the axis of history (e.g. St Augustine, Hegel) – that displayed an experience common to all humanity.[4] This experience was above all the leap in consciousness that took place during the Axial Age, 'the evidence that human beings independently of each other are able to mentally transcend themselves and their culture under similar circumstances. This is in turn the basis for entering into communication with others' (Roetz, 2012: 252). In a similar fashion, the philosophy of metaReality offers its 'principle of axial rationality' and related 'principle of universal solidarity', while integral theory adopts an explicitly developmental perspective.[5]

Second, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt's *historical-sociological* approach, starting in the mid-1970s, which converted the Axial Age into a full-blown research programme, detailing the rich diversity and plurality of axial civilizations. Eisenstadt (1986) also expanded the notion of the Axial Age to the broader notions of axial civilizations and axiality, which are no longer chronologically restricted. In this way, 'secondary breakthroughs' like those of Christianity and Islam are included, though Eisenstadt later adopted a typological approach in which he redefined axiality as a 'set of characteristics that enhance the transformative potential of culture, and do so in specific ways linked to visions of transcendent reality' (Arnason *et al.*, 2007: 11). He also saw modernity as a new axial civilization that began in the West but later manifested in many 'multiple modernities' throughout the world, which Chapter 4 will draw upon (e.g. Eisentsadt, 2000, 2001). In this way, Jaspers' 'axis' has been extended to cover axial and modern societies. A new axial vision, based on a complex integral realism, would expand the embrace one step further to include also the unique contributions and particular sophistication of indigenous societies, thus embracing all humanity (see the introduction to part three).

Third, and more recently, Robert Bellah's (2011) *evolutionary-developmental* turn that reformulates his original theory of religious evolution (1964), which is now placed in a broader theory of the evolution and development of human consciousness, using Merlin Donald's (1991, 1993, 2012) cognitive classification of human culture. He uses Donald's three stages of human bio-cultural evolution – mimetic, mythic and theoretic – to trace religious evolution, and views the Axial Age as the first manifestation of the theoretic stage. This evolutionary-developmental turn resonates strongly with integral theory's general developmental perspective, with Donald's theoretic stage broadly paralleling its, and Habermas' (1979), rational stage, as well as Jean Gebser's (1949–1953/1985) mental structure of consciousness. I will focus primarily on this latest turn in the Axial Age debate, discussing Donald's, Habermas', integral theory's and Gebser's evolutionary stages, as well as the developmental/ontogenetic equivalents revealed by constructivist and adult developmental psychology and their broad relationship. I will also emphasise that the essentially cognitive evolutionary models are by no means isomorphic with the unique shift that took place in the Axial Age as a whole, which, as we saw, encompassed breakthroughs not only in the cognitive but also in the moral and spiritual domains. In later Chapters, 2 and 4, I argue that these largely cognitive evolutionary stages are directly related

there was a focus especially on the spiritual/religious and also the moral/ethical; in India there was a general emphasis on the spiritual/religious and, in Buddhism, on the moral/ethical – and rational; in Greece there was a focus on the cognitive/philosophical and also moral/political – with Plato (and later Plotinus) also on the spiritual/transcendent; and in China, the emphasis was primarily on the moral/political and cognitive/philosophical – with a more spiritual/mystical emphasis in Daoism. A new and updated 'axial vision', which in some ways a complex integral realism could be viewed as aspiring towards, would need to craft and integrate all three strands into a coherent whole – which Part III attempts to do.

An evolutionary/developmental perspective on the Axial Age (and modernity)

With this essential background, we can now focus on the evolutionary-developmental turn in the Axial Age debate initiated by Bellah, and relate Donald's model, used by Bellah, to other evolutionary and developmental models. In doing so, we can compare the unique shift of the Axial Age with the largely cognitive evolutionary models and then, in Chapter 2, examine how the cognitive stages associated with the shift experienced during the Axial Age and particularly axial Greece – Donald's theoretic stage, integral theory's rational stage and Gebser's mental structure – are related to the four biases of the Western tradition. Further, in Chapter 4, this overall evolutionary-developmental perspective can then be applied to the similar shift in consciousness that coincided with the advent of European modernity, and used to compare the two.[13]

With Bellah's widely praised magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011), the Axial Age debate took an evolutionary/developmental turn. The developmental leap was implicitly recognized in Jaspers' mythos to logos and the general scholarly focus on the new axial level of reflexivity and critical questioning, but Bellah took an explicitly evolutionary and developmental perspective. As we saw, he was guided primarily by Merlin Donald's cognitive classification of human culture, although he also used a number of developmental models to supplement Donald's model of cultural evolution: Abraham Maslow's Deficiency and Being cognition; Jean Piaget's and Jerome Bruner's stages of child development; Heiner Roetz's (1993) use of Kohlberg's stages of moral development for an analysis of Chinese, especially Confucian, axial thought; and also aspects of Jürgen Habermas' developmental perspective on sociocultural evolution. One of the strengths of integral theory is its overall developmental perspective, which also makes use of Maslow, Piaget and Kohlberg's developmental approaches, as well as a whole host of other 'lines of development', especially from constructivist/adult developmental psychology. For its broader evolutionary stages of human culture, it makes use, like Bellah, of Habermas' levels of sociocultural evolution, but also Jean Gebser's structures of human consciousness, instead of Donald's stages of human bio-cultural evolution.

systems. It led to a literate elite and eventually to 'paradigmatic or logico-scientific thought' and is innate neither to the human brain nor to cultural structures (ibid.: 66). Donald argues that theoretic culture failed to fully establish itself in any of the main axial centres and that it is still not fully realized: while 'it dominates science, engineering, education, government, and the management of the economy, it includes only a minority of humanity, and even in that minority, its influence remains somewhat tenuous' (ibid.: 67). The previous cognitive stages are hardwired and still active – and even 'totally dominate' aspects of the developed world cultures – but the 'algorithms of the Theoretic culture are not' (ibid.).

With respect to the Axial Age, Donald notes how it built on the previous increase in social complexity experienced in pre-axial cultures during the first millennium BCE (like Egypt and Sumer): relatively large cities, food surplus, literacy, centralized state control of wealth and proto-bureaucracies. From this there emerged both an intellectual elite or possible 'performers in the "public metacognitive" domain' and a literate audience (ibid.: 68). It also resulted in fuller bureaucracies, which 'are distributed cognitive networks whose main functions are usually cognitive in nature: classification, decision-making, planning, oversight, review, prioritizing, and control' (ibid.: 72). In the realm of thought, the emergence of theoretic culture provoked a 'representational, or worldview, revolution', a 'new vision of human destiny', 'a major evolutionary step [of humanity] in self-monitoring and supervision that can be described as metacognition' (ibid.: 73). There was a process of 'metacognitive oversight' at both the individual and collective level that gave evaluative feedback on actions, thus promoting self-examination, correction and development. Donald argues that this metacognitive leap was the common feature underlying all four axial civilizations. However, he also highlights Greece as producing the most developed forms of analytical and evidence-based thought:

> For a brief period in Greece, this public intellectual reflective activity developed into an evidence-based, analytic approach that bore a significant resemblance to the modern methodology of analytic thought. This was less true of other Axial Age civilizations, with the possible exception of China in some limited domains.
>
> (Ibid.: 69)

As we shall see in the next chapter on axial Greece, this predominantly analytic approach, emerging from the theoretic stage and an integral part of Gebser's mental structure, constituted both a significant developmental advance and, in its unbalanced or 'deficient' (Gebser) form, detrimental consequences that became most apparent in the second modern wave of the theoretic stage/mental structure. We will also see how it contrasted with the predominantly dialectical approach of ancient Chinese philosophy (Nisbett, 2003).

Index

Page numbers in *italics* denote tables, those in **bold** denote figures.