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Kurt Salzinger’s review contains opinion but little information about delta theory itself. He does not mention that delta theory posits eight known means of influence, of which contingency management is one, all shown to be consistent with evolution theory. Influence is transmitted directly through psychosocial systems (the small group of people who share activity and conversation) and more broadly diffused through social networks. Influenced change develops through dynamics described by the zone of proximal development.
In the book I then sketch a theory of practice, describing the various patterns of influence by agent on subject as applied directly or indirectly through mediators. I also aspire to begin a unification of social sciences across the topic of influence and change, offering solutions to vexing problems that have prevented cross-disciplinary unity. I mention here only three examples: reconciliation of crucial concepts in psychology and culture studies, drawing on the work of American philosopher John R. Searle; a proposed experimental clarification of the dynamics of the formation of social networks and psychosocial systems; and news of developments in neurocognitive research that support the delta theory’s propositions regarding psychosocial system dynamics.

Because delta theory offers itself as universal and unified, the book is replete with examples from a breadth of settings, cultures, historical periods, and purposes. Salzinger is apparently amused by the case examples and range of scholarship of the book. In fact, the title (“Nietzsche, Sequoia, the Reichstag, Contingency Management, and Tango Therapy”) of his review, which he admits in his first sentence is unfair, seems an attempt to trivialize the theory itself.

Salzinger’s substantive critique of delta theory is this: Too many concepts, none of which improves on the explanatory power of good old reinforcement and shaping: “behavior analysis alone would be sufficient to explain how it all happens.” Delta theory addresses influence and change in its contexts: biological, cultural, and social. Behavioral concepts are not exceptions immune from context effects: Even the reinforcing/punishing valence of any stimulus is conditional on who, what, when, and where.

But Salzinger’s review illustrates well the social–intellectual dynamics of evolving theory. Many have called for unification of theory in social science, but when it actually happens, not everyone likes it. A unified theory, in one dimension, subordinates domain theories. Not all specific-domain theorists will like that, and their guilds will certainly not.

I raise this issue specifically in the delta theory book, in the context of criminology. A unified theory will never nullify the craft expertise of specialty practitioners, but it would offer enriching additional basic explanatory concepts and guidance. So an overarching theory brings to specific domains genuine benefits, but the gains may seem slight to some who are required to think again.