

# Exploring the Concept of Focus in Reversal Theory

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Two main kinds of motivational change have been suggested in reversal theory: reversal and focal change. The latter, to which comparatively little attention has been paid so far, is about the relative importance of different motivational states and values in conscious experience at a given time and over time. If reversals are about value oppositionality, focal change is about value complementarity – about which states go together at a particular time and about how these combinations change over time. One kind of relationship between states arises when two focal states are active together at a given moment and one uses the other for its own purposes: in this respect, the first “assimilates” the second. Numerous examples are provided in this article. Which state assimilates which state in such a pair can also change through “focal inversion”. It is also possible for opposites within a domain, such as telic and paratelic, to help each other over time such that both their values may be pursued successfully. These concepts raise new challenges for research on motivation and personality and extend the reach of its explanatory power.

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Reversal theory emphasizes motivational change over time. This is highlighted in the very notion of reversal itself. But change in the way that a set of motivational states is experienced can also occur without a reversal – in this case through change of focus among parallel active states, with different active states coming to the fore at different times. This second dynamic, which has been less studied in reversal theory, will be explored in the present theory-development paper and some new distinctions and suggestions will be made. The aim will be to clarify and refine the concept of focal change and see whether it, and related concepts, can add further explanatory power to the theory. In doing so, we shall be drawing out some of the implications of concepts that are already part of the theory (as enumerated for example in Apter, 2001). In particular we shall be making use of the idea of psychological value.

The concept of focal state arises in the following way. Although four of the eight reversal theory states (one from each pair) are postulated to be active at any given moment, reversal theory suggests that the individual will normally be particularly aware, and focused on, only one or two of these active states, the others constituting a kind of background. The momentarily predominating active states can be thought of as “focal states” and they are central in organizing experience and guiding behavior in accordance with the values

that they represent. Which of the active states are focal can, however, change.

As illustrated below, this represents a hierarchical system. At the lowest level we have eight basic values. These map onto the eight motivational states at the next level. These in turn are reduced to the four active states. At the highest level we have the (usually) one or two focal states “chosen” from the active states.

## The Value of Values

It will be helpful to start by looking at the concept of value as it is used in reversal theory, and which, as we have just seen, underlies the concepts of both reversal and focus (throughout what follows, the term “state,” unless otherwise specified, will mean motivational state).

Each state in reversal theory is based on a fundamental psychological value that guides behavior (Apter, 1982). In this respect, a motivational state represents, expresses, and seeks to optimise the value concerned. In the terms of McCoby (1988) it is a “value drive.” The key insight brought by reversal theory is that values are continually altering and shifting as they guide behavior.

Although there are some classic works on the psychology of value (especially Allport, 1961; Rokeach, 1973; Spranger, 1922) the concept has not entered into psychology to the extent that it might have done. The term “value” itself has been used in the human sciences literature in a variety of ways, all of them associated in some manner with the experienced worth of some action or some outcome. In reversal theory, “value” emphasizes the following three characteristics:

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1. **Fundamental.** All the meanings that we assign to our actions derive from a basic set of values. Reversal theory therefore is not concerned with explaining actions in terms of the myriad of more superficial values that enter peoples' lives, such as physical fitness, owning a comfortable home, having a short commute, since these can all be reduced to more basic values.

2. **Motivational.** Values guide behavior, acting as criteria against which we can judge the outcome of our actions. We can tell which state we are in particularly by knowing which criteria we find ourselves applying to our actions. But values enter into their concomitant states in a variety of ways: for example they sensitize towards certain aspects of the situation, they bring to bear certain skills, they invoke certain attitudes, and so on.

3. **Psychological.** Values relate to the meanings that people assign to their actions, including the pursuit of feelings of self-worth, rather than to the maintenance and survival of the body. Except in emergency conditions, the latter tend to become assimilated to the former. For example, eating can be experienced in different ways in all eight states. One can eat for the enjoyment of the taste (paratelic), to please one's host (other-oriented), because it is time to eat (conforming) and so on.

In all these ways, the values of interest to reversal theory are what one might think of as "deep values." The key proposition of reversal theory, and hence its name, is that motivational states, and the deep values that they represent, go in pairs of contrasting and incompatible opposites. These are what sociologists call "value contradictions." Reversal theory is consistent with Isaiah Berlin's classic political science contention that every value necessarily conflicts with other values (Berlin, 1959, 1997). Indeed, reversal theory could be seen as a systematic way of developing Berlin's insight into a complete structure of deep value contradictions.

At the level of individual psychology, this means according to reversal theory that at any given time a person must be in one state or the opposite in any pair of these contrasting opposites, but cannot be in both at the same time. An important type of change involves switching between opposites. This is, of course, what is meant by a reversal. As a reminder, the values that underlie each of the motivational states are as follows: achievement underlies the telic state and enjoyment the paratelic state; duty underlies the conforming state and freedom the negativistic state; power underlies the mastery state and love the sympathy state; self-actualization underlies the autic state and transcendence the alloic state. Values are not just about decisions, although they obviously enter into these. Rather, they are ever-present in everyday life, coloring in their own way, and giving their own meaning to, everything that we do, both important and unimportant.

The value words just used are not always the most appropriate words in different particular contexts. For example, one would probably not use the word "transcendence" in relation to teaching a child, or the word "duty" in relation to following a cooking recipe. So one should rather think of these particular words as each representing a range of possible words that depict, in different ways, the same fundamental desire – for example in the paratelic state, one can talk about the desire for play, fun, entertainment, enjoyment, stimulation, distraction, and so on. Indeed, different words have been used for all the reversal theory values in the reversal theory literature.

We should remember that no state is intrinsically better or worse than its opposite state. Each state can be associated with both pleasant and unpleasant feelings and emotions at different times and can be played out in different circumstances in terms of behaviors that are desirable or undesirable for oneself or others. Nor are there dimensions on which we can judge or rate different values against each other: reversal theory is consistent with the view that values are "incommensurable" (Gowans, 1987).

The values underlying focal dynamics and reversals are assumed to be universal and therefore in a sense biological, even though they relate to psychological needs and motives. The approach is therefore opposed to social constructionist, cultural, post-structuralist, post-modern, discursive, and other such accounts, to the extent that these see values as being socially derived and therefore relative to different societies at different periods. Of course, in reversal theory terms, different societies will encourage and privilege different values/states and develop different kinds of institutions to afford satisfaction of them, but the states and their underlying values cannot go beyond the basic set. The reversal theory account is therefore pluralist (meaning that the same situation can be experienced in various ways) but not relativistic (meaning that the number of possible interpretations is not unlimited). The relationship between societal values and the individual values that are being examined in this paper is an interesting and important one, but it will have to be pursued elsewhere. Suffice it to say that, from the reversal theory perspective, most social values – tolerance, justice, unity, mercy – arise out of the individual psychological values discussed in this paper and are indeed anchored in them.

### **Focal change**

Reversal theory, then, has identified two principles of change in experience, based on the way in which values are experienced. These are reversal and focality, or "focal change" (Apter, 2001; level 2, proposition 5). As we live our daily lives, so our way of experiencing the world, due to the values that we adopt, is ever-changing in one or other or both of these ways.

At any one time, a person will have four states active – one from each pair – representing a set of four values, known in the theory as an “array” (Apter, 2001; level 2, proposition 4). For example, in cooking for his or her family, a person might at a given time be in the telic, conformist, sympathy, and other-oriented array of motivational states. The operative values in such a case would be achievement, duty, love and transcendence. We might suppose in this case that the cook would see the activity as serving the needs of an important goal, a recipe would be being followed, and the cooking would be being done out of love and for the sake of others (the family). We can represent the four pairs of values as follows, with each pair placed one above the other (which one is above and which is below being arbitrary). Let us put the active values making up the array in italics.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Duty</i>	Power	Self-actualization
Enjoyment	Freedom	<i>Love</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>

However, typically only one or two states are at the focus of attention and this focus can change. For example, during cooking the focus at one time (while reading the recipe) might be on the conformist (duty) state and at another time (when thinking of the pleasure that the food will give to one’s family) on the alloic and sympathy states (transcendence and love). If we put the values of the focal states in capitals, this change could be represented in the following way. In this case duty at time 1 is not only active but also focal, but at time 2 love has become the focal value along with transcendence. The arrays are in this respect different from time 1 to time 2, even though no reversal has occurred.

Time 1			
<i>Achievement</i>	<i>DUTY</i>	Power	Self-actualization
Enjoyment	Freedom	<i>Love</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>

Time 2			
<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Duty</i>	Power	Self-actualization
Enjoyment	Freedom	<i>LOVE</i>	<i>TRANSCENDENCE</i>

This kind of focal change contrasts with that of reversal, in which the change occurs from one to the other of the opposites within a pair. For example, in cooking, the cook may suddenly feel the need “to spice it up” – to break away from the recipe and do something different and even experimental. This would involve a reversal from the conformist state (duty) to the negativistic state (freedom). We could represent this as follows:

Time 1			
<i>Achievement</i>	<i>DUTY</i>	Power	Self-actualization
Enjoyment	Freedom	<i>Love</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>
Time 2			
<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Duty</i>	Power	Self-actualization
Enjoyment	<i>FREEDOM</i>	<i>Love</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>

In this kind of diagram, reversals occur in the vertical direction and re-focusing in the horizontal direction. (Incidentally, note that reversal is not confined to focal states, as occurs in this example, but to any of the pairs whether they are at the focus of attention or not.)

The values that underlie our experiences and actions are therefore not just a list of alternatives between which we can choose, as previous psychological accounts of value would have it – such as Allport’s six types (1961), based on Spranger (1922), or Rokeach’s thirty six types (Rokeach, 1973, 1979) or Maccoby’s eight types (Maccoby, 1988). Rather, there is a structure of relationships between the identified values so that the values together make up a system. In fact, as should now be clear, there are two kinds of relationships according to reversal theory, each with their own kind of dynamic:

1. Relationships of value opposition. That is, every basic value has a contradictory and mutually-exclusive value, for example, achievement and enjoyment, which are pursued in the telic and paratelic states respectively. Reversals can occur between such opposites within each such binary opposition.

2. Relationships of value complementarity. Different compatible values – for example, values in different domains – can be pursued simultaneously and guide activity at a given moment. Change here involves re-focusing between combinations of compatible states – for example, telic and mastery (achievement and power values) might change to conformist and alloic (duty and transcendence values).

### Complementary values

Recognition of value complementarity leads to questions about the actual way that active states relate to each other.

One hypothesis would be that they relate very little, but constitute separate parallel processes that each go their own way, with all active states contributing more or less independently to the ongoing action. In this scenario, there would be no governing focal state. For example, in playing soccer a person might experience competition (mastery), but also be equally aware that he is playing for a team (alloic), trying to have fun (paratelic) and obeying the rules of the game (conformist). All these values are compatible, at least in the setting provided by the game, and in a sense they all work to-

gether to enhance each other, with none of them dominating. Any one of them could come to the fore at any time, or be replaced by another, without major disruption to the ongoing action. Unfortunately, this arrangement would presumably lead on occasion to incoherence and even conflict between states pulling in different directions.

An alternative hypothesis would be that there is only one reigning focal state at a given moment and this state imposes its values and organizes the other states around it in some way that is to its advantage alone. In this case the focal state autonomously rejects or disregards the other states, which as a result are temporarily impotent and pushed to the very margins of awareness. This ensures coherence of action, since only one value is fully engaged in the action, but this over-riding value can, of course, change.

There is an intermediate hypothesis, which is the one which will be pursued here. This arises from a consideration of what might happen when there are two focal states co-active at a given moment. One of the things that would allow us to experience this duality cohesively would be for one of the focal states to be experienced as controlling the other, but controlling it in a way that allows the latter to operate in accordance with its own particular value. By this is meant that the controlling state would govern ongoing action more than the secondary focal state would do, but both would play a part. To accomplish this, the more focal state might make use of a process that we could define as “focal assimilation.” It would tend to draw the other focal state into its orbit and use it for its own purposes. So the most focal state – the state that is more important at a given moment – would tend to be served by the other focal state in a way that would also be satisfying to the secondary state.

This model would, by extension, allow us to see how all the states in an array may be brought together in mutually supportive ways, with some states serving others. Obviously this can become complicated, but we can understand the principle involved by looking in more detail at the two-state case.

When an individual is pursuing two complementary values, one will be what one might call, following Rokeach (1973), the “terminal value” (represented in the more focal state) and the other will be what one might call an “instrumental value” (represented in the less focal of the two focal states). That is, pursuit of the latter kind of value is instrumental in achieving the satisfactions that go with the former. To be sure, pursuit of the instrumental value may also give rise to its own satisfactions, but the individual will be less sensitive to these than to the satisfactions of the terminal value, which will seem more important (the term “terminal” here is not intended in a religious or philosophical sense, but merely in the sense that this is the key meaning-giving value of which the individual is aware at a given moment).

The interesting thing, from the reversal theory perspective, is that, unlike the case in Rokeach’s theory, any value can

be either instrumental or terminal at different times. Even more interesting is that particular pairs of instrumental and terminal values in the sense defined here can “swap over” so that what was the instrumental value can become the terminal value and vice-versa. That is, switches between the centrality of different active states can occur all the time, even during the course of the same activity. For instance, one can start by using the conformist state in order to achieve telic satisfaction but then invert this relationship so that the telic state comes to be used in order to achieve conformist satisfaction. One might go to church to fit in with the community, using something serious in the service of the need to belong, but then at another time fit in with the community by going to church and in this way accomplishing something that one feels to be important. In helping a friend with technical advice on the purchase of a computer one might swap between being most concerned with the satisfactions of expertise (mastery) and the satisfactions of helping (alloic) although both remain focal states. We may suppose that there are times when such inversions may occur back and forth fairly frequently. In any case, this “focal inversion” would be a new kind of reversal, not previously recognized either in reversal theory or in previous research on values. It might, however, be difficult to recognize in ongoing behavior. But the assimilation concept seems to be the most promising way of thinking about harmonious relationships within an array and this is why so much attention is devoted to it in the following section of the paper.

### Two-state combinations

What follows in this section of the paper provides a taxonomy of the different meanings that people can assign to their actions when pairs of complementary motivational states are involved. The examples are not intended to be comprehensive but illustrative. They are varied in how important or trivial they are and in how general or specific. They are also not intended to be definitive but to be suggestive. Each entry is a kind of mini “thought experiment.” The reader should ask himself or herself whether the examples are anything like situations that they have experienced and whether they seem believable.

In what follows, each of the eight reversal theory states will be listed in turn as terminal values, followed in each case by the combination of that state with each of the other states acting as instrumental values. This is something of a catalogue. But in this way it will be possible to see how each state can be served by every other state (except its mutually-exclusive opposite – but see below). This brings out some of the complexity and richness of the experience of these states and the ways that states can come together to make patterns.

It would obviously be too much to list all possible combinations, including three and four state combinations, and to give concrete examples of these state combinations in ac-

tion. But the general idea of states serving states – of instrumental values being assimilated by terminal values – should help us to understand relationships in complete arrays as well as in two-state relationships. Thus a particular state might be serviced by more than one other state and perhaps by all three remaining states in the array. Alternatively a given state might service more than one focal state.

### **Telic**

How the telic state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Conformist:** Use laid-down rules and procedures in order to achieve something important – follow discipline in order to rise in the ranks in the army, perform one’s job “by the book” in order to achieve promotion, assiduously fill in an application form for a job.

**Negativistic:** Behave defiantly in order to achieve something important – act as a political dissident to change society, go against received wisdom to develop a new scientific theory, take short cuts to meet a deadline, lie to make money.

**Mastery:** Attempt to control things in order to achieve something important – attempt to master a subject-matter in order to pass an important examination, learn new skills so as to enhance one’s career prospects, get one’s taxes done on time.

**Sympathy:** Attempt to develop close relationships in order to achieve something important – take quality time with one’s children in order to maintain a psychologically healthy family, get to know one’s boss well in order to achieve promotion.

**Autic:** Take personal initiative in order to achieve something important – suggest some improvements that could be made to procedures at work, decide to start exercising for one’s health.

**Alloic:** Enter into some group of people in order to achieve something important – join a voluntary charity to help collect money for cancer research, join a political pressure group.

### **Paratelic**

How the paratelic state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Conformist:** Follow the rules in order to enjoy one self – play sports, dance, play chess, take part in a choir.

**Negativistic:** Disobey rules in order to enjoy oneself – smoking where one is not supposed to, wearing odd clothes, being gratuitously rude, drinking too much.

**Mastery:** Control things in order to have fun – play the guitar, build and fly model aeroplanes, learn how to skateboard.

**Sympathy:** Develop close relationships in order to enjoy oneself – develop a small group of friends who do fun things together (partying, hunting, touring), buy a pet.

**Autic:** Behave independently in order to enjoy oneself – play an individual sport like tennis or golf, go for a walk on one’s own, indulge in sexual fantasy.

**Alloic:** Enter into some group of people in order to enjoy oneself – play a team sport, like soccer or baseball, join a play reading group.

### **Conformist**

How the conformist state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Telic:** Do something serious in order to fit in – join a church in order to be able to take part in rituals and feel part of a tradition.

**Paratelic:** Do something playful in order to fit in – join an art class, or regularly meet with a group of friends in a neighborhood bar, or watch the same television programs as others.

**Mastery:** Control things in order to fit in – play skillfully enough that one can remain a member of a sports team, display one’s credentials in order to join some prestigious social club.

**Sympathy:** Develop a relationship with others in order to fit in – if you are a student, get to know people personally in a fraternity or sorority in order to feel a sense of belonging.

**Autic:** Take an individual action in order to do one’s duty – act in accordance with one’s conscience on a moral issue, even though others are doing other things.

**Alloic:** Take joint action in order to fit in with others – become a cheerleader, join a political demonstration, teach Sunday school.

### **Negativistic**

How the negativistic state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Telic:** Do something serious in order to be able to be defiant – insist on talking about religion at a dinner party when you know that others have different views, be a whistle blower at work.

**Paratelic:** Do something playful in order to be able to be defiant – draw graffiti, be sarcastic, tell a risqué joke.

**Mastery:** Do something controlling in order to be able to be defiant – ride a motorbike beyond the speed limit, learn how to use a gun when your family deplores this.

**Sympathy:** Do something affectionate in order to be defiant – flirt with a friend’s spouse, make friends with someone who is detested by your other friends.

**Autic:** Do something for yourself in order to be defiant – start eating a meal while others are still being served, smoke

even though others have indicated that this would be disagreeable to them.

**Alloic:** Do something for others in order to be defiant – stand up for someone who is being bullied, take the side of the underdog.

### **Mastery**

How the mastery state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Telic:** Try to achieve something important in order to be in control – try to get something published in order to increase one's professional reputation, apply for some award in order to improve one's professional standing.

**Paratelic:** Try to do something enjoyable in order to be in control – play video games, go horse riding, learn how to skate, perform a playfully sadistic sexual act.

**Conformist:** Follow the rules in order to be in control – maintaining discipline in military combat, constructing a shelf unit from a kit, follow a cooking recipe, getting a passport photograph taken.

**Negativistic:** Be defiant in order to be in control – start an argument in order to show your superior knowledge over someone else, try to learn something that you can use against somebody.

**Autic:** Do something in order to be in personal control – learn some skill that will allow you to dominate others, practice operating some complex piece of machinery.

**Alloic:** Do something for someone else in order to be in control – coach someone in something that you are skilled at, organize a party for someone's birthday, introduce someone to a powerful acquaintance.

### **Sympathy**

How the sympathy state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Telic:** Try to achieve something important in order to feel close to someone – try to get a better job in order to be able to get married.

**Paratelic:** Do something enjoyable in order to feel close to someone – have a romantic dinner, go on a date to the theatre.

**Conformist:** Do what you are supposed to do in order to develop a relationship with someone – send a Valentine card on Valentine's Day, visit a friend in hospital.

**Negativistic:** Do something you are not supposed to do in order to develop a relationship with them – gossip and tell secrets in order to get closer to someone.

**Autic:** Do something selfish in order to develop a relationship with someone – ask someone else for help, borrow something from a friend, ask for a favor.

**Alloic:** Do something for someone in order to feel close to them – give a birthday present, discuss their problems, lend

them something, go to some pains to give them something that they might need.

### **Autic**

How the autic state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Telic:** Do something serious that you stand to benefit from personally – study for an examination, take out insurance on your spouse's life, make an investment.

**Paratelic:** Do something enjoyable that you stand to benefit from personally – buy chocolates for yourself, go shopping for clothes for yourself, sleep in late on the week-end, give yourself a treat.

**Conformist:** Do something that you are supposed to do that you stand to benefit from personally – have a regular routine medical examination, follow a diet, tidy the house.

**Negativistic:** Do something you are not supposed to do that you stand to benefit from personally – take longer than you should for lunch and get back to work late, take someone else's parking space, take the last piece of cake.

**Mastery:** Do something controlling that you stand to benefit from personally – play poker for money, bargain over a purchase, get your spouse to do the housework.

**Sympathy:** Develop a relationship with someone that you stand to benefit from personally – give a present to someone influential, ask about your customer's family.

### **Alloic**

How the alloic state might be served by or assimilate the following states:

**Telic:** Do something serious that other people will benefit from – write a will, donate blood, give to a charity, write a reference.

**Paratelic:** Do something playful that other people will benefit from – buy tickets for a charity sweepstake, take children out to play in the park, crack jokes to cheer up someone who is miserable.

**Conformist:** Do what you are supposed to do in a way that other people will benefit from – give Christmas presents, make nice remarks about them in a speech, send a thank you letter for services rendered.

**Negativistic:** Do what you are not supposed to do in a way that other people will benefit from – get marijuana to help a friend who is in pain, drive above the speed limit to get to a relative who is experiencing an emergency.

**Mastery:** Do something involving power or control so that you can identify with others – teach others how to do something so that you can vicariously enjoy their achievement.

**Sympathy:** Be nice to other people so that they will benefit – listen to other people's stories, laugh at their jokes, show interest in their problems.

In all these examples it is suggested that the terminal value state is not simply calling up a certain behavior that might ordinarily go with the state representing the instrumental value. Rather, it is calling up the motivational state itself, so that there is a genuine desire to be satisfied through the experience of the state. For example, the serious state might call up the sympathy state in order to get to know someone who might turn out to be useful and important. This would be different from, and more authentic than, pretending to be sympathetic by producing sympathy behavior without sympathy feelings.

Another point is that instrumental states can be enjoyed as well as the terminal states. But things do not always turn out in this way and the supporting instrumental state may be associated with unpleasant feelings that need to be tolerated for the sake of the terminal state. For example, anxiety may be tolerated in the telic state for the sake of achievement.

### **Integrating opposites**

Although, as stated above, the opposite members of a pair of states are mutually exclusive in operation and therefore unable to serve each other directly in the way that complementary states are able to do, they can support their opposite state indirectly. This might seem paradoxical, but some examples should make it clear. In these examples, a given state is helped in achieving its satisfaction by arranging for the opposite state to be embedded in a sequence of actions or situations that it (the first state) has organized. (To avoid unnecessary circumlocutions here, the states will be described as if they were individuals with agendas.)

1. The telic state can be served by the paratelic state through the individual organizing periods of rest and recreation which help him or her to be able to work harder afterwards.

2. The paratelic state can be served by the telic state through the individual taking on genuinely dangerous tasks which, once the risk is overcome, result in enjoyable feelings of excitement and thrill.

3. The conformist state can be served by the negativistic state through the individual joining a dissident group that has strict rules that have to be followed once entry has taken place.

4. The negativistic state can be served by the conformist state through the individual joining a cult, the membership of which the individual knows will afterwards annoy friends and relatives.

5. The mastery state can be served by the sympathy state through the individual getting to know people who will after-

wards be useful in a developing network of professional and business acquaintances.

6. The sympathy state can be served by the mastery state through the individual being cruel to be kind.

7. The autic state can be served by the alloic state through the individual's increased status that can come through membership of a prestigious group.

8. The alloic state can be served by the autic state through the individual developing personal skills that will afterwards be indispensable for the group.

In all these cases the individual is displaying a form of "motivational intelligence" by organizing activities in a coherent way that optimizes the satisfaction of the state concerned (for example, achievement in the telic state) while allowing for, and taking advantage of, additional satisfactions en route (for example, fun in the paratelic state).

### **Conclusion**

In adding focal change to the reversal theory "mix," we see that there are two broad kinds of relationships between motivational states and therefore between the values that they express. These are the relationship of oppositionality and the relationship of complementarity. Each allows and prompts its own kind of change.

In the course of this paper some types of complementarity change have been identified. In fact, three terms have been suggested to refer to these types of change, all of which involve changes in focal states and their relationships:

1. Focal change, meaning change in the particular active motivational state that is central in experience at a given time and that guides the ongoing action.

2. Focal assimilation, meaning the way that one state is drawn in and used in the service of another state.

3. Focal inversion, meaning two states exchanging positions in relation to focal assimilation.

Many questions for future research arise from this analysis. One set of questions concerns the causation of focal change. Are such changes governed by the same general agents as bring about reversals, namely contingency, satiation and frustration? One suspects that contingent effects must have much to do with this kind of change, changes arising as one moves from one physical location or task, or psychological context to another. It is also tempting to suggest that there may be more cognitive control of such focal change than there is of reversals, which seem to be largely involuntary (Desselles & Apter, 2013). Other factors may also of

course be involved as causal agents, these being factors that we have yet to identify and study.

Another set of questions relate to personality. Here are some that suggest themselves:

1. Do individuals have favorite motivational states – states that tend to be both dominant and focal? Such states have been referred to as “key states” (Apter, 2001; level 3, individual differences propositions 4.)

2. Do individuals have favorite domains? For example, a person might spend more focal time in the telic-paratelic domain than other domains. The degree of time spent by an individual in a particular domain is known as the “salience” of that domain (Apter, 2001; level 2 proposition 9 and level 3 individual differences proposition 3). This is of course not the same as “dominance,” which is about the balance of time spent in one state or another within the pair that constitutes a domain.

3. Do individuals tend to experience some combinations of motivational states more than other combinations? Indeed, do they experience certain clusters of states, perhaps whole arrays, more frequently than other combinations or arrays? If so, are there cultural forces at work, with tendencies to certain pairings occurring more frequently within one culture than within another?

4. Are there situations in which complementary pairings of states produce conflicts rather than cooperation? How do these arise and how may they be resolved?

What has been attempted in this paper has been the refinement and elaboration of the concept of focus in reversal theory and the exploration of related concepts like complementarity and assimilation. The approach, as in all reversal theory concept development, has been that of structural phenomenology. The aim of this approach is to identify structures and patterns in subjective experience, especially patterns of change. It is clearly recognized that this can only be the first step in a path that necessarily involves operationalization and empirical testing. It is also recognized that the

concepts developed in this paper may turn out to be particularly difficult to operationalize because they involve distinctions that may be subtle and difficult for both subjects and experimenters to make. I hope this will be seen as a challenge to research rather than a barrier. In any case, the analysis presented here points to some new directions for research and possibilities for application. In terms of intervention, recognition of focal change extends the range of possible strategies that can be used to help people with a variety of problems.

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