The Basic Dualism in the World

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Abstract

- Graham Harman writes that the "basic dualism in the world lies…between things in their intimate reality and things as confronted by other things."

- This paper supports Harman's assertion from a systems theoretic perspective and illustrates it with some examples, including conceptions about truth, ethics, value, and intelligence.

- But dualism implies irreconcilable difference; what Harman points to is better expressed as a dyad, where the two components not only imply one another but are related, and where this spatial dyad is usefully augmented with a temporal dimension, expressed in a third component or an additional orthogonal dyad.

- Introduction

- The Systems-Theoretic Dyad

- Examples of the Dyad

- Beyond the Dyad

- Summary

- References

Introduction

- The basic dualism in the world lies not between spirit and nature, or phenomenon and noumenon, but between things in their intimate reality and things as confronted by other things. – Graham Harman (2005: 74)

- Intra-ontic vs. Inter-ontic

- Undermining vs. overmining

Elements and Relations
Aspects of a Scientific Metaphysics

Hardcover & PDF available at Springer site

https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-99403-7
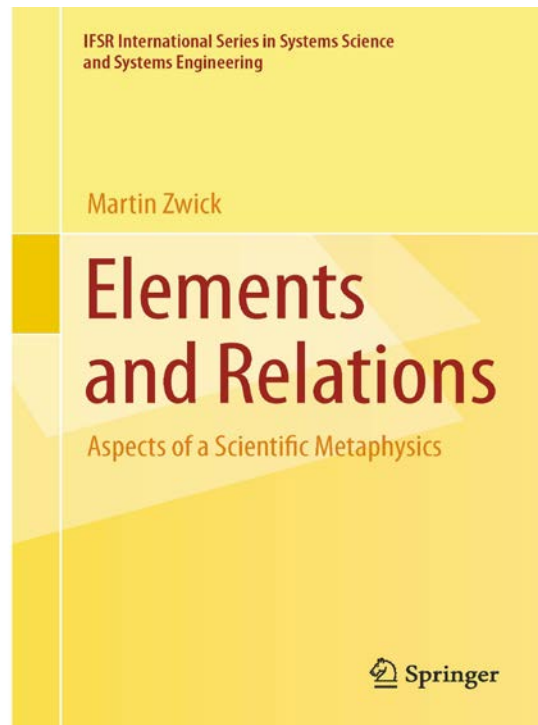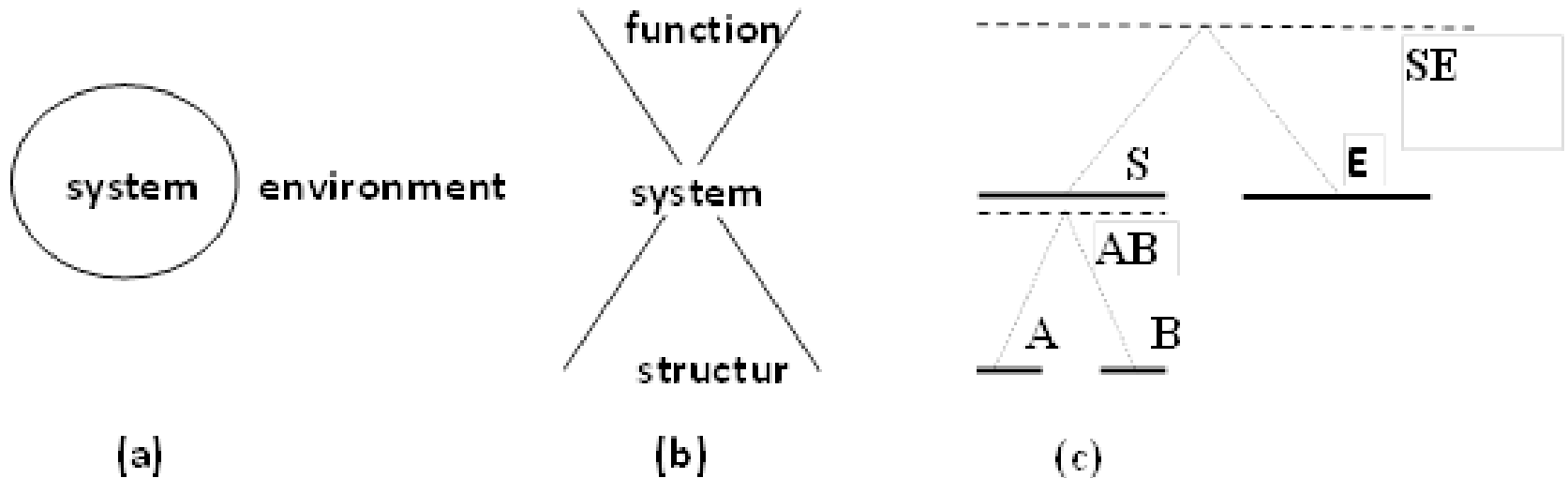
The Systems-Theoretic Dyad

Figure 2 Structure and function

(a) System-environment distinction; (b) structure-function dyad; (c) system as elements (bold solid lines) ordered by relations (dashed lines). In (b) and (c) verticality indicates a spatial dimension.

Examples of the Dyad

- Nature-nurture

- Language

- Intelligence

- Development of science

- Economic development

- Definitions of "planet"

- Definitions of "species"

- Criteria of truth

- Methodologies of inquiry

- Loci of value

- Ethics

- Literary criticism

- Therapy

Beyond the Dyad

**Figure 3 Adding attributes to the definition of system**

(a) Attributes Q and R of system S emerge upwardly from the system's internal relations, AB and BC. (b) By virtue of these Q and R attributes, system S enters into relation SE with environment E (which has attributes U and V).
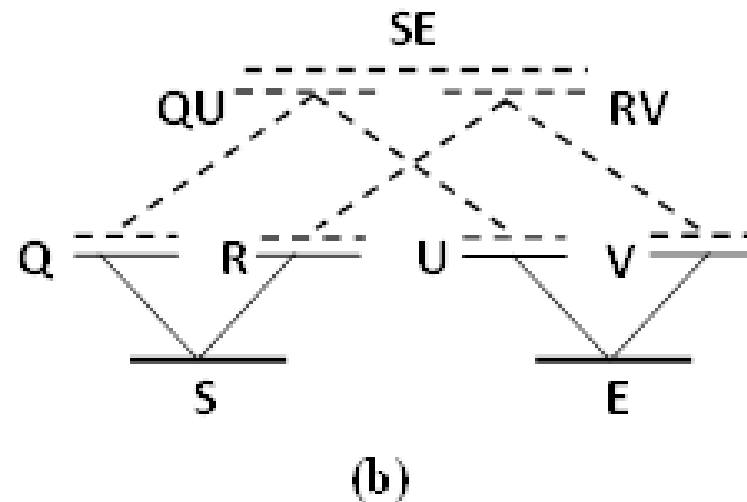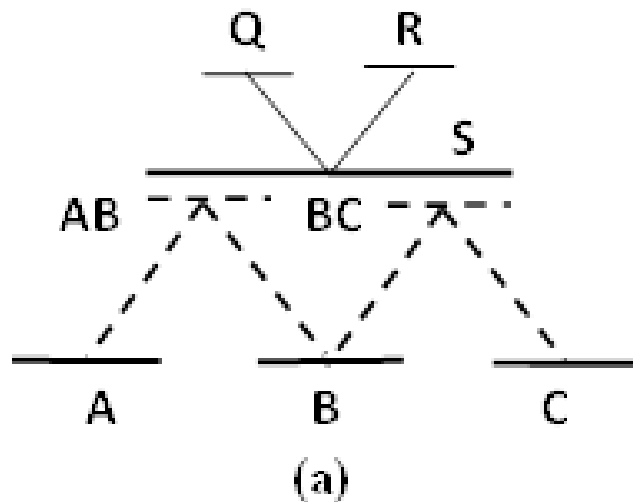
Beyond the Dyad

Figure 4 Adding time to the spatial structure-function
S = structure; F = function, H = history. (a) Time is a parameter;
(b) time is represented as H and the arrows to and from it; (c) the
vertical spatial double cone diagram (dotted) is augmented by the
horizontal double cone diagram (solid).
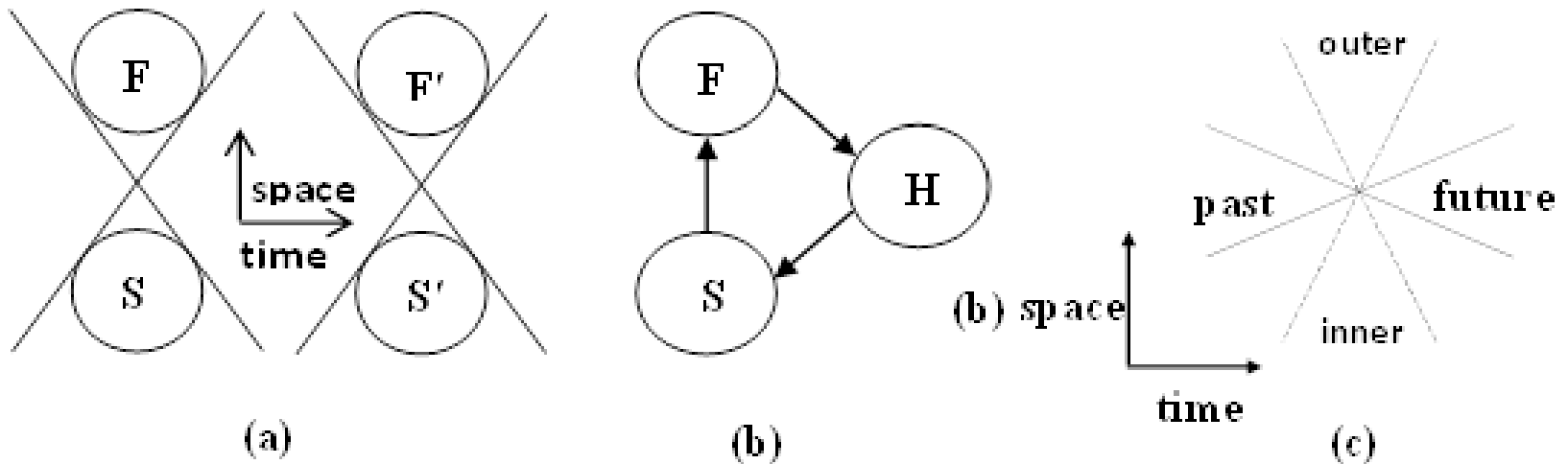
Beyond the Dyad

The following are just a few examples of the triadic augmentation diagrammed in Figure 4(b).

- **Definition of "species**

- **Definitions of "planet**

- **Criteria of truth**
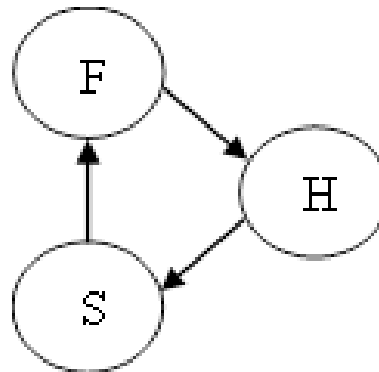
Summary

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- But dualism implies irreconcilable difference; what Harman points to is better expressed as a dyad, where the two components not only imply one another but are related, and where this spatial dyad is usefully augmented with a temporal dimension, expressed in a third component or an additional orthogonal dyad.

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Thank you.

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Responses to Fritzman's criticisms (1/4)

- #1 *Saying something is a dyad doesn't indicate relative contribution of two poles, which is an empirical question depending on context.* <u>Response</u>: I totally agree! I'll have to figure out why Fritzman might have thought that I might disagree.

- #2 *How do I justify my claim that examples I give are dyads, that both poles have truth rather than one? Also, how are poles linked?* <u>Response</u>: Justification is different in each case; I need to provide details for each example. I do claim that *usually* both are partially true, but I actually do allow for possibility that one pole might be dominant or even exclusively present or true. (I will have to fix the text accordingly!) A linguistic example of linking Chomsky & Skinner: parameters specified by (internal) nature (Chomsky) gain specific values in (external) nurture (Skinner).

Responses to Fritzman's criticisms (2/4)

- #3(a) *Systems Theory doesn't discern dyads but stipulates them, and is a competing perspective rather than one transcending opposition.* <u>Response</u>: Yes, it *does* stipulate that objects have both structure & function, but *allows* for either being dominant. It doesn't transcend opposites but encompasses both, so it's not "just another" competing perspective.

- #3(b) "*An ethical theory inspired by Systems Theory that links virtue theory & consequentialism will be rejected by both virtue theorists & consequentialists.*" <u>Response</u>: But you yourself note that some versions of virtue ethics subsume consequentialism and vice versa, so encompassing both is already being done. These more inclusive versions are realizing the systems theoretic view! Systems Theory has no problem with either structure or function being salient.

Responses to Fritzman's criticisms (3/4)

- #4(a) *Systems Theory wrongly asserts that structure must be constitutive but it's optional to consider function to be constitutive.* Response: I didn't mean to say that & should fix statements that do. Function *can* be constitutive & structure non-constitutive. Example: money. Systems theory allows either pole to be dominant, but is admittedly biased towards regarding structure as constitutive & function as not, just as idealism has the reverse bias.

- #4(b) *Structure is causal; function is constitutive. Intelligent behavior has causal (neural) preconditions but these are not constitutive.* Response: I need to learn how/why philosophers distinguish between what is causal & what is constitutive. I use "constitutive" to mean essential, intrinsic, as contrasted with what is non-constitutive, i.e., contingent, extrinsic, non-essential. For physical systems, both are causal. I should clarify my terminology.

Responses to Fritzman's criticisms (4/4)

- Fritzman's criticisms are valuable and helpful, and point to ways that I need to clarify and in some places simply fix the current text.

- Many thanks, Fritzman!!