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Factor B: "Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted"

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My perspective on the future of Q methodology most closely corresponds to that identified by Hurd and Brown as Factor B—"Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted." As I read their explication of the four perspectives, I indeed feel close affinity with the Factor B description, which advocated the need to apply Q methodology to social problems and present the results of these applications to both Q and non-Q audiences. However, I also identify in some measure with the perspective revealed by Factor D—labeled "Beyond Orthodoxy." This latter association is confirmed by a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.34 between my sort and the common sort captured by Factor D. This brief essay will attempt to explain my view of the future of Q methodology in light of these two perspectives.

Importance of Stephenson's Q Orthodoxy

I believe that it is important to honor and discuss Stephenson's theory and understanding of Q methodology. In particular, I appreciate (sometimes in awe) Steven Brown's leadership in preserving Q "orthodoxy." A shared understanding of Q sustains our community. Q researchers in particular appreciate the importance of language and meaning; when we use terms such as operantcy, subjectivity, concurrence, abduction, and representativeness we must know what these terms mean in Stephenson's theory. The "slow reading" of Stephenson's *The Study of Behavior* that Brown led about 10 years ago was particularly helpful in developing a consensus understanding of Q. I recommend that this effort be repeated every few years to remind ourselves of—and properly introduce novices to—Stephenson's conception of Q.

Importance of Evolution (But Not Devolution) of Q

Contrary to the Factor A perspective labeled “Orthodoxy Upheld,” I do not believe that the future of Q is threatened by discussions about how Q should be conceived and practiced. I share the sentiment of a commenter in the Hurd and Brown study who noted, “If we all simply accepted what those who have gone before have thought and made a decision to remain ‘pure’ to their ideas, there would [have been] no Stephenson.”

In my view, we should not only understand Stephenson’s Q but also explore its evolution as the science and phenomenology of subjectivity advance. For example, I am intrigued by the constructivist notions of Q as advanced by some in Europe. I particularly enjoyed the presentations by Steven Brown on Newton’s Fifth Rule and the rejoinder by Wendy Stainton-Rogers at the 2002 Q conference in Durham, England (as well as the private discussions with colleagues from the Netherlands afterward), which still motivates a search for integration. I do not mean to suggest, however, that we should devolve Q with regressive R-like interpretations.¹ We should stand against such interpretations.² However, I do mean to suggest that we should embrace opportunities for advancing Q theory and extending its application. I support the continuation of our epistemological discussions of subjectivity. Q praxis is strengthened by coherent rigorously-conceived Q theory.

Importance of Expanded Application of Q

One effective defense of Q against R-based criticism is the demonstration of its power to analyze policy controversies and stimulate the formulation of consensus policy outputs. I have found that Q is ideally suited to getting beneath the superficiality of conflicting policy positions to reveal the complex character of political concerns and preferences. I have found that policy conflicts are rarely veridical (involving bipolar factors) but rather orthogonal with areas of common agreement which can form the bases for developing consensus. Both policy dialogue participants and policymakers have expressed their appreciation of the use of Q to reduce, if not eliminate, chronic controversy.

This use of Q is but one example of how its practical application is not only useful in solving addressing real-world problems but also a powerful device for recruiting others to Q. Expanding application of Q to other arenas will increase further its acceptance and appreciation. Shouting Q’s virtues from the sidelines, it seems to me, is much less effective.

¹ It seems to me that the arguments presented on behalf of the “California” school of Q represent a step back toward R while the constructivist arguments advanced by the so-called “British” or “European” school represent a progression further away from R.

² Like a former smoker who finds others’ smoking intolerable, a former biologist/engineer like me finds unacceptable others’ insistence that R methodology and quantitative methods are the only valid means to investigate social phenomena. Although I agree that R methodology is important to generalizing social science research findings to populations, I believe that such research must first be grounded using methodologies such as Q

Advantage of Q in Bridging Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies

I have found that Q's incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative methods serves to bridge these two research traditions. I continue to marvel at its ability to convince both camps that Q deserves consideration. Qualitative researchers, of course, identify with the analysis of concourses while the quantitative community identifies with the use of factor analysis to reveal underlying patterns. The magical nexus between these two components is the Q sort. When skeptics reconceptualize the Q sort as a link between qualitative and quantitative methods, their appreciation of Q methodology grows dramatically.

A Reason for Optimism

I remain optimistic about the future of Q. I believe that Q leaders will emerge naturalistically; we do not need a "cult of Q" to ordain new ministers. As long as we understand Stephenson's Q, remain vigilant against R tendencies, adopt a non-reactionary posture to new ideas, engage in civil and informed debates, and demonstrate the power of Q to analyze and solve real-world problems, I expect that Q will continue to grow in stature and application.

Perhaps in part because I am not among those who had the privilege of studying under Stephenson, I am not as concerned about threats to his legacy. His contributions will survive through the ISSSS and our continued discussions, presentations, and publications. Nevertheless, I believe that we can and should build on his legacy to advance Q theory and its application. After all, Einstein's special and general theories of relativity did not render Newton's theories of motion and gravity irrelevant; rather, they merely extended them to realms not contemplated by Newton. It seems to me that the evolution of Q can also extend the work of Stephenson into realms not contemplated by him, and thereby pay homage to his work.

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Factor C: "Orthodoxy Reinforced"

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The factor structure, as reported and discussed by Hurd and Brown, makes sense to me because, as is most often the case with a successful Q study, the communication scene has been untangled without harming any of the strands. Additionally, it makes sense to characterize the four resultant factors in terms of conventional standards, the appropriate usage of the word "orthodoxy" in this instance, because Q methodology has come to be, over a period of seven decades, a collection of theoretical principles and standards of practice. Finally, it makes sense to show how members of our