

The THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY List Serve Statement

The Theory Of Knowledge (TOK) Society consists of a group of scholars and students who are concerned with the current state of the academy and academic knowledge. A primary concern shared by society members is that human knowledge currently exists in a state of fragmented pluralism, such that there is a seemingly endless number of perspectives on knowledge and values with virtually no coherence or unity or shared language game to frame our general understanding. This fragmented state of knowledge is associated with an attitudinal shift that emerged in the academy during the latter half of 20th century regarding the nature of knowledge, and associated core values, such that there was a significant swing away from “big” theories of knowledge and more toward a postmodern chaotic or distributed arrangement.

Although authoritarian or forced “top down” approaches to knowledge construction should always be resisted by free academic inquiry, it nevertheless must also be recognized that fragmented pluralism is deeply problematic in terms of its capacity to educate citizens and foster a coherent understanding of the world and humanity’s place in it. Consistent with this claim is the fact that many scholars have noted a crisis of meaning making in modern society, and a dramatic rise of anti-intellectual “know nothings” and “post-fact” attitudes, resulting in much cultural chaos and future uncertainty ([see, e.g., Smith](#)).

The TOK Society list was started to foster conversations that emerged in the context of the Society’s first conference in April of 2018 at James Madison University. The list provides the TOK Society scholars and students to share ideas pertaining to knowledge and knowledge organization, human values and meaning making systems, societal changes and challenges, and the place and relevance of psychology in these issues. The list discusses a wide variety of topics, but its central concern is with how the academy might address the issue of fragmented pluralism and move toward an integrated pluralism. An integrated pluralism is one that embraces the diversity of positions and topics in the world but is simultaneously concerned with placing those perspectives and systems in coherent relationship to one another.

An example of such a system that might result in an integrated pluralism is Henriques’ Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System approach to natural philosophy, and broader Unified Theory/Unified Approach (UTUA) framework and language system to bridge the sciences and humanities ([see gregghenriques.com](http://gregghenriques.com)). Henriques argues that the problem of psychology is intimately related to the modern academy’s state of fragmented pluralism, and its solution is key to moving toward an integrated pluralism. The list welcomes scholars and curious individuals of all stripes to join in discussion about these themes. The list strives to be collegial and dialogical. Debate and disagreements are certainly accepted and expected, but the culture of the list is to foster understanding and the exchange of ideas, and respect for various positions is cultivated.

There are approximately 70 people currently on the list. If you have questions or are interested in participating, contact Dr. Gregg Henriques at henriqgx@jmu.edu.

If you would like to peruse the archives from the list, they are public and found here:

<https://listserv.jmu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A1=ind1903&L=TOK-SOCIETY-L&X=O05FE7D5FE702A9C587&Y=henriqgx%40jmu.edu>

Note: Please be aware that the name of the list appears as “Tree of Knowledge” (ToK) in places because that was the older name. It helps to be clear that the ToK System refers to Henriques’ metaphysical map of the universe into Matter, Life, Mind and Culture. The Theory Of Knowledge (TOK) is the current name of the Society exploring an integrated pluralism, with the ToK System being an example for achieving this vision.