

# Development of the Mag/Min Framework: The Next Step (2023)

Thomas J. Schur

## Introduction

The steps in the development of my Mag/Min framework began with the original conceptualization presented in my first book, Mag or Min: Which Are You? It then progressed with the expansion of the framework into the deeper level of self-exploration in the Sequel (Level II), eventually leading to the additional concept of Transcendence. From there the most recent step has been the engagement of the Deetime Network with the idea of the New Story by Thomas Berry [dtnetwork.org/the-new-story] Note that this development has been organic, not planned; the ideas have emerged one from the other.

This article will describe the current state of this development by explaining how the assumptions and principles of the Deetime Network a.) align very congruently with my Mag/Min framework, and b.) provide a powerful enhancement of it.

The Deetime Perspective is focused simultaneously on the enormous universe that continues to evolve, and on the human, as a species and as individual humans, who are part of that continuing evolution. The members of the Deetime Network are focused on the exploration of how to engage this process in the most productive ways.

*(Note: 1. This essay presumes some familiarity with my Mag/Min framework, Bowen theory, Ernest Becker's notion of existential paradox and denial, and Thomas Berry's idea of a "New Story.")*

2. All references for content in this essay are accessible on two websites: my own [tschur.com] and the Deeptime Network [dtnetwork.org])

The following are the elements of the congruence between the Deeptime Perspective and Mag/Min.

### **Systems theory**

Mag/Min is based in systems theory. The assumption is that the patterns of that denial system of Mag/Min maintain the self of the person internally as an individual system, and in the larger systems the person operates in like the family, communities and organizations. Those two systems, the individual self and the larger systems of other living systems, maintain a larger homeostasis that is recursive between them. One of them cannot be separated out from the other. They operate in tandem. I have named this conceptualization of recursion "Self/System" in describing the human functioning in the world [tschur.com/selfsystems.html].

The Deeptime Perspective is unquestionably a perspective based in systems theory. However, this systemic perspective is a conceptualization of an enormous system, namely the universe. At the same time this perspective maintains a focus on the human, the individual person. This is entirely consistent with my notion of self/system, but it expands the larger system component exponentially. As a result it enhances the systems base of Mag/Min, as the homeostasis is based in the much larger process of evolution.

### **Bowen theory**

Bowen theory is a systems theory of the self as a living system based in the processes of the natural world, especially evolution. Of the eight concepts in Bowen theory the primary one is Differentiation. In this theory, Differentiation refers to the extent to which a person, like other living systems in nature, maintains a self in relationships with others

[<https://www.thebowencenter.org/differentiation-of-self>]. This ability is scaled from low to high, where the lowest level indicates a highly reactive pattern of yielding integrity to the system that the living system exists in. Higher levels indicate the ability of the living system to maintain its integrity within the system in which it exists. The integrity for the human is based on the ability to manage the anxiety in the system by being able to distinguish responses that are driven more by emotionality or more by thoughtfulness.

Bowen theory's grounding of the self in the natural world fits very well with the Deetime Perspective of the human as part of the evolution of the universe as a living system in the "matrix" of the earth. This idea is described in the Second of five principles of the Deetime Network [[dtnetwork.org/deep-time-perspective](http://dtnetwork.org/deep-time-perspective)] which states that the human is embedded in the Earth "from which all life has emerged and depends."

The concept of Differentiation is common to both Bowen theory and Deetime though they come from different frameworks. It is listed in the First of the five principles of named Context as one of the elements of orientation to an evolving universe. Differentiation here is derived from Thomas Berry's work and is defined as meaning: "the objective variety and uniqueness of everything."

While the Deetime Perspective is focused on exploration of how the human can engage the process of evolution of the cosmos, it does not have a specific concept of a self like Bowen theory, as framework for that engagement.

## **Anxiety**

Bowen theory as a theory of the human as a living system with a self, hypothesizes that anxiety is a major factor in the functioning of that self. As a systems theory, it further hypothesizes that the dynamic of anxiety

operates not only in the individual human, but it operates at the same time in the relationships among humans, just like it does in the relationships between other living systems at all levels, from the cellular to the human organism.

I am not aware of exploration in the Deeptime Network of anxiety generated by the consideration of the acceptance of this new cosmology. If this does not exist in this worldview, it is a major point of incongruence with Bowen theory and my Mag/Min framework. As such, that gap could be a significant area of exploration that could facilitate the completion of an otherwise comprehensive, overall congruence.

## **Language**

Language is not one of the concepts in Bowen theory, even though all of the concepts depend on language. I have argued elsewhere [[tschur.com/bowen-theory.html](http://tschur.com/bowen-theory.html)] and [Schur (2011) *Bringing Systems Thinking To Life: A Supervision Model Based in Bowen theory and Language*. pp 281-291]) that this is an omission in the theory, that if incorporated, could expand the ability of the theory to explain phenomena of human functioning in the world.

The Deeptime Network is very focused on the importance of language with their foundational idea of needing a narrative, a new story of the evolution of the universe. For this they draw upon Thomas Berry's idea of a "New Story" [[dtnetwork.org/the-new-story](http://dtnetwork.org/the-new-story)].

## **Existential Anxiety**

The Deeptime Perspective, with its simultaneous focus on the universe and the individual human, can evoke Becker's existential paradox.

This paradox is the situation of human mortality in which one focuses either on the human's ability to imagine the infinite and being immortal, or

the ability to assume the constant possibility of imminent death. The paradox is that both are true and contradictory. Neither ability can be eliminated, but accepting this contradiction creates anxiety because there can be no resolution to the contradiction. This anxiety is existential because the paradox is about one's very existence. According to Becker, this lack of a possible resolution forces a person to have a denial mechanism to preserve one's ability to function in the world.

The Deeptime Perspective provides one with the ability to imagine the power of participating in the enormous process of the evolution of the universe across billions of years; and simultaneously of being a tiny, insignificant part of this enormous process. Which does one focus on? One cannot hold a focus on both simultaneously, as one works to find a way to integrate these two perspectives.

As noted above, the Deeptime Perspective does not address the anxiety generated by this dualism, and so there is no notion of denial. But as noted above, there is major emphasis on the need for a narrative, especially a new narrative to integrate the duality of these two orientations, and I would contend that such a narrative would be a denial mechanism that allows humans to engage in the Deeptime Perspective thus increasing the existential anxiety, because of the expansion of perspective to the entire cosmos.

## **Conclusion**

My Mag/Min framework provides a theory and a tool to manage the existential anxiety generated by the existential paradox. The Deeptime Perspective offers a powerful way to move forward in the modern world with the continual increases in understanding from science, combined with the focus of including the humanities, both integrated in a new narrative. However, it comes with the price of needing a functional denial

mechanism to accommodate the increased existential anxiety. As the Deeptime Network seeks to find ways for the human to engage in the evolution of the cosmos, my Mag/Min framework can provide a practical way to participate in this process with the focus on patterns of decision-making that can lead to more productive outcomes with more functional denial mechanisms.