

DUAL- PROCESS THEORIES:
QUESTIONS AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES

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The goal of this paper is to offer a critical analysis of the contribution of Dual Process Theories (DPT) to psychological theory. A key advantage of DPT is that they offer an integrated framework for generalising across specific tasks and situations; this represents a clear advantage over the traditional approaches that have focussed on task- and process- specific explanations. At the same time, it can be argued that the level of description offered by DPT lacks the predictive power normally required of cognitive theories. That is, whilst recent proposals have made some progress towards developing testable assumptions, they nonetheless lack specification at several levels. Specifically, the distinctions between System 1 and System 2 address the properties of representations and processes, and downplay the principles by which the representations are formed and the processes executed. Thus, to date, theoretical proposals either focus on lists of potential processes or on high-level, general descriptions. Neither approach allows principled prediction: The former because it lacks integrating assumptions and the latter because it is not sufficiently precise. In this paper, I propose that an intermediate level of description might be useful, and illustrate how basic principles of attention and metacognition may be developed to advance theorising about issues such as “What information is extracted from the problem space” and “When and under what circumstances does System 2 intervene?”