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Spirituality, Religion, Contemplative
Practices, and Socially Transformative
Service in the 21st Century

INTEGRAL REVIEW

A Transdisciplinary and Transcultural Journal For New Thought, Research, and Praxis

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Spirituality, Religion, Contemplative Practices, and Socially Transformative Service in the 21st Century

Special Issue Introduction

Issue Editor: Bahman A. K. Shirazi[1]

I welcome you to this issue of *Integral Review*. This is our second special issue from the California Institute of Integral Studies and the Symposium on Integral Consciousness. Integral Review is glad to deepen our association with CIIS with the continuation of these special issues. We believe they enrich the range of perspectives and thought available to the growing scholarly community making use of IR. As the value and contribution of integral thought continues to expand into the academic world, we are grateful to be able to continue publishing works like those found in this issue. We are also grateful for and wish to acknowledge the work of Bahman Shirazi in continuing to take on the responsibility for guiding the articles presented here through the editorial process. I will leave you now to take in his introductory remarks, and hope you enjoy reading through this issue.

Jonathan Reams,
Editor-in-Chief
Integral Review

The articles in this special issue of *Integral Rev*iew highlight selected contributions to the 2011 Symposium on Integral Consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) (www.ciis.edu). This annual symposium provides a forum for CIIS community members and friends to exchange and deepen their understanding of integral consciousness, its evolution, and its relationship to the current planetary challenges and transformational processes.

Each year there are several themes covered in a variety of presentation formats: keynote and standard presentations, as well as a number of interactive sessions and workshops. You can find more information on these activities at the Symposium site: http://ciislibrary.wordpress.com/2010-symposium/.

The overarching theme in 2011 was: Spirituality, Religion, Contemplative Practices, and Socially Transformative Service in the 21st Century. The contributions highlighted in this issue

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are connected in multiple ways. If interested, one could simply start at the top of the list, and hopefully find an underlying connection between all of them in the order presented. It is also possible to start with a topic of choice and navigate through the whole collection over time; or simply choose topics of interest. You might find that some key topics briefly covered in one article, are more fully discussed in one or more others. Or perhaps, one might begin to see how these pieces, despite the variations in theme, length or detail, comprise a window to the limitless world of integrality and find resonance with respect to one's unique perspectives and experiential context.

We begin with Higher Education and Interreligious Dialogue by Joseph L. Subbiondo who stresses the need for inclusion of courses on religion and spirituality, as well as interreligious dialogue in higher education, through an examination of three interrelated dimensions: Interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism and religious literacy. Drawing on some recent research such as that of University of California, Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute, as well as other recent publications on religion and spirituality in the United States, he highlights the importance of the place of higher education in overcoming religious illiteracy in a world in which religious tensions have been on the rise, and colleges and universities are predominantly secular in their curricular outlook. The article also mentions some initiatives in this direction at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

In New Religious Movements, Modern Esoteric Movements, and Integral Consciousness, Constance A. Jones who is an expert in this field, provides a brief overview of the new religions and spiritual communities which have emerged in recent decades. These new religious movements are among the many trends that shape today's religious consciousness. This essay argues that eastern thought in the west, fostered in large part through the growth of new religious movements, and western esoteric teachings which have appeared in many guises throughout the history of the West, are reemerging in our time and that understanding these movements and their alignment can deepen our appreciation of the foundations of integral consciousness.

Rethinking the Future of World Religion: Four Scenarios is the summary of a conversation I had with Jorge Ferrer who has been reflecting on the aforementioned religious movements and has presented four scenarios about the future of religion: global religion; mutual transformation of religions; interspiritual wisdom; and spirituality without religion. We also discussed his own participatory vision based on his various publications. He reflects on whether humanity will ultimately converge into one single religion, or continue to diversify into numerous forms of spiritual expression; or perhaps, a middle path reconciling the human longing for spiritual unity, and the developmental and evolutionary gravitation toward spiritual individuation and differentiation will emerge. We explored implications of these scenarios and other related topics such as the importance of embodied and whole person approaches to personal and collective integration.

Next, in Transformative Body Practices and Social Change: The Intersection Between Spirituality and Activism, Don H. Johnson highlights the intersections of embodied spiritual practices and organizing for social change through the seemingly different, but potentially complementary perspectives of two leading revolutionaries, Mahatma Gandhi and Wilhelm

Reich. He focuses on the importance of body cultivation in addressing social issues and how traditional practices might be taught to prepare the practitioner for dealing with grief.

In the next essay, The New Myth: Frederic Spiegelberg and the Rise of a Whole Earth, Ahmed M. Kabil provides, through the life and teachings of Frederic Spiegelberg, a novel account of some of the unique historical and intellectual developments that converged in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid twentieth century and subsequently informed and enabled many of the defining chapters of recent global history. Spiegelberg was instrumental in creating the American Academy of Asian Studies (a predecessor to CIIS) in San Francisco by inviting pioneering east-west scholars such as Haridas Chaudhuri (founder of CIIS) and Allan Watts who are responsible for the early dissemination of Asian spiritual traditions in the west. The conversations and writings by Spiegelberg, Watts, and Chaudhuri lead the way toward cultural movements such as the San Francisco Renaissance, the rise of the counterculture, the environmental awareness, and the information age revolution. This well-researched essay connects some key developments in world consciousness in the last 60 years. Of special importance is the connection between science (and recent technological developments) and spiritual consciousness which may be apparently diametrical, but are actually complementary in an all-embracing integral consciousness.

In The Future History of Consciousness, David Hutchinson picks up on the theme of science, spirituality and integral consciousness in an intriguing reflection on the future of integral consciousness. He asserts that 'consciousness' is the key fact of life and that the study of it is in its infancy. He maintains that spirituality and science are bound to meet and argues that science is moving rapidly into the hitherto unexplored subjective areas such as dreams, thought processes, and awareness and asserts that we are on the verge of a momentous shift in knowledge and ability with consciousness driven by exponential change in theory and technology.

In the article titled Sri Aurobindo's Lila: The Nature of Divine Play According to Integral Advaita, Matthew W. Morey highlights a key aspect of integral consciousness focusing on the concept of Lila, or Divine Play, in the context of Integral non-dualism as described by Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri. To provide a context for this topic, he first recounts Haridas Chaudhuri's brilliant exposition of the various schools of Advaita (non-dual) Vedanta and how Integral consciousness is a culmination of several key spiritual philosophical schools of Indian thought known as Advaita Vedanta. The second part of the essay directly addresses Sri Aurobindo's description of Lila, a play that is at once a dalliance of the Divine and a teleological drama. In the context of Lila, the essay examines evolution, the individual poise of Brahman and the participatory nature of Integral Yoga.

Debashish Banerji's Structure and Process: Integral Philosophy and Triple Transformation takes the reader deeper into the core of integral consciousness, philosophy and yoga. He starts by examining the debate concerning perennialism and pluralism in religious studies and considers the category of the 'integral', as described by Sri Aurobindo in the context of this debate. After exploring the case for perennialism vis-à-vis pluralism, he compares the contemporary taxonomy of a perennial core to mystical experience developed by Robert K. C. Forman with the idea of the "triple transformation" developed by Sri Aurobindo.

Finally, in United Religions Initiative: Global Community Emerging, Sally Mahé provides an introduction to United Religions Initiative (URI), a global grassroots interfaith network that promotes peace and justice through intercultural and interreligious dialogue using a process known as 'appreciative inquiry'. URI is a leading example of a global organization which has successfully implemented the participatory and pluralistic vision at the core of a holistic and global approach to interreligious dialogue and interfaith cooperation. While she highlights some of the accomplishments of URI, she stresses that more cooperation, more compassion, and more commitment to good relationships is needed across the world for global unity, justice and peace.

Gratitude is due to editors of *Integral Review* for providing support for this publication.

Bahman A.K. Shirazi
San Francisco
July 2012

Higher Education and Interreligious Dialogue

Joseph L. Subbiondo[1]

Abstract: This article highlights the current need for inclusion of courses on religion and spirituality, as well as interreligious dialogue in higher education through an examination of three interrelated dimensions: Interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism and religious literacy. Some initiatives in this direction at the California Institute of Integral Studies are discussed.

Key Words: Higher Education; interreligious dialogue; Religious Pluralism; Religious literacy; California Institute of Integral Studies.

In 1973, the California Institute of Asian Studies, as the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) was known then, applied for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Led by the primary founders of CIIS, Haridas and Bina Chaudhuri, the Institute prepared a compelling institutional report in which they affirmed the quality of the academic programs as well as the operations of the Institute. In the report, the following courses were listed among the requirements of MA degree programs: 'Comparative Religion: East and West', 'Comparative Mysticism', 'Comparative Theology', 'Religion and Comparative Politics', and 'Varieties of Mystical and Psychedelic Experiences'. The following courses were listed among the electives: 'Meditation and Other Spiritual Disciplines', 'Religious Symbols', and 'Psychophysiology of Religious Experiences'. Certainly, a forward thinking curriculum for today, and a remarkably progressive one in 1973!

As you can see, interreligious study and dialogue has been a significant constituent of the CIIS educational experience since its founding. In keeping with this founding vision, which was and continues to be well ahead of its time, I will focus here on the now more-than-ever need for higher education in general, and CIIS in particular, to advance interreligious dialogue. To show the inextricable link between higher education and interreligious dialogue, I propose the following assertions:

a) Interreligious dialogue requires religious pluralism;
b) Religious pluralism requires religious literacy; and
c) Religious literacy requires higher education.

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[1] **Joseph L. Subbiondo,** president of CIIS since June 1999, has an accomplished background in both administration and academics. He brings a 30-year history of achievement in higher education, including appointments on several international academic committees; and he has been active on many accreditation teams for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Prior to coming to CIIS, he served as Dean of the School of Liberal Arts at St. Mary's College of California; Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of the Pacific; Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Santa Clara University; and as a professor of English and linguistics at four universities.
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We know too well the consequences of living in a world that is in need of interreligious dialogue. Most, if not all, of the wars in our lifetimes have been or are being fought largely because of religious difference. For example, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Hindus and Muslims in India, Muslims and Jews in Israel and Palestine, and Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq …. and the list goes on. The United States is not immune to violence in the name of religion as the post 9/11 assaults, such as the murder of a Sikh in Mesa, Arizona will attest.

Religion as a justification for war is as old as religion itself. For as long as we have recorded history, people have interpreted their religious beliefs as mandates to plunge themselves and their societies into deadly conflicts. It is easy to understand why many people identify war with religion. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (2005) points out in his book, *To Heal a Fractured World*, "Too often [religion] appears on the news, and lodges in the mind, as extremism, violence, and aggression" (p. 9).

Because religion has served as a battle cry, many reasonable people have argued that we should do away with it because it prevents peace and perpetuates oppression. For example, Richard Dawkins (2006) asserts this position in *The God Delusion,* as does Christopher Hitchens (2009) in his book, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. While Dawkins and Hitchens are correct in maintaining that religion has too often been associated with evil throughout history, I support Karen Armstrong's response to Dawkins and Hitchens in *The Case for God* (Armstrong, 2009). She writes: "It is … misleading to insist that all the problems of the modern world are entirely due to religion, if only because at this perilous moment in human history we need clear heads and accurate intelligence" (p.306). Haridas Chaudhuri (1984) was certainly clear headed and accurately intelligent regarding religion. He wrote in *Modern Man's Religion*:

> …religion is an autonomous function of the spirit. It can hardly be replaced by any non religious discipline. That which seeks to replace religion in a radically atheistic and anti-religious mood begins soon to function as a special kind of religion. So the great need of our present day is not to reject religion but to reconstruct it in accordance with the intellectual climate and the specific requirements of the present age. (p. ix)

Drawing on Chaudhuri's notion of reconstruction, religion has been and can be (reconstructed if necessary as) a primary inspiration for global peace and social justice. Supporting this possibility is the claim that all the major world religions incorporate some version of the golden rule: "do unto others as you would have them do to you." As noted by Rabbi Sydney Schwarz (2008) in *Judaism and Justice,* "According to God's covenant with Abraham, every Jew [and I could add members of nearly every religion] is called upon not simply to *believe* in the values of righteousness and justice, but to *act* on them" (p.34). In their comprehensive histories of world religions, Karen Armstrong and Huston Smith document in extensive detail that the world's religions attracted vast numbers of followers because they responded to a universal human longing for global peace and social justice.

If the teachings of the major world religions promote peace and social justice, then why are we living in an age tormented by religious wars? Charles Kimball (2008), professor of comparative religion at Wake Forest University, offers an answer in his book, *When Religion Becomes Evil*.

Kimball asserts that throughout history people have often "corrupted" traditional religion by aligning it with their violent intentions. Examining the history of world religions, Kimball identifies "five warning signs" that indicate that a religion is being "corrupted": (1) absolute truth claims, (2) blind obedience, (3) ordained historical time, (4) ends justifying means, and (5) declaration of a holy war. Kimball's five warning signs have one highly destructive element in common: exclusion.

The most potent antidote to exclusion is a progressive stage of inclusion—what we consider *pluralism*. With pluralism in mind, I turn to the first part of my assertion.

Interreligious Dialogue Requires Religious Pluralism.

Religious pluralism only exists in an environment where there is religious diversity, but religious diversity alone cannot guarantee religious pluralism. Religious pluralism requires consistent study, reflection, respect, and difficult conversation. Religious pluralism enables us to stand together despite profoundly held differences. While there are many similarities among the core beliefs of the world's religions, religious pluralism is not a "melting pot" in which all religions become the same. The religious pluralism that can be a path to interreligious dialogue demands that we honor the integrity of each faith tradition as a distinctive and legitimate lens for viewing the sacred.

In his book, *How to Win a Cosmic War: God, Globalization, and the End of the War on Terror,* Reza Aslan (2009) argues that the way to end a "cosmic war" is to avoid representing religious conflict as a cosmic battle between "good" and "evil." Aslan insists that by moving war to the cosmic playing field, we elevate war. Rather, he contends that we need to see religious war for what it is; namely, people using religion to justify their worst intentions and deplorable actions. Aslan goes so far as to claim that religious pluralism, especially in local settings, could eliminate religious war. Through a series of compelling examples, Aslan makes a case to support his claim that Muslims become suicide bombers when they are marginalized, alienated, and disaffected because of their religion. If we can reverse this trend, we can move ourselves closer to world peace.

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago, and author of the autobiographical *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Patel, 2007)*,* holds a view similar to that of Aslan. Patel noted that the 9/11 hijackers were examples of what happens when young men are recruited into exclusive and extreme religious fundamentalism[2]. Patel (2007) calls us to embrace religious pluralism. He writes:

> One Hundred years ago, the great African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois famously said, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." I believe that the twenty-first century will be shaped by the question of the faith line. On one side of the faith line are the religious totalitarians. Their conviction is that only one interpretation of

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[2]For a detailed account that provides support for Aslan's and Patel's arguments, please read Lawrence Wright's (2006) Pulitzer Prize winning *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, in which Wright tracked the life journeys of each of the 9/11 hijackers.

one religion is a legitimate way of being, believing, and belonging on earth. Everyone else needs to be cowed, or converted, or condemned, or killed. On the other side of the faith line are the religious pluralists, who hold that people believing in different creeds and belonging to different communities need to learn to live together. (p. xv)

Patel's book chronicles his engaging story of being raised a Muslim, learning about Mormonism in high school, Roman Catholicism in college, and Islam in graduate school. Each of his intensive contacts with various religions eventually brought him to reclaim his religious identity as a Muslim. He drew important lessons from each of the religions that he experienced; for example, from Roman Catholicism, he learned how to bridge religion and social responsibility when, as a student at the University of Illinois, he was a community member of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker house in Champaign. He writes: "The most radical part about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement was the insistence that everything the movement did was guided by a single force: *love*" (Patel, 2007, p. 50).

For a thorough study of the increasing religious diversity in the United States, I strongly recommend Diana Eck's excellent book, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (Eck, 2001). Eck drew on the research of her "Pluralism Project at Harvard," a project built on extensive interviews conducted by her students and herself of religious leaders and groups. Eck points out that religious…

Pluralism is not an ideology, not a leftist scheme, and not free-form relativism. Rather, pluralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences … Pluralism is not a *given*—it must be *created*. (p. 70)

One of the most effective organizations engaged in promoting religious pluralism worldwide is the United Religions Initiative (URI) which provides models and training in creating circles of religious dialogue. Located in San Francisco and founded by William Swing, the former Episcopal Bishop of California and international peace activist, the URI is a …

… global network of locally organized 'Cooperation Circles' acting to promote enduring daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing. Groups are called Cooperation Circles because they are formed by people of different [religious] traditions who come together to initiate acts of interfaith cooperation. (http://www.uri.org/)

The URI defines a Cooperation Circle as the basic unit of URI membership and consists of local or virtual groups that include at least seven members and at least three different religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions. (for more information see: http://www.uri.org/cooperation_circles)

Religious Pluralism Requires Religious Literacy

Stephen Prothero, professor of religious studies at Boston University, writes about the widespread religious illiteracy in the United States in his book *Religious Literacy: What*

Americans Need to Know (Prothero, 2007a). In his essay "Worshiping in Ignorance" published in *Chronicle of Higher Education,* Prothero warns:

> Religious illiteracy is more dangerous [than cultural illiteracy] because religion is the most volatile constituent of culture. Religion has been, in addition to one of the greatest forces for good in world history, one of the greatest forces of evil. (Prothero, 2007b, p. B6)

Later in the same essay, he points out:

> Americans remain profoundly ignorant about their own religions and those of others. According to recent polls, most American adults cannot name even one of the four Gospels, and many high-school seniors think that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. (p. B6)

Prothero affirms that there are integrative connections among interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism, and religious literacy: he writes…

> Each of the world's great religions has wrestled for centuries with the foundational questions of life and death and whatever (if anything) lies beyond. Each has developed sophisticated theologies for making sense of other religions, for regulating war, [and] for fighting injustice. (p. B7)

Prothero points out that as a nation, the US is religiously illiterate; yet eighty percent of its citizens claim to be religious and/or spiritual.

This high percentage of national identification with religion and/or spirituality is reflected at colleges and universities among students who are very comfortable with religion and among faculty members who have an emerging interest in religion. Alexander and Helen Astin and the research team at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA are engaged in the longitudinal project, *Spirituality in Higher Education.* Periodically, they have been publishing reports based on the research from their extensive surveys, and they have published their findings in their book, *Cultivating Spirit: How Colleges Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives.* (Astin, A., Astin, H. & Lindholm, J., 2011). It has been my good fortune to have been a consultant on a mid-point developmental phase of this project. In the phase, teams from ten colleges and universities explored specific ways that they could encourage the spiritual growth of students because these institutions discovered that spiritual growth typically improved students' academic performance and well being.

The UCLA 2003 survey of 112,232 students entering their first year at 236 colleges and universities and 3,680 third year students attending 46 institutions indicated that 80% of the students were interested in religion and/or spirituality and that they believed in the sacredness of life. In addition, 50% were on spiritual quests, 75% were searching for the meaning and purpose of life, 80% regularly attended services and discussed religion with friends, 75% believed in God, 71% were sustained by their religious and spiritual values and beliefs, and 66% prayed regularly.

In 2004-05, the UCLA research team surveyed 65,124 professors at 511 colleges and universities and reported the following results: 81% of the faculty members considered themselves spiritual persons, 70% stated that they were developing a meaningful philosophy of life; 69% sought opportunities to grow spiritually, 68% engaged in self-reflection, and 47% integrated spirituality into their lives. The 2004-05 faculty surveys revealed that faculty members who identified themselves as spiritual and/or religious scored significantly higher (better than 8 to 1) than their non-spiritual and/or religious counterparts in supporting students' personal development; and by a margin of 2 to 1 in favoring student-centered pedagogy and in advocating civic-minded practice and values.

While a majority of faculty members (57%) disagreed with the statement that "The spiritual dimension of faculty members' lives has no place in the academy," a minority (30%) agreed that colleges should be concerned with facilitating students' spiritual development. This determination was consistent with responses from third year students who noted "that their professors have never encouraged discussion of spiritual or religious matters, and never provide opportunities for discussing the meaning or purposes of life." However, many faculty members believed that the following educational goals were 'essential' or 'very important': enhancing self-understanding (60%), developing moral character (59%), and helping students develop personal values (53%). Lastly, the UCLA researchers examined faculty responses by discipline; and they found that the health sciences, humanities, and education were among the highest in believing that higher education should facilitate spiritual development and the social, physical, and biological sciences were among the lowest.

In studying both surveys, the UCLA team concluded that "it appears that colleges and universities are doing little to help students explore these issues and support their search in the sphere of values and beliefs." The team noted that "there is a sharp divide between students' interests and what happens in the classroom" This "sharp divide" raises a critical question for colleges and universities: should they reduce this divide" (for more information see Spirituality in Higher Education website: www.spirituality.ucla.edu).

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, colleges and universities are major keys to developing interreligious dialogue because they can educate their students in religious literacy, a prerequisite for religious pluralism which, in turn, is a perquisite for interreligious dialogue. In short, we cannot understand, appreciate, or respect what we do not know.

Religious Literacy Requires Higher Education

I will suggest three steps that higher education should consider, and I will comment on plans that we are discussing at CIIS to advance religious literacy: 1) offer courses on the diversity of religious and spiritual practices; 2) integrate religion and spirituality throughout the curriculum; 3) increase awareness of and practice in social justice.

The first step that colleges and universities could take to cultivate religious literacy would be to provide students with opportunities to study a variety of religions. I agree with Professor Prothero that colleges and universities should require courses in religion for all academic major programs; and at the very least, they should require a course in comparative world religions.

Many higher education institutions are increasing their elective courses in religious studies, and enrollments have been exceeding expectations. At faith based colleges and universities where students can easily study and practice a religion, students should be encouraged to study religions other than their own.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), the celebrated Trappist monk, wrote passionately about the dangers of knowing only one's own religion. He wrote:

> We must … admit with regret that, in the past, the tendency of Christians has been to regard all non-Christian religious experience as so obviously suspect as to be either too dangerous to study or else not worth the trouble of being studied. (Merton, 1967, p. 204)

Drawing on the traditions of contemplative practice in the East and the West, Merton pointed out that contemplative practice provides a fresh lens for interreligious study:

> One of the most important aspects of interfaith dialogue has …been one of the least discussed; it is the special contribution that the contemplative life can bring to the dialogue, not only among Christians, but also between Christians and the ancient religions of the East…. (p. 203)

Bede Griffiths (1906-1993), a Benedictine monk, established a religious and spiritual center in India near Bangalore. Griffiths enjoyed the respect of the local Hindus as they referred to him as *Sadhu—* a holy man. In his illuminating book, *The Marriage of East and West,* Griffiths (1982), like Merton, made a compelling case for knowing a faith other than one's own. He wrote:

> It was not merely the desire for new ideas which drew me to India, but the desire for a new way of life. I remember writing to a friend at the time: 'I want to discover the other half of my soul.' I had begun to discover that there was something lacking not only in the Western world but in the Western Church. We were living from one half of our soul, from the conscious, rational level and we needed to discover the other half, the unconscious, intuitive dimension. (pp. 7-8)

At CIIS, in response to increasing requests that we offer more courses and public programs reflecting the broad diversity of religions and spiritual traditions, we are increasing our offerings in comparative world religions in our Philosophy and Religion Program as well as in our Public Programs. In fact, we are working with several faculty members in considering ways to expand the presence of interreligious dialogue at CIIS. Also, our Public Programs has been organizing events for the general public that are grounded in interreligious dialogue featuring leading figures such as Karen Armstrong, Coleman Barks, Daisy Kahn, Joan Halifax, and Cornel West among many others.

A second step that colleges and universities can take to advance religious literacy is integrating religion and spirituality throughout the curriculum. In her book *Speaking of Faith: Why Religion Matters and How to Talk about it,* Krista Tippett (2007) rightly notes: "Religion has moved from the side lines to the center of world affairs and American life" (p. 9). It is not in

my opinion a stretch to argue that whether or not people believe in any particular religion, they need to study religion.

An excellent resource for integrating religions into the curriculum is *The Forum on Religion and Ecology*. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, Professors of Religion at Yale and co-directors of the *Forum*, believe that religions need to be in interactive dialogue with academic disciplines (including the natural sciences, ethics, economics, education, public policy, and gender studies) in order to develop comprehensive solutions to global, as well as local, environmental problems. The Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program faculty work closely with Mary Evelyn and John.

Because much of higher education takes place outside the classroom, let us consider a third step that colleges and universities could take: increase awareness of and practice in social justice**.** Through activities such as service learning projects and student internships, we can help students engage in promoting social responsibility. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (2005) has insisted, "The God who gave us the gift of freedom asks us to use it to honor and enhance the freedom of others. God, the ultimate Other, asks us to reach out to the human other" (p.3). Sacks emphasizes his point: "Jewish ethics is refreshingly down-to-earth. If someone is in need, give" (p.5). Sacks recognized the current urgency of charity and social justice: "Now, of all times, we should be holding out the hand of friendship to strangers, help to those in need" (p. 265).

To support students in this endeavor, colleges and universities can encourage campus interreligious and religious groups to live the social responsibility commitments of their spiritual and faith traditions. For example, students can help the homeless, tutor children of underserved populations, visit the abandoned elderly, serve non-profit organizations, and volunteer in community service programs.

Focus on community service at CIIS has been eloquently articulated in the *Beloved Community* initiatives at CIIS. In recognition of our many community service programs especially our six counseling centers, CIIS was invited and has become a member of Campus Compact, an organization that has both a state and a national network of colleges and universities engaged in community service. In spring of 2011, I forwarded the CIIS faculty and staff a preview of President Obama's forthcoming Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. Certainly CIIS is meeting this challenge and we certainly will let President Obama know that we are.

Furthermore, we are currently in the process of developing the Chaudhuri Center with the mission to integrate contemplative practice, interreligious dialogue, and social justice. The Center, in effect, would incorporate all three steps that I have been recommending. The Center recently co-sponsored a lecture series on Interreligious Dialogue and Social Justice at the Interfaith Center at the Presidio. (for more information visit:
http://www.ciis.edu/about_ciis/chaudhuri_center.html).

I will conclude my remarks by citing the last sentence of Karen Armstrong's book, *The Great Transformations: The Beginnings of our Religious Traditions*:

Auschwitz, Bosnia, and the destruction of the World Trade Center revealed the darkness of the human heart. Today, we are living in a tragic world where, as the Greeks knew, there can be no simple answers; the genre of tragedy demands that we learn to see things from other people's points of view. If religion is to bring light to our broken world we need […] to go in search of the lost heart, the spirit of compassion that lies at the core of all our [religious and spiritual] traditions. (Armstrong, 2006, p. 476)

We have a long and complex journey ahead of us if we wish to arrive at pluralistic interreligious dialogue, and higher education can significantly help us negotiate the many and seemingly insurmountable obstacles that stand in our way.

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New Religious Movements, Modern Esoteric Movements, and Integral Consciousness

Constance A. Jones, Ph.D.[1]

Abstract: Sensibilities toward Eastern thought in the West, fostered in large part through the growth of new religious movements, align with the elements of Western esoteric teachings which have appeared in many guises throughout the history of the West and are reemerging in our time. Understanding these sensibilities and their alignment can deepen our appreciation of the foundations of integral consciousness.

Key Words: Esotericism, Integral Consciousness, New Religious Movements.

Introduction

The religious landscape is changing and we are in a particularly advantageous place from which to view these alterations. Not only is California the site of more new religious movements than elsewhere in this country (and perhaps the world), but the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) offers fertile soil and is a veritable greenhouse for change in consciousness. I have studied new religions in America since 1970 and have recently begun to examine esotericism throughout history in the West. I suggest that these two impulses, new religious movements and esoteric movements, may offer insights into our understanding of integral consciousness.

Personal Standpoint

In the early 1970s, when I began to study the sociology of new religions, the larger field of sociology of religion was declining. Many sociologists were predicting that the field of sociology of religion would cease to exist, since the dominant theory of the day was the secularization hypothesis that modern societies would find religion less and less important over time as rational thought and scientific progress would move us away from belief and superstition. The last forty years demonstrate that these predictions were erroneous. We have a burgeoning of religion and

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huge shifts in religious affiliations. Reports of the demise of the sociology of religion were premature and overstated. The sociology of religion is needed more than ever to understand why these changes in religious phenomena are occurring.

The Religious Landscape in the United States

A quick overview of religious affiliations in the U.S. demonstrates what Americans have always known that religion matters. In the traditional religions of this country (Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism) conservative groups are growing and liberal groups are declining in membership. In the world of Protestantism, liberal denominations (such as Episcopal and Methodist) are declining, while conservative denominations (such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and other evangelical churches) are growing. Eastern religious beliefs and practices, particularly those of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sikhism, and Jainism, are proliferating in the larger culture, even if formal membership grows only slightly or not at all. Today, almost everyone in this society knows the meanings of religious concepts from the East, such as karma and reincarnation. But only two generations ago, few Americans knew these concepts, or the basics of astrology, Tarot, or the I-Ching.

New Religious Movements

The breadth of belief and practice demonstrated in new religious movements in this country is immense. Of particular interest to us are the ancient traditions from the East that appeared in abundance after the Asian Exclusion Act was repealed in 1965. The U.S. saw many teachers from Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Taoism, and Sufism appear and attract devotees to Eastern beliefs and practices. Interestingly, some of the oldest religious traditions on earth are classified sociologically as "new religions" in the U.S. because they entered the mainstream culture in the last 100 or so years. There has also been a reclaiming (some would say a revitalization) of indigenous spirituality centered around pagan thought and practice, goddess spirituality, and renewed connection to nature through shamanism and entheogens.

Other movements, such as Scientology, Christian Science, UFO groups, and channelers claim to unite religion and science and to use empirical methods to bolster faith and a spiritual cosmology. New Age groups combine these distinctive threads into innovative forms that seem to demonstrate endless permutations. Even newer are the growing fundamentalist movements in the major world religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and even Hinduism.

This brief sketch of the panoply of new religious impulses is cursory, but telling. What we see is a growing eclecticism among those who accept liberal versions of traditional religions. It is not uncommon to find individuals who simultaneously study Kaballah, attend an Episcopal church, go to Buddhist retreats, visit shamans in Peru, have Tarot readings, practice yoga, and meditate. This movement toward eclecticism and the privatizing of religion has long been noted by scholars of religion. In the 60's, Thomas Luckmann (1967) called this form of spirituality "the invisible religion"; in the 70's Agehananda Bharati (1976, p. 11) referred to the "aloha-amigo" syndrome, which he described as "pathological eclecticism"; and in the 80's, Robert Bellah (1985) coined the term "Sheilaism". Each term refers to the assertion that religion is essentially a

private matter to be constructed idiosyncratically and that no particular constraint is placed on individuals by a historic church or religious community.

Bellah (1986) found in the 1980s that 80% of Americans agreed with the statement: "an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches of synagogues"(p. 2). When such privatism combines with eclecticism, we see a 'make your own' religion, as each person can pick and choose what he or she prefers from the smorgasbord of beliefs and practices that is openly available. Among some, the ability 'to make your own' religion has also become valorized under the term "spirituality", as distinct from religion. Others define the eclecticism of the smorgasbord as pathological; especially if, as most traditions assert, one must go deeply into one tradition to benefit from its wisdom and transformative promise.

Also new, but in opposition to this sampling at the smorgasbord of belief and practice, is an entrenchment in various traditions in order to preserve what is considered a "pure" but threatened religious tradition, usually to a depth of conservatism and rejection of interfaith dialogue that supersedes any previous stage in the tradition. This phenomenon includes the growing fundamentalisms in several world religions, a decidedly important trend—but not part of our consideration here—because the fundamentalist impulse of exclusivism runs counter to the impulse toward integral consciousness.

Esotericism

Esotericism, broadly understood as the hidden side of any institutionalized religious tradition, has many definitions. For our purposes, we emphasize the personal struggle for progressive elucidation at multiple levels of reality. Esotericism involves submitting oneself to a conscious and transcendent reality that is contacted within the self. It is a psychological enterprise that includes both the sacred and the profane in a quest for self-knowledge, which does not depend upon acceptance of any system of belief or morality. Although the site of transformation is the psyche, esotericism relies on communities of practice and teachers to provide conditions for transformation. Thus, the esoteric enterprise cannot be completely privatized. Esotericism involves a way of engagement quite distinct from institutionalized or exoteric religion.

Exoteric religion contrasts with esotericism in that traditional exoteric religion in the West defines the human condition as one of sin and the goal of life as salvation—this is particularly true of Christianity. The means to salvation include belief, faith, and doctrinal orthodoxy. We even refer to individuals who practice a religion as 'believers'. Western exoteric religion is dualistic, dividing morality into good and bad elements and cosmology into the creator and the created. Exoteric religion involves membership in an institution (e.g. church, synagogue, or mosque) that promotes practices and rituals derived from faith and belief.

Esotericism, on the other hand, defines the human condition as one of ignorance and fragmentation and the goal of life as gnosis, evolution, and transformation, with different degrees of emphasis on these goals in various traditions. The means to transformation include inquiry, self-observation, knowledge, and integration of the parts of the self into a whole. Esoteric religion is non-dual, emphasizing universalistic themes; members can be in all faiths. Instead of membership in a religious institution, esotericists belong to schools and follow a teaching rather

than a belief system. Their practice is more akin to an exploratory inquiry than a faith-based orthodoxy. Instead of being a "believer," an esotericist is more properly termed a 'student.'[2]

What does the shift from exoteric religious belief to new religions and esotericism signal? The answer is multi-faceted and requires considerable explanation. I point here to only a few themes that are salient for our consideration because these themes also participate in what we identify as integral consciousness.

How New Religions and Esotericism Contribute to Integral Consciousness

The search begins as a yearning for authenticity. We are not as we can be and in our fragmented and conflicted state, we are not whole. We are able to be greater and are called to be greater than we are. We sense a personal obligation to search for a change in our state of being. Some impulse calls for a rebellion against the unresolved compartmentalization and contradictions in modern society, in all of its manifestations—religion, family, education, science, ethics, art, etc. In a quest for wholeness, many attempts are made, sometimes misguided, to grapple with the ethical and metaphysical relativism that defines our age.

A mechanistic model of the universe no longer suffices. We learn from indigenous, pagan, and Eastern traditions that the universe is not inanimate, but rather conscious and that the universe constitutes a teaching in itself. Nature is thus living and conscious and we participate in its unity, not as separate entities, but as fractals of a whole. We learn that study of our psychology and study of the cosmos are mutually reinforcing. In fact, one learns about oneself through knowledge of the workings of the larger cosmos. We begin to see relationships and identity between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Individual healing reflects cosmic principles, as in the alchemical axiom 'as above, so below'.

Although acutely aware of the many differences among us, we recognize a universalizing principle that rises above sectarianism to affirm that all humans are in a common struggle for liberation from the bondage of conditioning. In recognition that we can be liberated only after intense study of ourselves, we have an impulse to unite with others in an effort, a work, to make more of ourselves and our communities than we can even comprehend at this point. A local exemplar of this impulse is the Cultural Integration Fellowship[3] in San Francisco founded by Haridas Chaudhuri. In our intent to transform self and society, we find that our efforts need to be trans-religious, trans-cultural, and trans-gender. Frithjof Schuon (1984) refers to the transcendent unity of religions; Robert Bellah (1986) asserts that "the religious heritage of the human species is one"(p.3). Somehow we reckon that we are deeply interdependent.

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[2] Western esoteric movements have existed much like an underground stream throughout Western history, surfacing in distinct places and times, but with similar principles and practices. A few examples to illustrate the breadth of esotericism include: Essenes, Greek Mystery Cults, Pythagoreanism, Kaballah, Sufism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Alchemy, Hermeticism, and groups following specific teachers such as Jacob Boehme, Rene Guenon, G.I. Gurdjieff, and Adyashanti.
[3] for more information see: http://www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org/

Part of the universalizing principle is a rejection of partisan, sectarian religious tenets that have been integral to the American worldview. The traditional civil religion that saw America as God's new Israel and as the exemplar of absolute good is suffering a crisis of legitimacy. As is the Protestant Ethic—also known as the American Success Ethic—which defines poverty as disreputable and justifies accumulation of wealth. In place of these divisive belief systems that justify social and cultural hegemony without a trace of self-criticism, we find an ethic of community arising in a number of new religious forms. We recognize a dimension of humanity that the modern secular world denies and we acknowledge a quest for direct experience of this dimension, variously referred to as the divine, the sacred, the transcendent, the mysterious, the participatory. In reaction to the emotional blandness of the modern world, an impulse arises to integrate body, mind, spirit, and emotions. Wholeness requires that we honor the teachings of the past through myth and story and discover a sacred dimension to humanity that calls for expression.

Similarly, the impulse toward integral consciousness originates from a higher level of ourselves, a level that is 'esoteric', hidden or inaccessible to us because we habitually identify with a surface consciousness that is fragmented, isolated and alone. How do we search for this authenticity, this integrity of being? One fundamental esoteric principle is that we are not alone, that there exists a locus of conscious energy that calls to us and speaks to us through the diversity of forms we call 'art', 'religion' and even 'science', provided we know how to listen with a more whole, integral self. What we have not understood and what is problematic is that the attention we bring to these areas of interest is always insufficient because it is always the same fragmented attention we occupy daily in our ordinary state. Attention is not theoretical but so long as it evades itself, allows itself to become absorbed in its various momentary interests to the exclusion of its integral potential, we necessarily suffer the consequences of a fragmented and incomplete existence.

All of these impulses constitute a desire for a religion or a teaching that makes a difference in our everyday lives. It is not enough to be a nominal participant in a faith-based institution. Spending one hour on Sunday morning in church, going to High Holy Days each year or observing Namas each day does not satisfy the urge to change one's state of being. To change, to transform, to transmute, to integrate, to individuate are processes that require more than nominal allegiance. They require diligence and energy.

I conclude by citing Jacob Needleman, "What we find in these movements is the hope of a worldview for modern people, a sense of the wholeness and purposiveness of reality within which individual human beings are called to discover their own natural place, bringing with them everything of their minds, hearts, and instincts. This impulse has the virtue of joining the inner life of each person in all its possible levels to the world of nature and beyond, even to the Highest" (Faivre and Needleman, 1995, pp. xxiv-xxv).

In these ways, the deeper aspects of the new religious phenomena represent the reemergence of esotericism in our time and contribute to the foundations of integral consciousness.

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Rethinking the Future of World Religion:[1]
A Conversation with Jorge N. Ferrer[2]

Bahman A.K. Shirazi

When it comes to religious consciousness, the turn of the 21st century presents an unprecedented and challenging time in human history. On the one hand, the long-standing chasm between premodern theocentric religious traditions, and the modern anthropocentric, scientistic, and materialistic worldviews is widening. On the other hand, unlike what some may have anticipated, not only religion and spirituality are not on the decline, they are as strong as they have ever been.

Hundreds of new religions, cults, sects, and spiritual communities have emerged in recent decades. These new religious movements, along with globalization of religion, multiple-religion explorations, ecumenical services, religious syncretism, and secular spiritual orientations are among the many trends that shape today's religious landscape. Despite the widespread materialism in a technology-dominated world, we live in times of rich spiritual diversity, experimentation, and innovation. Our postmodern world seems to be evolving at an increasingly accelerated rate. While some are very comfortable moving along at such a fast pace, others, unable to cope with this rapid change, have either resorted back to religious fundamentalism, or have become profoundly confused and disenchanted.

Jorge Ferrer is one of few thinkers who have tried to map out the current landscape: He reflects on whether humanity will ultimately converge into one single religion, or will it continue to diversify into numerous forms of spiritual expression? Or perhaps, a middle path capable of reconciling the human longing for spiritual unity, on the one hand, and the developmental and evolutionary gravitation toward spiritual individuation and differentiation, on the other hand, is more likely?

In this interview he discusses four possible scenarios for the future of religion: global religion; mutual transformation of religions; interspiritual wisdom; and spirituality without religion—*as well as discussing his own participatory vision.*

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BS: *Thank you very much for this interview! I would like to start on a personal note regarding your own background in terms of religion and spirituality. Were you brought up religious or secular? Were you ever part of a religious community?*

JF: I was born in Barcelona, Spain, and was educated in a Catholic school (Maristas la Imaculada) where the object of devotion was not God, but the Virgin Mary. In retrospect, I can see how this impacted my spiritual orientation, which could be seen as more feminine, organic, and embodied than most traditional ones. Thus, I had twelve years of elementary and high school Christian education that was less rigid and more liberal than the one offered by other orders such as the Jesuits.

During my school years, I had some unusual experiences such as states of absorption or trance in the classroom. I remember that a teacher once abruptly woke me up during one of those trances and I broke up crying. I was sent to the school psychologist to see if I was epileptic—which was not the case. Then during my pre-adolescence I had numerous out-of-body experiences. These nonordinary experiences, as well as an increasing awareness of psychological wounds, impelled me to study psychology.

BS: *So you were already aware of these psychological issues?*

JF: I was aware of a number of energetic blocks and associated psychological neuroses by the time I was seventeen years old. I was also fascinated by those nonordinary experiences, so I went into psychology to both try to understand them, and heal myself. Mainstream psychology in Spain was then dominated by cognitive psychology and neuroscience, which provided neither answers to my questions nor any healing. Thus, I launched a personal search through autodidactic study. I read most of Freud's *Collected Works* and from there I went on to read Jung and Fromm. Reading Fromm, Suzuki, and de Martino's *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* was a turning point in my search. That was my first contact with Eastern philosophies, which in turn led me to Alan Watts and eventually to the field of transpersonal psychology. At that time, I also joined a Hindu meditation group in Barcelona called the Brahma Kumaris—do you know them?

BS: *Yes, they have a center in San Francisco too.*

JF: I was with them for about half a year and had beautiful meditative experiences, but some aspects of the group's philosophy, such as apocalyptic thinking and the belief that "they would be the only ones who would be saved", didn't sit well with me. Since I appreciated Zen, I moved on to study with the female Korean Zen teacher Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim for a couple of years in Barcelona.

BS: *Were you in college at this time?*

JF: Yes, I was at the university studying psychology. Korean Zen is influenced by both Taoism and shamanism and the practice involved not only meditation, but also energy work, mantras, and magic. I was still nineteen when my teacher proposed to me to move to her center and become celibate for three years. At that time, however, what I actually needed was to explore and heal my sexuality. It was obvious that my Zen teacher, who was supposed to be a psychic reader, 'did not get it'. I left her school, entered psychotherapy, and eventually attended workshops to explore my sexuality, which were deeply healing and liberating. This event is at the root of my valuing my internal spiritual authority over external sources such as scriptures, doctrines, or spiritual teachers. Interestingly, much later I naturally entered a period of almost three years of celibacy that was both effortless and profoundly transformative. All this led me to conclude that a healthy celibacy cannot emerge from a mental or even spiritual imposition upon our primary world, but should rather organically flow from the inner dynamics of our sexual energy.

During this time I also had some very formative experiences with psychedelics. I experimented with combining psychedelics and meditation and continued psychotherapy. When I arrived in the U.S. in 1993, I attended individual and group psychotherapy, and immersed myself in meditation practices such as vipassana at Spirit Rock center and Zen practice with Joan Halifax (who is ordained in Thich Nhat Hahn's Order of Interbeing). For a time, Joan became the closest to having a traditional spiritual teacher I have ever had. At that time, she used to teach at CIIS and I also went to her center '*Upaya'* in New Mexico to do a vision quest under her guidance.

Later on, I connected with Donald Rothberg and became a member of the *Buddhist Peace Fellowship*'s (BPF) *Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement* (BASE) for a few years, doing volunteering service with homeless Latino women in the Mission district of San Francisco. Thus, for about 10-12 years I was affiliated with various kinds of Buddhist practice from Korean Zen to Thich Nhat Hahn's Zen to Theravadin vipassana and to socially engaged Buddhism. I also attended many talks by Tibetan Buddhist teachers and regularly practiced *tonglen* (giving and taking suffering) and other Tibetan practices, but never studied Tibetan Buddhism formally.

I should add here that right before coming to the U.S. I had my first encounter with the body of work called *Holistic Sexuality*, co-created by Ramon V. Albareda and Marina T. Romero. I was doing a personality study with Ramon when he invited me to a Holistic Sexuality workshop. The workshop was so powerful that for a few years I would go back for more in the summers, sometimes with other CIIS students. This work has been very important for me and provided essential experiential seeds for my participatory approach to spiritual growth. Eventually, I invited Marina to the States and for a few years I became involved in the facilitation of this work at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), Esalen Institute, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP), and other institutions. Although Buddhist practice had given me a lot, I experienced a lack of vitality in Buddhist circles that was not nourishing my soul. Holistic Sexuality was the perfect remedy and provided the right balance for my integral practice.

Finally, shamanism has also been very influential in my spiritual practice. Starting from intensive reading on the topic in Spain, I then studied it with Joan Halifax (whose teachings combine Buddhism and shamanism), and worked with Mexican mushrooms and ayahuasca for many years in both the United States and South America. About five years ago, I came across San Pedro (Wachuma) in Peru and felt a deeper calling I had never felt with other plants. Since then, San Pedro has become a very important plant teacher for me.

BS: *In what way is the future of religion important to your worldview and current work?*

JF: Well, whether in my approach to intimate relations or the way I live by, I have always been naturally attuned to what is next—what is unfolding. I do not get too excited about what has already happened, but more about what is emerging and is new. Thus I am interested in the evolutionary spirituality that Sri Aurobindo, Haridas Chaudhuri, Ken Wilber, and many others talk about—which gives a sense of adventure to both being alive and spiritual inquiry. It is in this context that I am interested in the future of religion.

BS: *You spoke about four scenarios in your presentation. In the first scenario you talked about* the emergence of a global religion *or a single world faith for humankind—the possibility of a global religion where either one religion will come to dominate others, or a synthesis of many or most traditions will emerge realizing the dream of a global spirituality; and you said that this scenario is not likely. Is this just a hypothetical possibility or is there more to this beyond a desire on the part of some religion for it to prevail over others?*

JF: I think that most religious traditions explicitly or implicitly aspire to have their creed prevail over the rest, because they genuinely believe that it is the best; that is, it represents the highest truth and is good for everybody. In some cases, this attitude (which I have called "spiritual narcissism") manifests as problematic fanaticism, in others simply as a candid belief. Spiritual narcissism is pandemic and not necessarily associated with a narcissistic personality.

For example, the Dalai Lama is very likely among the least personally narcissistic, but he firmly believes that his particular school of Tibetan Buddhism holds a higher truth than any other Buddhist school or religion. He supports a diversity of religions on psychological grounds (i.e., on the basis that people have different psychological dispositions), but he still believes that it is a temporary situation, and that, after the necessary reincarnations people will come to realize the superior truth maintained by his school.

BS: *Also for example, in Islam there is a belief that it is the last religion and the last word!*

JF: Exactly. I believe this situation invites us to wake up to the possibility that there might be another way to hold the plurality of religions beyond believing that one must own the

highest truth. I don't believe that any of the existing religions will become global, in part because there is tremendous spiritual diversification, even within each religion. For example, which particular kind of Buddhism would prevail, as they are fighting internally over doctrinal issues? And the same is true with other religions.

In my view, the evolutionary move towards differentiation is positive and a sign of spiritual creativity. If spiritual diversification is a good thing, then the whole dream of a global religion becomes both illusory and misleading. If there is anything that might become global, it may take the form of a number of interreligious principles that all good-hearted people might agree upon.

BS: *Are many of the other scenarios that you talked about more like a reaction to this first scenario?*

JF: Exactly, many are a reaction to spiritual narcissism, the deep-seated belief that one's spiritual choices are best for everybody.

BS: *Yes, it is like a kind of provincialism—as all of these religions started as local practices.*

JF: Exactly, this is also true with Ken Wilber's proposal in transpersonal and integral studies. He articulates a spiritual meta-framework that is supposed to be universal, global, and truest, so his model functions like a dogmatic religion—the Wilberian-integral religion.

BS: *You refer to the second scenario as the* mutual transformation of religions, *where religious traditions conserve their identity but are deeply and perpetually transformed through a variety of interreligious exchanges. The distinctive feature here is that religious cross-pollination will lead to spiritual creative unions in which diversity is not erased, but rather intensified. You maintain that this vision is consistent with not only the adoption of practices from other traditions by members of different faith communities, but also with the deepening or re-envisioning of one's own tradition in light of other religious perspective.*

You have given examples of this type of religious syncretism: the Haitian Vodou's blending of Christianity and African traditions or the Brazilian Santo Daime Church's incorporation of the indigenous use of ayahuasca into a Christian container. You maintain that currently this religious cross-fertilization is visibly taking place in interfaith dialogue, the New Age movement, and a number of eclectic and integrative spiritual groups. You have also included in this category the growing phenomenon of "multiple religious participation," in which an individual partakes in the practices and belief systems of more than one tradition, which can potentially result in the renewal of existing religious traditions through cross-cultural encounters

So, this seems to be the next natural reaction to, or movement from, the first scenario. You mentioned that interreligious dialogues are a part of this trend. Many people say that the interreligious dialogues that they have seen are more about stating your case, honoring or acknowledging the other, but sticking to your own truth and boundaries. I was wondering if you were inspired by certain kinds of interreligious dialogues that go further than that and the parties are really mutually interested in one another?

JF: I have read a lot about interreligious dialogue and attended a number of interreligious encounters, including the Parliament of the World Religions and others organized by Religions for Peace at the United Nations.

There are a variety of attitudes within the interfaith movement. What you described is a kind of tolerant dialogue in which people have an interest in each other but there are clear limits regarding how deeply transformative the dialogue can be. In some circles interreligious dialogue moved beyond that. In many cases, for example, Christians not only gain a deep understanding of say Buddhism, but also state that such understanding helped them to recognize aspects of Christianity that they would have otherwise overlooked. In addition, there are increasing numbers of interfaith experiments that move beyond verbal dialogue to include exchange of spiritual practices.

Interestingly, perhaps because of their self-critical postcolonial awareness, Christians seem to be the ones more open to these kinds of deeply transformative exchanges. What I see in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue is that many Christian theologians are ready to transform Christian doctrine through engagement of Buddhist teachings, but this is not always the case in the other direction. In any event, this is the direction I would like to see the dialogue move forward—toward mutual transformations not just at the level of doctrine, but also of spiritual practice. The reason for that is that I believe that different traditions have stressed, cultivated, and developed different human potentials.

BS: *Exactly, each tradition seems to have mastered a certain aspect of reality or a part of the larger whole.*

JF: And this cross-pollination can allow different traditions to remain in their identities and simultaneously be enriched by contact with other religions. One phenomenon that fascinates me is cross-fertilization at the visionary level. There are the levels of doctrine and practice, but what about the visionary, ontological, or metaphysical levels? In some contemporary ayahuasca ceremonies, for example, people access visionary worlds that combine indigenous and Christian motifs. I think we are going to see more of that in years to come. What people bring with them to these dialogs is key, and many involved in interreligious dialogues are practicing more than one tradition.

BS: *Do you think practicing more than one religion is just a temporary phase? Or is it really possible to continue with multiple traditions?*

JF: I think it's perfectly possible. It is well documented in individual biographical cases, but also in the case of entire societies, such as contemporary Japan. Many Japanese people practice a combination of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism side by side. They tend to compartmentalize it; for example, Shintoism for nature, Buddhism for the self, and Confucianism for politics. On an individual level, Raimon Panikkar's case comes quickly to mind. He was both a Christian priest and Hindu *sanyasin*, and his influential approach to interreligious dialogue emerged from his own intra-religious dialogue.

BS*:   This has also been true in the past, for example, in Southeast Asia the animistic and indigenous traditions are just part of the Buddhist religion today. Buddhism has not washed over them and somehow has incorporated the older traditions into its religious practice, so it's possible that this will continue.*

JF: The phenomenon of "multiple religious participation" is increasing and has been well documented sociologically. For example, Judaism and Buddhism seem to somehow easily go together; many Buddhist teachers in the United States were Jewish by birth and there are many Jewish people who practice Buddhism.

BS*:   One individual explained the reason for this being that in Judaic theology there is not enough explicit acknowledgement of human suffering; and that Judaism tends to be a life-celebratory and God-glorifying tradition. So there is little acknowledgment of personal suffering in Judaism—and thus attraction to Buddhism.*

JF: I do believe that many people have the psychospiritual capability to hold different beliefs and practices in their lives. What we don't know is whether the phenomenon we are seeing now will eventually lead to syncretic religions or more to situations like the one in Japan.

BS*:   It seems that if there is a certain element of truth in any faith, it should withstand the test of time, and the reason for something to disappear would be its inability to hold true over the course of evolution of consciousness.*

*   In the third scenario you talked about the affirmation of interspiritual wisdom emerging from spiritual teachings, principles, and values endorsed by all religious groups and traditions. You have mentioned a number of people whose philosophy falls under this category such as Hans Küng's proposal for a global ethics, or the work of Christian author Wayne Teasdale who proposed a universal mysticism grounded in the practice of "interspirituality". Additional examples you have given are Beverly Lanzetta's proposal for an "intercontemplative" global spirituality that affirms the interdependence of spiritual principles giving birth to new spiritual paths, and Robert Forman's "trans-traditional spirituality" that feeds on the teachings of all religious traditions but is not restricted by the confines of any particular credo.*

This may sound somewhat like the previous scenario, so I was wondering if you could elaborate on the difference? Is this true more at one end of the spectrum or limited to certain individuals? Is it starting to happen more and more?

JF: As you mentioned, this proposal has been articulated by a number of scholar-practitioners such as Brother Wayne Teasdale and Beverly Lanzetta, who were very engaged in the interfaith dialogue. In a way it is connected to the second scenario; their proponents hope or believe that the interfaith dialogue will lead to agreement upon a certain number of spiritual teachings or understandings such as the ethical principles of Hans Küng's Global Ethics. But this proposal goes farther than just ethics to include core spiritual teachings or doctrines.

I am fascinated by this proposal and would like to see it unfold. I can see how this might be more feasible with ethics than core spiritual doctrines, which I'm rather skeptical about, given the huge doctrinal differences among traditions.

BS*:   Küng got his license to teach revoked by the Vatican!*

JF: Still, I could envision that a minimum of core shared principles might emerge in the future.

BS*:   It seems like a pragmatic possibility; as these religious worlds come together, there will be some obvious issues and people can agree upon some shared realities regardless of the deeper end of these philosophies and develop a foundation on that pragmatic level.*

JF: I am a spiritual pragmatist and I'm interested in what works for people. In terms of the validity of doctrines, I also take a more pragmatic approach inspired by the Buddhist teaching of "skillful means" (*upaya*). I posit that spiritual teachings are valid insofar as they work; that is, insofar as they help people become less self-centered, create wholesome communities, lead to better relations with the environment, and so forth. This is connected to my non-objectivist participatory approach to spiritual truth.

BS*:   Do you see a possibility that while on the exoteric side world religions will stay as diverse as they are today, on the esoteric level there will be more mutual understandings in such a way that will influence the exoteric level—the emphasis being on the latter, since I have seen many individuals on the contemplative side fairly easily get along. But do you think that it will affect a larger population and the effect would disseminate through the mainstream traditions themselves?*

JF: I have no doubt that the more mystical or contemplative strands of religions cultivate their traditions' living fire, and that those practitioners tend to become beautiful human beings. But this is different from the perennial assertion that there is greater agreement in spiritual doctrine and truth at the esoteric or mystical dimension of the traditions.

The whole esoteric/exoteric distinction is problematic in many ways. I think that the Schuon-Smith hypothesis is erroneous and it does not stand against historical, textual and phenomenological evidence. Even within a single tradition, disagreements among contemplative practitioners abound. Take Buddhism for example: Zen and Tibetan Buddhist monks strongly disagree about the ultimate nature of reality; are they not considered Buddhist esoteric or mystical practitioners?

Although I question the hypothesis, contemplative practitioners do seem to get along better among themselves than believers who engage in religion on conceptual and doctrinal levels, which tends to lean more easily to fanaticism (and this is not to say that mystics cannot be religiously zealous!).

BS: *I recall from Haridas Chaudhuri's book: Modern Man's Religion, that he made a distinction between the 'universalist individual' within a religious tradition—since all of the major religions have a universal outlook and a person within that tradition could reach or embody the universal teachings, higher ethics and values etc.—and a 'universal religion'.*

JF: My dream or fantasy is that those practitioners get along, appreciate each other, and are engaged in spiritual cross-fertilization, but we know that many are actually trying to convert the other; you know that this happens even within the mystical branches.

So, can we embrace all this incredible spiritual diversity as something positive? Can we contemplate that different traditions may have found different soteriological solutions for the human dilemma, and that they may be advancing the evolutionary creativity of Being in different directions?

If we accept this view, there may be overlapping qualities among traditions, but we don't need to come to identical agreements, truths, or principles. These kinds of (failed) attempts have plagued the religious history of humankind. In my view, the objectivist perspective about spiritual truth underlying these attempts is not very generous regarding the creativity of spiritual unfolding.

BS: *There seems to be strong tendencies to stick to the form of things—the way things are presented on the outer level—and the problem you are talking about is that perhaps we can get along on a more essential level, but there is still a tendency to understand that essence in the familiar forms and not recognize it in the outer forms of other traditions.*

JF: That's true and my sense is that at the essential level there are important differences too. For example, when Theravada Buddhists talk about *sunyata* (emptiness) and Mahayana Buddhists talk about the *dharmakaya,* or Christians talk about God-the-Father, they are talking about radically different things.

BS: *There was a tendency thirty or forty years ago to say that all religions have a common core; it was well intentioned toward bringing about peace.*

But at the same time I have been thinking that certain kinds of layers might exist starting with forms on the outermost level, and then deeper or underlying structures that some phenomenologists are interested in; and then there is the meaning level, and deeper within there is the essence or essential layer. We may not know what 'essence' really means but perhaps 'essence' of, let say, water can take many forms and names in different languages and at the chemical level we refer to it as H₂O. But when you taste or experience water there may be many dimensions to that experience.

JF: In my work I advocate for the existence of diversity beyond form, that is, at those essential, cosmological, or metaphysical levels. However, I also believe that we can legitimately talk about a mystery out of which everything arises. Perhaps this mystery is closer to what you call the essential quality of all religions, but as soon as anyone 'essentializes' the mystery in terms of particular qualities (e.g., empty, personal, nondual, etc.), the challenges of spiritual pluralism re-emerge.

BS: *Yes, especially if it is done prematurely. I am still working with a gradient of these different levels in terms of epistemology or ways of knowing with respect to various levels. For example, there is outer empiricism, and also inner empiricism and eventually more direct or immediate ways of knowing pertaining to the innermost levels. So there may be something there, but it certainly is not that simple and they cannot be equalized simplistically.*

JF: Exactly, and it is important to consider that such essence that we may think of as primordial may be also evolving with us through co-creative participation! For example, nondual consciousness might be the origin of things, but that doesn't mean that that's where we want to go spiritually speaking. Taking such origin as a goal might be actually regressive in an evolutionary context. We might be able to access such foundation of existence, but my question is, where do we want to go with that today?

BS: *The last scenario before we get into the participatory paradigm is spirituality without religion. You include in this scenario a number of contemporary developments—from secular to postmodern, and from naturalistic to New Age spiritualities—that aim for the cultivation of a spiritual life free from traditional religious dogmas and/or transcendent or supernatural beliefs.*

You consider postmodern spiritualities, which remain agnostic about supernatural or transcendent sources of religion, and the New Age movement that tends to uncritically accept them, as the two most prominent trends that value the primacy of individual choice and experience, criticize the "received" religious doctrines and authoritarian institutions, and call for a democratization of spirit and a direct path to the divine. Lastly in this scenario, you included modern religious quests, secular surrogates for religion, and

postsecular spiritualities that use mottos such as "spiritual but not religious", "religion without religion," and "believing without belonging."

Many people nowadays talk about being spiritual, but not religious. What is your own view on the difference between spirituality and religiosity?

JF: My sense is that this distinction has practical value for people who have been brought up in religious contexts that were rather oppressive. In those cases, the distinction can allow such individuals to embrace spiritual values free from dogmatic specters.

Historically, there is a distinction between the terms *spirituality* and *religion*. For example, in the history of Christianity the term *spirituality* came to be used to refer to the more personal, affective, and experiential dimensions of religion— vs. its more communal, cognitive, liturgical, and doctrinal aspects.

But when it comes to judge whether particular groups or individuals are religious or spiritual, the distinction doesn't make much sense. Practitioners from the world traditions are usually considered to be religious, whereas many operating outside traditions identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious". But, to what extent are Christian monks (who in my experience can be non-dogmatic about Christian doctrine) less spiritual than New Age practitioners (who can hold their spiritual beliefs rather dogmatically)? Are those New Age people religious or spiritual? It seems like the dividing line here is between being doctrinal or dogmatic (religious) and practicing a more open-ended path (spiritual), and I think this can be helpful. But at the same time I don't think that we can use this distinction for mapping or categorizing. Why would one want to categorize someone as religious, and not spiritual, if she belongs to an organized religion? That doesn't make sense! But again, the distinction can have practical value for individuals who have been oppressed by an organized religion and want to take up a spiritual path.

BS: *So, I wonder if the distinction between exoteric and esoteric would be more meaningful in terms of 'religion vs. spirituality', where religious refers to the exoteric level, and spirituality to the esoteric?*

JF: My sense is that the distinction you are referring to does have some validity, but I hesitate to use the terms *spirituality* and *religiosity* as a way to distinguish mystical from non-mystical practitioners. You see, the overwhelming majority of mystics of the past considered themselves to be *very* religious; so who are we to say that they are "spiritual but not religious" according to our modern categories? The distinction is important but I wouldn't use those terms to make it.

BS: *Are there experiential illuminations that mark the exoteric/esoteric distinction?*

JF:　　There are actual experiential illuminations, as well as degrees of apprehension of spiritual truths in all religions; but again I would not use these terms as distinguishing categories.

BS:　　*In your* participatory *paradigm religious worlds and experiences are understood as co-created and emerging from the interactions of the entire range of human faculties: rational, imaginal, erotic, somatic, and so forth. Here you emphasize a shift from searching for spiritual unity in a global religion organized around a single vision, to recognizing an already existent spiritual human family that branches out in numerous directions from the same creative source. In other words, religious people may be able to find their longed-for unity not so much in an all-encompassing megasystem or superreligion, but in their common roots—that is, in that deep bond constituted by the undetermined creative power of spirit, life, and/or the cosmos in which all traditions participate in the bringing forth of their spiritual insights and cosmologies.*

You have said that in this scenario, it will no longer be a contested issue whether practitioners endorse a theistic, nondual, or naturalistic account of the mystery, or whether their chosen path of spiritual cultivation is meditation, social engagement, conscious parenting, entheogenic shamanism, or communion with nature. The new spiritual common ground will be the degree to which each spiritual path fosters overcoming of self-centeredness and a fully embodied integration that make us not only more sensitive to the needs of others, nature, and the world, but also more effective agents of cultural and planetary transformation in whatever contexts and measure life or spirit calls us to work.

This sounds like a whole-person or integral orientation. So I was wondering if there are participatory models that you are aware of that don't necessarily include this level of depth and breadth, and is that your contribution to bring the whole-person orientation into the participatory paradigm?

JF:　　Yes, there are various participatory models that emphasize different things. John Heron's work, for example, stresses the political dimension, although he has a holistic view of the person too. My work with Holistic Sexuality is very important here. In this approach, the spiritual path unfolds through the co-creative participation of all human attributes and ways of knowing (i.e., vital, somatic, emotional, mental, contemplative, etc.) in a spiritual power or creative dynamism of life or the cosmos.

BS:　　*That seems to be the key as you bring the whole person into the relationship. One can have all kinds of interactions and transactions, and even relationships, without engaging the whole person!*

JF:　　In the context of a participatory worldview, we could say that everyone *always already* participates in the creative unfolding of life, the cosmos, and/or the mystery. However, we can talk about different degrees of participation and also different gradations of

participatory awareness. Owen Barfield's distinction between original (or unconscious) participation vs. final (or conscious) participation was influential for me here. Degree of participatory consciousness is as important as the engagement of the whole person.

Later I learned that other approaches such as integral yoga have similar aims. As you know from our previous conversations, I feel that Sri Aurobindo de-emphasized the importance of the vital world and sexuality for a fully embodied spiritual participation—although I know that Chaudhuri appreciated better the integration of sexuality and spirituality. My sense is that the participatory paradigm is an academic and spiritual sensibility that each scholar or practitioner can shape in unique directions. In general, this sensibility could be said to stress the embodied, integrative, inquiry-driven, and relational dimensions of spirituality.

BS: *One might say that in the traditional religious settings there has been a lot of emphasis on the social dimension; however, the religious traditions do not emphasize the subjective, the inner experiential dimension. In reading some of your works one might think that you emphasize the subjective dimension, the experiential dimension, but you are coming into that in a different way— more consciously.*

JF: It could also be said that my work expands the value of the subjective dimension by including experiential dimensions that have been previously suppressed in religious inquiry, such as the body and sexuality. At the same time, its relational emphasis underlines the inter-subjective dimension of spiritual practice and understanding. Our subjectivity is co-created through inter-subjective engagements.

BS: *Haridas Chaudhuri has this simple teaching on the triadic principle of* uniqueness, relatedness *and* transcendence *that I like a lot. Actually, John Welwood used slightly different terms—*personal, interpersonal*, and* transpersonal *dimensions—for these in the 1980s. It seems like your approach does engage all of these three dimensions, even though it might appear as emphasizing the relational dimension, which has been missing and only recently being emphasized in psychology and psychotherapy?*

JF: Yes, this is great! My work also emphasizes these three dimensions equally as the intrapersonal (i.e., collaboration of all human attributes), interpersonal (i.e., cooperative relationships among human beings), and transpersonal (i.e., interaction between human beings and the mystery) dimensions of participation.

BS: *How about the uniqueness of individuality?*

JF: I talk about this dimension in terms of "spiritual individuation" that emerges from the unique unfolding of the person as it becomes whole and co-creatively engages with the mystery.

BS: *The transcendent aspect seems to have two different dimensions to me. One has been described using the metaphor of the overarching sky, but the other one is the underlying ground that connects everything—as in the case of a tree with the roots, the trunk, and the branches. A tree gets the food and water from the earth, but the air and light come from above; so that transcendent dimension is actually both of these. I wonder what your thoughts are on this issue?*

JF: Yes, the transcendent and the immanent have been usually antagonized in terms of different spiritual orientations, but my sense is that both are equally vital spiritual aspects of the mystery that transcend the person. Thus, my sense is that an integral or fully embodied spirituality requires the individual to be open to both types of transcendence.

BS: *Yes, there is an issue here potentially with the mind being the medium of expression, but when you translate that into yogic terms, or Kundalini experiences, it really takes on a different experiential form.*

JF: Yes, and I want to stress that the aforementioned polarity is not a duality. Immanent life and transcendent consciousness are two sides of the same coin—they are connected like sides of a Mobius string. This helps to understand why when we open into consciousness deeply enough, a sense of the erotic emerges, and when we delve deeply enough into the body and sexuality, the transcendentally numinous appears.

BS: *Yes, in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri after one goes deep into the core of matter, one experiences light. I guess we will leave that to the Great Mystery!*

        What is the role of the Divine Feminine in your view?

JF: The feminine and the masculine dwell at all levels. They exist in the immanent and the transcendent, as well as in all aspects of the human being and all levels of reality.

        Because of our patriarchal history, however, masculine values have been privileged over feminine ones, leading to a marginalization of the embodied, vital, and erotic aspects of spirituality. In addition, the masculine and the feminine have been associated to antagonistic spiritual orientations such as transcendence (masculine) and immanence (feminine). Part of our evolutionary challenge is to restore balance both personally and collectively in the spirit of healing and integration.

BS: *Is this part of your second and third scenarios?*

JF: Certainly in the interfaith movement there have been an increasing number of women participating. Of course, participatory spirituality could be seen as stressing "feminine" values such as full embodiment vs. the heart chakra spirituality characteristic of most

patriarchal traditions. But again, this emphasis seeks to counter our historical imbalance—the true horizon is integration.

BS: *Lastly, what about the distinction between religious vs. secular? Is that included in your work?*

JF: Let me tell you two short personal stories that will convey my sense of this distinction. First, I remember that members of the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) would go to meditation centers such as Spirit Rock to invite practitioners to provide service for the homeless. This was not very successful. Everybody had plenty of time for meditation practice (at times, entire months for retreats), but virtually nobody had an hour a week to offer to the homeless.

Second, my brother is a militant atheist and secular humanist who teaches sociology and politics at the University of Barcelona. He holds a scientific materialistic worldview and despises spirituality and religion. However, he fought for women's rights for years and is one of the main proponents of a universal basic income in Spain and Europe—for me there is a profound spirituality in what he is doing! What matters ultimately is what people actually do, not how they define themselves, "secular" or "religious." (I am not questioning here the value of personal retreats but this contrast brought to me this insight very sharply).

BS: *Hopefully the secular dimension would be included in the interfaith dialogue as it seems to be missing now.*

Thank you very much for your time—it is much appreciated!

JF: Yes, this was a great interview. Thank you!

Transformative Body Practices and Social Change: The Intersection Between Spirituality and Activism

Don Hanlon Johnson[1]

Abstract: This paper examines the intersections of embodied spiritual practices—breathing, sensing, postural awareness, moving, touching—and organizing for social change. The perspectives of two leading revolutionary theorists, Mahatma Gandhi and Wilhelm Reich, provide a basis from which to analyze the importance for body cultivation in addressing social issues. There is an analysis of how traditional practices might be taught in a context which opens the practitioner to the grief of the world and the energy to address it.

Key Words: Somatic Spirituality; Transformative Body Practices; Embodied Spirituality; Social Activism; Mahatma Gandhi; Wilhelm Reich.

The orderly form of this clean title belies the bloody historical conflicts in which various societies have tried to blend spiritual values, physical needs, and social justice. Grand spiritual visions continually veer into a fanaticism which becomes blind to many who are targeted as 'other', even to the point of questioning their humanity. Attention to physical needs collapses into narrow-minded squeezing of the human spirit.

Gandhi knew this. In his long struggles in South Africa and India to invent an Indian identity of freedom and social justice, he kept bumping up against the bitter resentments that turn us against one another even while we desperately seek to join together. It was for this reason that he was virtually obsessed about seemingly minor personal issues of diet, exercise, and sexual control. "It is easier," he wrote, "to conquer the entire world than to subdue the enemies in our body. . . The self-government which you, I and all the others have to attain is in fact this. . . . The point of it all is that you can serve the country only with the body" (Gandhi as cited in Alter, 2000, p.3).

It is astounding to go through his writings and discover how much of his energies he poured into the smallest details of self-cultivation in the midst of world-changing activities with thousands of people. Water cures, mud-packs, herbalism, Western gymnastics, vegetarianism, and other body disciplines are the stuff out of which non-violence (*ahimsa*) was derived and made possible in the face of colonial domination. Gandhi's notion of non-violence was far from passivity, born of intense work with the self, disciplining its automatic reactions, toughening its fibers, learning to bring into clear, useful focus its wild impulses. The truth of being that flowed

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from these practices, *Satyagraha*, was truth enfleshed, full-body truth, whose bearers stood firmly in that truth against the purveyors of illusion.

His rigorous attention to the body served the obvious purpose of strengthening the revolutionary for the severe challenges of resistance to violence. In addressing a national association of youth, he said:

> Try to follow my ideals as far as you can. For that we should have a good physique. We have to build up our muscles by regular exercise. But that should not be done to indulge in violence. . . Our ideal is to become tough labourers, and our exercises should be toward that end. (Gandhi as cited in Alter, 2000, p. 16)

A secondary purpose was to discipline the hard edges of emotional reactions that fragment the revolutionary community and keep it from harmonious and effective action. Perhaps the most important dimension of his body concerns had to do with purging the body of the effects of colonization which promoted food habits and medical practices, on top of wanton sexual behavior, that weakened the Indian population. His pleas for vegetarianism and celibacy were based on his arguments that these were strategies of resistance and liberation:

> We have more than an ordinary share of disease, famines, and pauperism—even starvation among millions. We are being ground down in slavery in such a subtle manner that many of us refuse even to recognize it as such, and mistake our state as one of progressive freedom in spite of the triple curse of economic, mental, and moral drain. (Gandhi, as quoted in Alter, 2000, p. 11)

While Gandhi was working to change the conditions of Indians in apartheid South Africa and colonialized India, Wilhelm Reich was addressing the social devastations in Europe that were the results of the Industrial Revolution, pogroms, and unending military conflicts. Despite their enormous cultural, psychological, and spiritual differences, these two men shared a core belief in the central importance of the body in social change.

As a young physician, Reich was shaped both by psychoanalysis, and by Marxist humanism. Freud made him aware of the roots of impotence within the fluids and nervous channels of the psyche. He saw that the innate energies of the organism became so distorted by the family and religion that they lost their capacities to energize a truly free adult, producing instead passive citizens subject to manipulation by charismatic leaders. From Marx, he became aware of the effects of the larger industrial society on the organism, how the conditions of mass populations of factory workers robbed them of their internal sense of agency. Like Gandhi, he understood that the struggle for freedom required intense practices of transforming the body: "As a result of thousands of years of social and educational distortion, masses of people have become biologically rigid and incapable of freedom. They are not capable of establishing peaceful coexistence" (Reich, 1970, p.319).

In the early 1930s, Reich wrote a hauntingly prophetic analysis of how Hitler succeeded so rapidly in mobilizing hordes of people to engage in a mass movement that seemed obviously contrary to the most basic human values. He raises the question of why it was that countless

thoughtful people were unable to stem the tides of the apocalyptic tragedies they could see bearing down upon them. From his view, the missing piece in revolutions that doomed them to repetitive failure was the anchor of passivity in the body: "... we set out to show the miscalculation that all freedom-fighters until now have made: *The social incapacity for freedom is sexual-physiologically anchored in the human organism"[2]* (Reich, 1970, p. 346).

Despite profound similarities in their analysis of social impotence, they differed radically in their prescriptions for addressing it. For Gandhi, the inner preparation of the body required severe repression of sexual urges. Reich, by contrast, developed the practice of psychoanalysis in the direction of transforming sexual urges into full-bodied, transgenital orgasm. I use the word 'transgenital' to avoid certain oversimplifications of Reich's bioenergetic psychology into a raw form of sexual release. If one studies his texts carefully, what is at stake is mobilizing the fullest capacities of the body's energies and in contact with other persons. Sheer localized orgasm is for him a deficiency, like gulping one's food. Though certainly rooted in nurturing sexual excitement, the discipline of his work consists in allowing that primal excitation to radiate throughout the entire organism, creating a sense of a fully energized self, a free person grounded in the fullest of his or her agency (Reich, 1972, pp. 318-325).

Like Gandhi, Reich inspired communities of revolutionaries-in-training who still work together to implement his theories for internal transformation with the goal of creating more humane civil societies. Throughout Europe, various communities organized around Reichian personal analytic work focus on bodily energies, combined with pre-natal and peri-natal care, education in early child care, couples counseling, and social advocacy around issues of health and sexuality. The utopian hope is that as healthier children are born and raised, a healthier mass population of more independently minded adults will replace the overwhelming percentage of people who are subject to fascist manipulations.

As one is beset today by the unending debates in US politics about contraception, abortion, gay rights, and uses of violence, the history of Reich's efforts seems all the more relevant. As Reich ended his life scarred by his long experiences of being hounded by psychoanalysts, Marxists, and democratic capitalists, he came to realize that fascism is not a peculiar characteristic of ephemeral political movements in Germany, Spain, Italy, and Japan. It is a universal phenomenon because it is rooted in the human body. When the multiple layers of bodily movements, impulses, and perceptions are not creatively transformed into lives of purpose, mass media and ideologues find it easy to create mass movements based on fear and disorientation.

Neither Gandhi nor Reich achieved enormous successes in the long run. Gandhi was painfully aware that his constant experiments with various strategies of changing himself and changing the nation enjoyed only modest successes. There were the small failures in his attempts to regulate his sexual desires, which may be strangely related to his larger failures as in his tragic inability to forge an alliance with the Muslim communities.

Reich was ousted by every community he tried to join. In 1956, he had been imprisoned in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, on spurious charges of transporting so-called medical equipment

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[2] Italics are original.

across state border. Shortly before he died there in 1957, the F.D.A. held a medieval-style book-burning of everything he had published.

Although their great hopes are dashed in the ruins of fragmented India and Pakistan, and in the depredations of the West, Reich's analysis of fascism and Gandhi's of colonialism are crucial in getting beyond the tragic patterns of revolutions in which the old oppressed, when they succeed in getting power, regularly become the new oppressors. In her book *On Revolution,* Hannah Arendt (1965) draws out the implications of the fact that the word means 'revolve'. Reich argues that it is not possible to break the cycle without getting at 'the social incapacity for freedom rooted in the human organism.' The repetitive good-willed efforts to create a just social order keep foundering on the shoals of closed-off bodies.

Can we learn from them and move forward taking note of what they missed?

I am in a workshop with Charlotte Selver, the late founder of Sensory Awareness[3]. We are each standing behind a partner. She is giving us instructions about how to be present to our partner by placing our hands on their shoulders, simply, not trying to do anything, just being there but intricately aware of the fullest possible contact between the contours of our hands and the contours of their shoulders. We do this experiment for some 5-10 minutes. After it is over, one of the touchers complains that her shoulders got a little uncomfortable doing this. Charlotte replies with her characteristically feisty tone of voice, "So?".

Her response hit me like a koan from a Zen patriarch. Here was a 95-year-old woman who had fled to New York when the Nazis first ordered her to wear the arm-band in her German university, who had gone on to wander the world dedicated literally to waking up people to what was happening all around us, living simply and teaching radically, keeping to her task even when deaf and having broken several bones. In that light, her impolite response to a complaint of muscle discomfort was a powerful assault on self-indulgence in a radically embodied way: how could I complain about my tiny aches and pains when the grief of the world was so overwhelming that it needs all the healing we can muster?

In his final years, the late particle physicist David Bohm left his lifelong work to help create more effective communities of social change. He was prompted in that life change by his intimate awareness of the dangers facing us, while bewildered by the difficulties of maintaining collaborative movements towards resolving those dangers. He joined Krishnamurti in developing a web of dialogues around the world to address the seemingly intractable problem of collaboration on social values. In his analysis of entrenched patterns of dominance, aggression, and violence, he found that a primary factor was the forming of false wholes, whose boundaries split people apart. The purpose of the dialogues was to address head-on what they considered to be the heart of those false wholes: the addiction to ideas, particularly 'big' ones—Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and Hindu fundamentalism; Marxism; Scientism; Neo-Capitalism, etc. These big ideas are, he felt, tenacious enough to keep people from mobilizing sufficient unity to transform

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[3] For more information on sensory awareness see Selver & Brooks (2007).

the radical problems that we all share: global warming's serious threat to the planet, poverty, hunger, violence (Bohm, 1988).

Bohm's unique characterization of mass addictions to ideas as the foundations for false wholes led him to become interested in the role of the body as an underlying ground of the fragmentation. Often disguised in fine language and gentle demeanor, the addictions reveal their true selves in bodily comportment. When the ideology is confronted with the 'other' from a different 'whole', a delicate veil descends over the face, the eyes narrow, muscles betray at least a slight hardening, a contrived smile appears along with an unctuous tone of voice. Edging too close to the core of the addiction can provoke a hostile response out of keeping with what seems to be the person's warm personality.

Compared to such gifted leaders as Carl Rogers, Eugene Gendlin, Joanna Macy, and many others, Bohm's dialogue methods are not particularly effective. I introduce him here because of his diagnosis of the addictive nature of societal fragmentation. It had an important impact on my own longstanding attempts to study how ideas are generated by, and anchored in, one's repetitive patterns of breathing, moving, tensing, sensing. Emerging as we are from a long history of institutional dualism, it is only very slowly that we are becoming aware of the central role the body plays in the evolution of consciousness and community.

A key person in bringing this theme to the fore was the cultural historian Norman O. Brown. In his seminal book, *Love's Body* (Brown, 1968)*, he advances this radical revision of the perennial philosophy:

> Union and unification is of bodies, not souls. . . [S]oul, personality and ego are what distinguish and separate us; they make us individuals, arrived at by dividing till you can divide no more—atoms. But psychic individuals, separate, unfissionable on the inside, impenetrable on the outside, are, like physical atoms, an illusion; in the twentieth century, in this age of fission, we can split the individual even as we can split the atom. Souls, personalities, and egos are masks, specters, concealing our unity as body. For it is as one biological species that mankind is one. . .; so that to become conscious of ourselves as body is to become conscious of mankind as one. (p. 82)

When I first encountered this passage, I had a strangely paradoxical reaction. On the one hand it countered the belief in which I had been schooled that it was the soul's abstract ideals—peace, justice, compassion—that would bring humans together. As bodies, we were just windowless monads moving in the void. And yet, I knew from that same schooling that our sorry history is of a succession of idealistic communities using all means possible, including torture and murder, to get other communities to adopt their values, no matter if the cost means rationalizing an abandonment of their own ideals of love and compassion. I began to study how direct work with such intimate realities as breathing, sensing, moving, and touch might loosen the hardpan that anchored such infertile ideological conflicts.

Over some forty years, I have been trying out various experiments aimed at bringing to the fore the consensual bodily matrix in which we engage with others. I have found again and again that people who were ideologically in conflict—Muslims/Jews, Whites/Blacks, Native

Americans/Christian evangelists, atheists/theists, young/old—would find themselves interested in each other if given the chance to work silently and simply with one another, breathing, touching, and moving. Learning to stay connected with the 'Other's' facial responses, or maintaining a gentle tactile contact, or listening to each other's breathing, reduced the charge provoked by abstract preconceived differences, and allowed people to settle into a more primal level of shared values about the grief of the world and focus more on how to ameliorate it than on differences of opinion.

> I am in a workshop which Emilie Conrad Da'Oud and I organized with some fifteen African-American somatics practitioners. Emilie has us in partners. I am standing behind a seated man, a clinical psychologist the same age as I. She asks us to put our hands on our partner's shoulders in simple contact. I do this for some few minutes. At the end, we two exchange feedback. He says at first "I cringed, expecting to be pushed down once again by a white guy. But I felt such relief when I felt you were just there with me".

How to think of the body as a source of collaborative visionary efforts to shape a more just world? What images might galvanize our desires for a more effective way to join with one another?

Richard Niebuhr makes a fruitful distinction between the body as missionary and as pilgrim:

> Our bodies are vehicles of passage, and to make pilgrimage is to exercise our inborn motility. It is in this natural propensity to motion that our future as pilgrims is formed. But to discern this fact properly, we have first to attend to another fundamental trait of our being, a pervasive yet determinate feeling that is a ground tenor accompanying all the music of our activities. I will call this ground tenor attachment to place. (Niebuhr, 1984, p. 8)

Reich and Neibuhr join together: the healthy free adult is mobile, not frozen; and the pilgrim is of necessity mobile. To walk the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*, circumambulate Mount Kailash, or embark on the *Hajj* one has to be in shape, physically vital, capable of handling the rigors of weather and terrain, knowledgeable about how to carry food and water for the journey, skilled in necessary clothing and footwear. Small rigidities will emerge over the long haul to create serious dysfunctions. In this long journey, the pilgrim needs help from others: the ordinary gestures of food, drink, shelter, and directions; the extraordinary ones in case of emergency. Like the Good Samaritan, the pilgrim's helpers do not inquire into the religious proclivities of the person in need before they offer help.

At the same time, the pilgrim has to develop a sensitivity to place. Because *here* (San Francisco) is not *there* (Kailash). There is a deep meaning in undertaking these journeys; they presuppose that place affects one's spiritual life. The pilgrim is in a position to learn that all spiritual viewpoints are rooted in the places where they evolved: the Sinai desert, the polar tundras, the Amazonian and Southeast Asian rain forests. If place is nothing but an accident of ephemeral reality like one's underwear, if each place is essentially like every other, there is no real point in making a difficult journey.

The missionary is a different being. His or her anchor is neither body nor place, but floating entangled in elaborately defined ideas of salvation and virtue. Places are irrelevant in the grand scheme of eternity. The body is important primarily as the dangerous playground of desire, needing to be corralled. Mobility is not one of their virtues; they are more like stone pillars. Conversations inevitably bump up against a stance impervious to any assault: some usual triggers are homosexuality, contraception, earth-based or tribal spiritual practices, etc. Bring any of these topics forward, and the unchanging responses are predictable.

I paint this hard-edged portrait not as an outside elitist critic, but as one who is recovering from a very sophisticated training as a missionary. I have been a zealot for Roman Catholicism, for Rolfing, for various forms of spirituality. For a good part of my life, I firmly believed that I knew something that others needed to know, and I worked to convince them of such. Only slowly over many years of practice, have I learned to situate myself in my own standing and walking and breathing, here, where I, not you, exist. Learning to inhabit this place, I see that you are indeed a being who knows, if different from me. Perhaps we can walk this land together, even if our notions about it are different. But only if we walk hand-in-hand, sensitive to each other's movements, paying more attention to our rhythms of sound and movement and less to the occasional abstraction.

A friend, trained in a discipline called "Authentic Movement,"[4] is on the staff of a company that does diversity trainings for corporations. For some years, he had tried without success to get his team to consider incorporating body movement practices in their work. One week, they had begun a seminar at a company in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where most of the employees are from the Rio Grande pueblos. During the first day, the participants were unusually passive and resistant. In their discouragement at the end of the day, his co-leaders said to my friend that since nothing else was working, he could try some of his body stuff. The next morning he did a long session of authentic movement. At the end, the participants said, now we can tell you our names.

I conclude by addressing the difficult tensions manifest in history between spiritual idealisms and social justice. In every spiritual tradition there are transformative body practices: breathing, awareness of bodily sensations and reactions, healing touch, sacred dance, whirling, chanting, meditative postures and mudras. The shapes of communal consciousness that emerge from long practice of any of these are not automatically programmed; they are largely shaped by particular spiritual teachings which vary widely. Sometimes, the meditator is encouraged to cultivate the ways in which these practices open him or her to the greater world; often, the direction is more internal.

In the various transformative practices that have emerged more recently in the West, the evocation of the fuller energies of the body into speech and action dictate radical changes in the world itself. Social change is always in the background. The above analyses suggest the importance of shifting the context of these practices from one in which their content is taught within the confines of preconceived sacred writings to one that builds on the opening of the

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[4] For more information see Pallaro (1999).

practitioner to the Infinite Unknown within which other persons are situated in their unfathomable depths.

The negative theology of the medieval mystics, the *Via Negativa*, holds a clue. In the light of carrying any of these processes far enough, the meditator's sense of self and fixed concepts can dissolve in the immensity of the transconceptual, eventually revealing in its depth and density the earth and our fellow beings together, a matrix on which we can craft a better home, a shelter for all in the great storms.

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The New Myth: Frederic Spiegelberg and the Rise of a Whole Earth, 1914-1968

Ahmed M. Kabil[1]

Abstract: The present article provides, through the life and teachings of a little-known German scholar of religions named Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994), a novel account of some of the unique historical and intellectual developments that converged in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid twentieth century and subsequently informed and enabled many of the defining chapters of recent global history. Separately, these developments are known as the dissemination in the West of Asian religious perspectives and practices, the San Francisco Renaissance, the rise of the counterculture, the widespread blossoming of environmental awareness, and the information age revolution. Together, they comprise *The New Myth*: synchronous with and in reaction to the planetary spread of technology and the global experiential horizons such technology discloses, a constellation of holistic integral thought emerged in various domains in the West that was characterized above all by a spatiotemporal emphasis on the '*Here and Now*' and the realization of unity through the recognition and transcendence of polarity. The origins, afterlives, and implications of this constellation of thought are only now being discerned. The story of Professor Frederick Spiegelberg's life—little known and largely forgotten—functions as the conduit through which the New Myth's historical and intellectual contours are traced and thereby rendered intelligible.

Keywords: Alan Watts; Counterculture Movement; Cybernetics, Frederick Spiegelberg; Haridas Chaudhuri; Martin Heidegger; Integralism, San Francisco Cultural Renaissance; Sri Aurobindo; Steward Brand; Whole Earth Catalog.

The following article presents a vignette of the life and teachings of a little-known and largely forgotten professor of comparative religions named Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994). My central contention is that the path of Spiegelberg's life discloses a constellation of holistic, integral thought and the network of thinkers who disseminated it. The constellation of thought and the network of its promulgation reveal a history of the spiritual revitalization of the West, one undertaken through rediscovering and appropriating the West's shared origins with the East. The goal was to discover a way of being suitable to the age of global technological modernity. I call the network the drive towards wholeness. I call the constellation of thought the New Myth.

Synchronous with and in reaction to the planetary spread of technology and the global experiential horizons such technology discloses, a '*New Myth*' emerged in various domains in the West that was characterized above all by a spatiotemporal emphasis on the Here and Now and the realization of unity through the recognition and transcendence of polarity. These efforts

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culminated in a convergence of developments during the mid-twentieth century that have informed and in ways enabled many key developments in world history since—most notably the rise of environmentalism and the information age.

A theologian by training and a professor of comparative religions by vocation, Spiegelberg was in a sense an ideal albeit typical scholar, occupying a stable post at Stanford University for three decades with the odd publication here and there before retiring to a quiet life in his Bay Front apartment overlooking Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco.

But Spiegelberg was anything but conventional. His interests ranged far and wide, and East and West. As well versed in Greek and Latin as he was in Sanskrit, Spiegelberg administered Rorschach tests to Indian yogis, dabbled in the 'dark and disreputable' arts of alchemy and gnosticism, and exalted heresy and iconoclasm as paths to salvation. He possessed the largest collection of Tibetan ghost traps in the West, and grew convinced that an earlier encounter with the great Indian yogi, Sri Aurobindo, infused him with a divine energy he could summon and transmit in lectures. Spiegelberg warned his followers he was not a prophet, yet made prophecies nevertheless. He spoke of vast changes in store for the world, and believed his endeavors were to play a key part. And he was right.

Spiegelberg stood knee-deep in the currents of East and West at the crucial moment of their confluence. His actions were pivotal in transmitting the strains of Ch'an (Daoist/Zen) Buddhism, Hinduism and existentialism that would influence the Beats, 1960s counterculture, and the developments in technology and environmentalism that followed. Spiegelberg's story tells of three overcomings; the first, of the spiritual crisis of Interwar Europe symbolized by world war; the second, of the mechanized outlook of postwar cold war American society symbolized by the mushroom cloud; and the third, of the widespread belief that technology was an antagonistic force in the aim of global unity, symbolized by the whole earth.

Many parts of the tale have been told before. But the whole, as history, has not. To be sure, the full breadth of the story, with all the origins, afterlives, and implications is outside the scope of this article. The goal here, then, is to point to key moments in a tale that stretches across traditions, continents and eras. Part I, World War (1914-1945), traces Spiegelberg's early years as an academic in Europe seeking alternative approaches to discuss the experience of Being, culminating in the crystallization of his seminal intellectual contribution, the *Religion of No-Religion*. In Interwar Europe he found himself drawn to the work of Martin Heidegger in philosophy and Carl Jung in psychology, and brought his unique understanding of both scholars to San Francisco when he was forced to flee Nazi Germany in 1937. Part II, Mushroom Cloud (1945-1957), follows Spiegelberg as a teacher at Stanford and the American Academy of Asian Studies as he becomes one of the principal transmitters of integral yoga, Chan Buddhism, Heideggerian existentialism, and Jungian psychology to the West.

Many of the students and colleagues influenced by his teachings and projects would go on to become key players of the San Francisco Renaissance, 1960s counterculture, and information age revolution. They include Alan Watts, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Michael Murphy and Dick Price (who co-founded the Esalen Institute in 1962), and ecologist/futurist Stewart Brand (who spearheaded modern environmentalism and ushered in the digital age through his Whole

Earth projects). Part III, A Whole Earth (1957-1968), examines a lecture Spiegelberg gave in 1958 comparing the ideas of Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo, and the "Beatniks of North Beach" concerning Being and global unity. From there, we see the influence of Spiegelberg's thought on the Whole Earth projects of his student Stewart Brand. The article concludes by comparing two incarnations of the *Religion of No-Religion* in Heidegger, Spiegelberg's teacher, and Brand, Spiegelberg's student, concerning the role of technology in the global age.

Part I. World War (1914-1945)

Born on May 24, 1897 in Hamburg-Harvestehude, Germany to liberal-minded Lutheran parents, Spiegelberg had a fairly leisurely and aristocratic upbringing. He displayed voracity for learning early on, and his father prudently allowed him an unusual amount of freedom in pursuing his interests. The defining moment of Spiegelberg's life occurred when he was a 20 year-old Latin theology student at the University of Holland in 1917. After reading some verses of Rilke, Spiegelberg went on a walk through wheat fields dotted with flowers and had his first spiritual experience. It came as the edifice of his Christian faith was crumbling under the weight of philosophy and the steady pounding of academic rational inquiry.

Staring out on the fields, he perceived holiness as existing everywhere and in everything around him. Past and future receded into the present moment, and the young Spiegelberg's normal categories of ego-bound experience dissolved into "an eternal bliss of the all-penetrating holiness" (Spiegelberg, 1948, p.18). Spiegelberg (1960) called this experience the *miracle of being*. "The moment," he wrote of the miracle of being:

> … that I get over the narrow limitations of my reasoning and feel driven instead to experience the bewildering, monstrous miracle of this our being here and now, in this moment on earth, […] When, instead of raising my eyes to nowhere beyond in order finally to hallucinate some Life Power there; if, instead of doing anything like that, I am puzzled, stimulated, enthused by the hardness of metal, by the clicking of time, by the warmth of your breath, by the sound of my own voice and the movement of my own fingers – the moment that I touch this bewildering, surprising, unexplainable, perfectly miraculous reality itself as an astounding mystery,—*that* is the miracle of being. (p. 53)

He brought this understanding of being and the spiritual experience that informed it with him to the German Academy. He arrived there at a unique time in modern European history. World War I eroded faith in the liberal ideal—an ideal that was supposed to deliver modern man from the dark ages and religious superstitions with its vaunting of the liberal trappings of the rule of law, a constitution, individual liberties, property rights, and a market society. Yet here we were, having marched headlong down the long bloody path from the French revolution in 1789 to the upheavals of 1848 to the aftermath of the bloodiest moment in human history. If this was the path to Enlightenment, it appeared as if the final nirvanic insight would all but confirm Hobbes' words spoken three centuries earlier in *Leviathan* that, rather than promises of life, liberty and property, man's lot was a life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

The result was crisis. "The liberal project," writes Benjamin Lazier (2008) in a study on theology in Interwar Europe,

… had derived much of its impetus from a confidence in the capacity for human progress, and could not help but falter as the trust proved folly. The war in particular dealt a deathblow to a faith in the progressive moral perfection of man, and in its wake came a post-liberal ethos more at home in crisis than in calm. (p. 5)

In theological circles this ethos manifested as crisis theology. Age-old debates about man, god and world were revived as many of Europe's greatest thinkers broached the crisis of the West through resurrecting the heretical traditions of gnosticism and pantheism to ask whether and why God had forsaken them.

Spiegelberg saw it differently. God had not forsaken us, we in our abstract rationalizing had simply forgotten that he was as near to us as the present moment. "It is," Spiegelberg (1961) later wrote "the instantaneous experience of the Being of Being in all its transcendence in and as this most immediate Here and Now" (p. 22). Through identifying with the fundamental aspect of Being rather than the constricted ego, we experience a world transformed.

The problem, then, was to develop modes of thought that reacquainted us with this fundamental component of our experience since forgotten in the modern age. To do this Spiegelberg turned east. "Today," he wrote in a set of notes from the period, "we realize [the divine reality] has to come from within and beyond. Yet maybe the direction from where to get the stimulation could still be East".[2]

These first inklings of East-West synthesis led Spiegelberg to taking full advantage of the German academy's offerings on windows to the East that at the time were rather extensive. Yet Spiegelberg recognized that one could not turn Eastward and assimilate its beliefs and practices wholesale, and so he found in his Western teachers similar attempts to discuss the fundamental experience of being, here and now, that he experienced in the wheat fields.

Martin Heidegger's thought would ultimately prove the most influential for Spiegelberg, though more so in later years than as his teacher in Marburg. "No other philosopher," he reflected, "seemed to me so immediately related to my own search for the essential answer to the ultimate questions of existence" (Mukowsky, 1976, p.1). In Heidegger he found a true revolutionary, a thinker whose ideas on being (*Dasein*) and the here and now (*hic et nunc*) resonated deeply with Spiegelberg's own experience and were unlike anything he had ever read by a Western philosopher. He immediately drew connections between Heidegger's insights and those of the East, despite Heidegger's apparent fidelity to his Greek and German intellectual heritage. "It was too obvious, to too many of his students," Spiegelberg put it (1960), "that a certain amount of parallels were there" (p. 51).

Spiegelberg started teaching at Dresden in 1927, and it was there that he met Carl Jung. Through Jung's pioneering work on myth, symbols, and the relationship between self and world, Spiegelberg found an interpretive model for comparative religions far surpassing contemporary approaches. Jung determined through his confrontations with the unconscious that the

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[2] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives. Note: about Eighty percent of Spiegelberg archival sources are held at Stanford University Archives, and the remaining are held at the California Institute of Integral Studies archives.

experiences disclosed to him were not random permutations of neurosis rooted in sexual trauma as Freud proposed, but rather transmitted symbols from the unconscious to the conscious mind. These symbols pointed to the perennial experience of man's attempts to balance the complementary facets of consciousness and unconsciousness. As Sharpe (1975) notes, the "recognition, acknowledgement and control of the unconscious by the conscious" is called by Jung the process of individuation, the "process by which a person becomes a psychological 'individual', that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole,' the process of coming to selfhood" (p. 206).

The purpose of myth has always been to tell this story of individuation. That is, Jung found that the symbols expressed in his personal experiments and in the dreams and psychoses of his patients shared striking parallels with the myths of myriad spiritual traditions, past and present. He concluded that the symbols disclosed an archetype—"a symbol of the unity of conscious and unconscious and a link between the individual and the cosmos of which he is part" (Sharpe, 1975, p. 207). A Tibetan mandala, for example, is an archetypal symbol signifying the wholeness of the individuated self as a microcosm of the macrocosm of which the self is part.

The two outlooks of Jung and Heidegger informed Spiegelberg's seminal intellectual contribution, the *Religion of No Religion* (Spiegelberg, 1948), first published as a lecture in 1938 at the London Buddhist lodge. Spiegelberg was a refugee at the time, having fled Nazi Germany in 1937 after being dismissed from Dresden for going to a conference banned by the Nazis.

While in London, he serendipitously wandered into "the only Zen Buddhist specialist in England," a brilliant 21-year old named Alan Watts (1915-1973). Watts would go on to become the principal popularizer of Zen Buddhism to American audiences in the 1950s and 60s, as well as the central teacher of Zen to the Beats. In 1937, he was simply a prodigy hanging around the London Buddhist Lodge. He had already written a book on D.T. Suzuki's interpretations on Zen Buddhism, and Spiegelberg found him "an almost superhuman being, a young lad with eyes of an angel".[3]

Spiegelberg begins the *Religion of No Religion* by asserting that the spiritual experience of Being Here and Now is the ground for the forms, symbols and rituals of religions to emerge. These symbols, if they are to be successful, must point to that fundamental experience of the miracle of being as well as to the unity of man and cosmos. Inevitably, the time will come when these symbols become meaningless because they fail to adequately convey the experience to which they point. What results is an iconoclastic reaction in which the symbols are thrown off as illegitimate, because they do not accurately express the miracle of being. But the cycle is ever to repeat itself. Indeed, it is the repetition of this cycle of the change and renewal of the miracle of being that is the history of religions.

The process begins with the *astonishment* or *miracle of being,* in which the individual realizes that God or Being is in all and everything. Following the astonishment is a feeling of *pantheistic mysticism*, "which means here that the limits between the ego and its opposites, such as the cosmos or God, are wiped out, and one all-combining feeling of community spreads over the entire universe" (Spiegelberg, 1948, p. 22). All symbols of God must be abolished, for they can

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[3] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

only mean a separation from him. This pantheistic moment results in a *psychological inversion* where that which stands before man becomes an inner reality of what Spiegelberg calls the "all penetrating holiness." Inevitably, the process repeats itself, as the astonishment of being always culminates in new attempts to reify it through names and symbols: "The paradox of a 'religion of no-religion' is produced by the fact that the human mind cannot grasp and realize any feeling or fact without giving it a name" (Spiegelberg, 1948, p. 55). Spiegelberg mentions Zen Buddhism, the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis, and the teachings of Martin Heidegger as three incarnations of the *Religion of No-Religion.*

The *Religion of No-Religion* was the fruit borne by Spiegelberg's experience as a refugee, of being forced down to the barest essentials, of holding on to only that which is wholly necessary for survival. It was at once a dialectical theology, a mode of being-in-the-world, and an explanatory tool for the historical trajectory of religious traditions. Spiegelberg saw it more as a passport, a belief of universal currency necessary for safe passage through the coming turbulent Atomic age—an age, he feared, where many would wander futilely in search of home amidst the ruins of the world's spiritual traditions as visions of mushroom clouds dotted the skies and obscured the divine light. "We are rapidly moving away from traditions and former ways of life that, in a few years, will be no more than distant memories," he wrote:

> The sudden developments of technology are changing our life beyond recognition. We are passing into an era of unknown experiences, call it the atomic age, or what you will. All that we can carry with us from the past is essential, the things without which men cannot live. And to cross the border safely, we will need some sort of passport that all men will recognize, some belief that has a universal currency. (Spiegelberg, 1968, pp. 18-19)

And so, Spiegelberg made his way to America, bouncing around on the East Coast for a few years before winding up at Stanford University in 1941. He carried little with him but his own ideas. But as we shall soon see, that was more than enough.

Part II. Mushroom Cloud (1945-1957)

At Stanford Spiegelberg grew entranced by the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the 20th century Indian freedom fighter, poet, and sage whose spiritual practice is known as integral yoga. He traveled in India in 1949 on a Rockefeller grant and eventually received *darshan* from Sri Aurobindo. Upon his return, he helped found the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco—a pioneering independent academic institution the likes of which had never existed before. "There was at that time not yet any competition in the way of live Asian studies in America, not even in the Bay Area," Spiegelberg reflected later. "We did not have at that time any ashrams or Zen monasteries, of which we have so many today" (quoted in Mukowsky, 1976, p. 5).

Indeed, in a *New York Times* book review of D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhsim* written the year before the Academy's founding, Gerald Heard (1950) reacts positively to the promise of Zen Buddhism for American society, yet notes the unsuccessful reception the Eastern faiths typically elicit out of American audiences. He attributes the lukewarm response to the West

having "outgrown its medieval regard for contemplation as a high or even respectable vocation" (p. 19).

In the article, Heard singles out the Eastern interpretations offered by Alan Watts, now a 36 year-old Episcopal chaplain at Northwestern, as having "roused little more than a faint esthetic curiosity" (Heard, 1950, p.19). Watts left Europe in 1938 not long after Spiegelberg and went to New York to study Zen. Dissatisfied with his teacher yet still committed to spiritual pursuits, Watts decided to enter the priesthood in 1945 and moved to Evanston, Illinois. And in the priesthood he may well have stayed had not a fortuitous string of events taken place in short succession in 1950. The first was an extramarital affair; the second, his young wife annulling their marriage; the third, getting expelled from the ministry; the last, a letter he received from Frederic Spiegelberg who was charged with starting a graduate institute to open in 1951 geared towards a wide-scale spiritual transformation of the consciousness of the West through the teachings of psychology, Zen Buddhism, and the integral ideas of Sri Aurobindo. Would he like to join him in San Francisco? "Happily," Alan Watts replied, "Circumstances are so arranged at present that I could come out to San Francisco this winter".[4]

Spiegelberg then set about calling "a first-rate man" from Aurobindo's ashram to join him and spread Aurobindo's message to the West. After some correspondence, the Bengali integral philosopher Haridas Chaudhuri was recommended, who at the time was the head of the Philosophy Department at Krishnagar College in Bengal. "The question was brought to Sri Aurobindo himself," Spiegelberg recalled. "He approved of Chaudhuri's coming with us with the word '*acha*' ('Of course!)."[5]

Two months later, in December of 1950, Sri Aurobindo left his body. In his letter to Chaudhuri inviting him to join him at the Academy, Spiegelberg wrote that Sri Aurobindo "is the guiding light of this earth and the prophet of our age. I believe that the last most important contribution that Sri Aurobindo made before passing was to send you here" (http://www.mysterium.com/aaas.html, p. 4). And just like that, the man who would become the most popular Western interpreter of Zen Buddhism (in Watts) and Sri Aurobindo's vision (through Chaudhuri) were brought to San Francisco. And here Watts and Chaudhuri would remain until their deaths in 1973 and 1975, respectively.

The Academy was a brazen attempt to expand the consciousness of the West so that the world did not end in a nuclear holocaust. Initially, the institute [Academy] had all the expected struggles, namely, difficulties in acquiring funding and credibility. "Clearly," recalled Watts (1972):

We were just another California cult trying to assume the mask of a respectable educational institution. But then—only twenty years ago—it was not as easy to see as it is today that when you make a powerful technology available to human beings with the normal form of egocentric consciousness, planetary disaster is inevitable. Moreover, the point had to be made that the egocentric predicament was not a moral fault to be corrected

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[4] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives
[5] See http://www.mysterium.com/aaas.html for more information.

by willpower, but a conceptual hallucination requiring some basic alterations of common sense; a task comparable to persuading people that the earth is round rather than flat. This was very largely the subject of discussion at the weekly colloquium of the Academy's faculty, at which Spiegelberg was the invariably provocative moderator, and which became an event increasingly attractive to San Francisco artists and intellectuals. (pp. 286-7)

The Academy functioned as a hub around which ideas on Being influenced by the East and the interwar scene were promulgated to the Beat Generation. Like their interwar counterparts, the postwar Beats were disillusioned by the mechanized ideals of cold war American society, the "valueless abyss of modern life" (Holmes, 1952, p.10). After World War II, Allen Ginsberg recalled:

There was a definitive shrinkage of sensation, of sensory experience, and a definite mechanical disorder of mentality that led to the cold war….the desensitization had begun, the compartmentalization of the mind and heart, the cutting off of the head from the rest of the body, the robotization of mentality. (quoted in Conners, 2010, p. 62)

And like Frederic Spiegelberg, they were after "the ragged ecstatic joy of pure being," as they put it, in which "existence itself was God" (Kerouac, 1957, p.195). Through the American Academy of Asian Studies, the Beats saw that the East could provide paths to the experiences they sought.

Here's Michael Murphy, a student of Spiegelberg's at Stanford and the Academy whose life was changed by Spiegelberg's courses on Sri Aurobindo, on what the Academy was like in the early days:

The electricity then was really enormous. There were some hundreds of students who started to gather around that Academy. In those early days there were a number of poets who contributed later to the San Francisco Renaissance: Gary Snyder used to come to those colloquia, and occasionally Allen Ginsberg. Most people forget this, but a considerable amount of the inspiration for the poetry of the Beat Generation came right through that Academy of Asian Studies. Michael McClure and David Meltzer, Phil Whalen, Ginsberg and Snyder...I would say all of them either directly or indirectly were influenced by Haridas Chaudhuri, Alan Watts and Frederic Spiegelberg, either directly or indirectly, and some of them would be in the audiences of those early colloquia and in those classes. (http://www.mysterium.com/aaas.html, pp. 6-7)

The Academy collapsed by the mid-1960s but its progeny live on today. Michael Murphy established the Esalen Institute in 1962 in the spirit of the American Academy, Spiegelberg's *Religion of No-Religion*, and Aldous Huxley's ideas on human potential; the California Institute of Asian Studies (later renamed the California Institute of Integral Studies) was established by Spiegelberg's colleague Haridas Chaudhuri in 1968; and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, where Spiegelberg served on the Board of Advisers, was founded by his colleagues and friends Robert Frager, Jim Fadiman and David J. Hall in 1975.

Assessing its legacy shortly before his death in 1973, Alan Watts wrote:

The American Academy of Asian Studies was one of the principal roots of what later came to be known, in the early sixties, as the San Francisco Renaissance, of which one must say, like Saint Augustine when asked about the nature of time, "I know what it is, but when you ask me, I don't." I am too close to what has happened to see it in proper perspective. I know only that between, say, 1958 and 1970 a huge tide of spiritual energy in the form of poetry, music, philosophy, painting, religion, communications techniques in radio, television, and cinema, dancing, theater, and general life-style swept out of this city and its environs to affect America and the whole world. (Watts, 1972, p. 284)

Spiegelberg maintained his post at Stanford during his tenure at the American Academy of Asian Studies, where he could oscillate between the roles of spiritual teacher and professor depending on the situation. If an impressed student in one of his introductory courses to comparative religions at Stanford stayed after class asking for more, Spiegelberg directed him or her to the "Beatniks of North Beach."

Such was the case in 1957 when a young student from his comparative religions class approached him asking where he could find people who thought this way.

"Oh, well you'll find none of that in Stanford," Spiegelberg chuckled. "When I want the news, I don't look for it in the paper. I go to the poets."
"What do you mean," the student asked.
"North Beach," Spiegelberg said after a pause. "Go to North Beach."
And with that, young Stewart Brand made his way to North Beach. And in a sense, he never left. (Steward. Brand, personal communication, December 13, 2010)

Part III. Whole Earth (1958-1975)

How to describe those strange things that happened in the decade we call the sixties? To say nothing of the unprecedented global upheavals, wars, crises, movements, and protests, how to describe the sequence of events that led to the technologies of the military industrial complex merging with the ideas of the counterculture to inaugurate the information age? How to describe the shift in the attitude towards the boogeyman of technology, long-seen as an instrument of government control and worldwide uprooting and annihilation, now seen as a tool of personal liberation and global unity? How do we account for the fact that, for the thinkers of the drive towards wholeness in the 1960s, technology, systems theory, integral yoga, Zen Buddhism, and psychedelic experiences all came to be seen as methods to bring about a consciousness of "the miracle of this, our being here and now"?

A Liberation of Earth and Being through Technology

In an essay based on a lecture given on August 21st, 1958, Frederic Spiegelberg used the example of the Beats to compare Martin Heidegger's thought with that of Sri Aurobindo. Speaking on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's centenary birthday, Spiegelberg's goal was to show that the ideas of Aurobindo and Heidegger were compatible and manifested in the example of the Beat Generation. Time was of the essence for the 'Beatniks of North Beach'—as Spiegelberg called them. They were no longer a secret now that Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (written in two

weeks in April 1951 but left unpublished until 1957) was a mainstream cultural phenomenon. In the essay, he groups Heidegger and the beatniks together by virtue of their shared central message: an emphasis on the 'here and now' and directly experiencing the present moment. Both Heidegger and the Beats hold that the rational mind is overemphasized, and here Spiegelberg feels they share the outlook of Vedanta and Aurobindo particularly. Spiegelberg also wanted to use the examples of Aurobindo and the Beats to broach Heidegger's new ideas on technology. Indeed, since Heidegger's (1927) publication of *Being and Time*, his writings took an increasingly mystical turn as he devoted more and more of his attention to what he called the question concerning technology. As he had before, Spiegelberg drew attention to the "Zen-like" quality of Heidegger's message, yet also found in him a global vision that strikingly called to mind Sri Aurobindo. Heidegger had not yet been translated to English, but Spiegelberg nevertheless engaged in a detailed exposition on the congruence of thought between Aurobindo, Heidegger, and the Beats using his own translations of Heidegger's (1977) work. In his essays in *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger, mysteriously speaks of a saving power in the essence of the danger of technology, and associates this saving power with the coming to presence of a god. "But where danger is," writes Heidegger quoting the poet Holderlin, "grows the saving power also" (p. 28). Only when we can reach the insight of how technology enframes us, how technology challenges us forth to order the world as standing-reserve, do we see how the truth of Being is hidden from us (Heidegger, 1977, p. 48). It is only once we can discern that "all mere willing and doing in the mode of ordering steadfastly persists in injurious neglect [of Being]" that we are free to "give utterance to insight into that which is"…When we give utterance into that which is, "it is the constellation of Being that is uttering itself to us" (p.48). "Will we correspond to that insight," asks Heidegger, "through a looking that looks into the essence of technology and becomes aware of Being itself within it?" (p. 49).

Esoteric remarks, to be sure. Spiegelberg understood Heidegger's ideas on the saving power as countenancing technology as a tool to achieve Being's task of liberating earth. In this Heidegger strongly echoes Aurobindo's ideas on global unity. Comparing the two, Spiegelberg believes they both share the same understanding of *Dasein* (being-there). Spiegelberg feels translating this term to Being in English is inaccurate. It is, rather, "the be-power itself" (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 53). In Aurobindo's schema, the equivalent term would be *sat* (pure or absolute Being) rather than *bhava* (existence/being).

"It is the essence and key word of Heidegger's existentialism," Spiegelberg writes. "Everything is *Sein*. And there cannot be anything that is not ultimately a part of that all-comprising Beingness. Even becoming is an expression of Being. This statement can be found in Aurobindo" (p. 53).

The limited personal subjectivity of the ego veils man from understanding the divine as Aurobindo's gnostic being. As such, the world's spiritual traditions have declined and the miracle of being is forgotten because of man's rationality. For both Heidegger and Aurobindo, writes Spiegelberg, there is only one hope. Here, they both quote Nietzsche's idea of the Superman:

When it comes to testify to a mentality that is greater than the degenerated mentality in which we find ourselves as a whole in this century, superman is called for, and to

characterize him we must say he will have true existentialist mentality, which looks for the direct experience rather than for the taming of reality by our mentality. This superman will have to be more daring than any man who ever walked. And therefore, because he is more daring, he will be able to say more. (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 54)

For too long we have cried for individual salvation, thinking only of ourselves in the constricted terms of our egos, when our task has been otherwise. "What is the task then, if it is not man?" asks Spiegelberg. "Aurobindo and Heidegger have the same answer: the earth." For both Heidegger and Aurobindo, "Earth needs man to liberate her, maybe even Being itself. *Dasein* needs man" (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 55).

Heidegger and Aurobindo agree that because all is *sein*, because all is *sat-chit-ananda*, nothing is to be thrown out or rejected. Everything has meaning as expressions of *Dasein*. Spiegelberg then draws a link between the Vedantic understanding of the divine play of Brahman, *lila*, where the divine plays hide and seek by searching and finding itself through us (coming to consciousness of itself), with Heidegger's notions that "*Dasein—*Being itself—comes to self consciousness in our own longing"(p. 58).

We do not need to escape technology to achieve Being's task of liberating earth, Spiegelberg says of Heidegger:

The world of science and technique does not at all preclude a jump beyond itself, says Heidegger. We do not have to get away from civilization, to do away with all our gadgets and with the all-too-fast progress of technique and science. Rather, the more you go into science, the more you talk to the great men of science, the more you meet an awareness of the mystery, the more it becomes possible to take science itself as a jumping board. It does not any more today seem that science would drive us away from the opening of the greater gates toward higher realization. Aurobindo in his *Savitri* has said that many times. He agrees completely with the existentialist message as Heidegger presents it (Spiegelberg, 1960, pp. 58-9).

In the essay, Spiegelberg provides his own translation of Heidegger's quote of the poet Holderlin concerning Being's task of liberating earth:

Earth. Is not this what you long for?
To be resurrected invisibly in us.
Is it not your dream one day to become invisible?
Earth invisible.
What, if not transformation
Would be your urgent task?
Earth – O Beloved One,
I will
(Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 55)

The Iconoclasm of Stewart Brand

Stewart Brand has dipped his finger in many jars. As Andrew Kirk (2007) notes:

[Brand] was present at, and instrumental in, the creation of the American counterculture, the birth of the personal computer, the rise of rock and roll, the back-to-the-land and commune movement, the environmental movement, and a crucial reorientation of western politics. He was an experienced LSD veteran before practically anyone had heard of the drug and advocated a new view of the earth that set a standard for how six billion people view their home world. (p. 31)

Indeed, it was his role in spearheading NASA to release images of the earth from space in 1968 that will stand as perhaps his greatest legacy. Poole (2008) has called the initial instance of man seeing the whole earth as the defining moment of the twentieth century (p. 198). The sight prompted a revolution in the global imagination, and furthermore, catalyzed an understanding of the interdependent relationship between man and his environment:

The sight of the whole Earth, small, alive, and alone, caused scientific and philosophical thought to shift away from the assumption that the Earth was a fixed environment, unalterably given to humankind, and towards a model of the Earth as an evolving environment, conditioned by life and altered by human activity. (Poole, 2008, p. 198)

For Brand, the whole earth was an icon, one he hoped would supplant the mushroom cloud as the dominant lens through which we saw the world. In this iconoclastic overcoming, Brand exemplifies Spiegelberg's *Religion of No-Religion.* As an icon, the whole earth symbolized two facets of Brand's philosophy: first, a holistic, integral, microcosm-macrocosm understanding of reality expressed through cybernetic whole systems theory that sought to overcome eternally troublesome distinctions between, among other things, man and his tools, organisms and artifacts, and self and world; second, the conviction that technology, when used appropriately, can function as a tool for personal liberation.

Brand took a course on comparative religions with Spiegelberg at Stanford in the fall of 1957 when he was 19 years old. It stands as his first exposure to the Eastern idea systems that, along with his ecological studies and the use of psychedelics, informed his cybernetic systems-based understanding of the world. In examining his notes from his course with Frederic Spiegelberg, Brand appears most struck by the paradox of unity within polarity and the various means to express that paradox, such as the symbol of the mandala and the Ch'an (Daoist/Buddhist) notions of *yin*, *yang*, and *Dao*. He quotes extensively from Carl Jung and Richard Wilhelm's (1931) *Secret of the Golden Flower*. The boxed exclamation points after the quoted passages appear to register the shock of influence. The trajectory of his later life and projects confirms it.

A noteworthy quote speaks of Jung's notion of "outgrowing," whereby an individual may outgrow an insoluble problem through "raising…the level of consciousness." From a wide view, the insoluble problem "lose[es] its urgency."[6] For Jung, "[t]he greatest and most important

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[6] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

problems of life are all fundamentally insoluble. They must be so, because they express the necessary polarity inherent in every self-regulating system. They can never be solved, but only outgrown."[7]

Brand would seize upon this notion of the polarity inherent in every self-regulating system. Though here applied to the individual, the idea applies in the *Golden Flower* to the cosmos at large:

> [The philosophy of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*] is built on the premise that the cosmos and man, in the last analysis, obey the same law; that man is a microcosm and is not separated from the macrocosm by any fixed barriers. The very same laws rule for the one as for the other, and from the one a way leads into the other. The psyche and the cosmos are to each other like the inner world and the outer world. Therefore man participates by nature in all cosmic events, and is inwardly as well as outwardly interwoven with them. (Jung & Wilhelm, 1999, p. 11)

Hence, the polarity inherent in the self-regulating system of man the individual is the same as that of the self-regulating system of the world at large. If this sounds familiar, it's because it's a hallmark insight of cybernetics and systems theory—the very approach Brand would later vaunt in his *Whole Earth Catalog* (1968).[8] Here the cybernetic insight is expressed almost verbatim, but in a spiritual context. This spiritual expression of the polarity in every self-regulating system stands as Brand's earliest known exposure to systems theory.

Embracing the potential of technology as a tool for personal liberation, Brand and Spiegelberg each collaborated with the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and Douglas Engelbart's

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[7] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

[8] A word on cybernetics: In the early 20th century, the sciences came to grapple with the breakthroughs in quantum mechanics that tore asunder the Classical Newtonian paradigm of physical processes. From out of the wreckage emerged the field of thermodynamics unscathed, and with it the principles that gave birth to the whole system models of the ecosystem and biosphere. The whole system model eschews the traditional boundaries between organic and inorganic entities by centering them within the supraentity of the system, of which they are mutually formative. According to this line of thought, there's no distinction between organism and artifice because both are self-organized and self-regulating, reflecting a certain systemic wholeness. Out of whole systems theory emerged cybernetics in the postwar era, and through its study of information, communication, and feedback reframed the ecosystem conceptual tool in techno-scientific terms. By focusing on behavior rather than structure, cybernetics founder Norbert Weiner placed organisms and self-directed machines in the same order on the basis of the "purposeful behavior" that both share. Weiner saw in information feedback the mechanism by which entities fight entropy. Systems use information feedback to maintain dynamic equilibrium, or homeostasis. Cybernetics demonstrated the potential for systems to go awry by way of positive feedback loops. The techno-scientific discourse of cybernetics reframed the debates of various fields in terms of information feedback. In the sciences, cybernetics met with ecosystem theory and redefined organisms as self-regulating machines. When applied to social systems, we begin to see the far-reaching implications of positive feedback: unless variables within systems respond to one another through communication, feedback, and circular causality within the set limits, system failure may result in the form of, say, an escalating nuclear arms race.

Augmentation Research Center (ARC) separately over the course of the 1960s.[9] Spiegelberg's friendship with Stanford psychologist James Fadiman and SRI Research Engineer David J. Hall led to consulting opportunities and eventually to Spiegelberg serving on the Board of Advisors for their Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in the 1970s. Brand, for his part, hung out often with the community, and was videographer for Douglas Engelbart's infamous "Mother of All Demos" event in 1968 that showed off the framework of tools that would one day become the personal computer.

Most interesting is a project Spiegelberg collaborated on with the Stanford Research Institute in 1969. Titled "Computer Processing and Bibliography of Literature Related to Voluntary Improvement of Individual Performance", the project had as its aim the production of a global network of research information exchange concerning literature on yoga, meditation, "physiological feedback training," "altered states of consciousness," and "other subjects related to voluntary improvement of individual performance."[10] As a consultant to the project along with Haridas Chaudhuri, Spiegelberg was tasked with providing direction in assessing a literature that was global, ancient, immense and "poorly classified." The idea was to use the latest technologies of SRI and SRI's Augmentation Research Center both to create and catalogue the information service as well as to perform a series of experiments relating to that literature. SRI had just become one of the first four nodes on ARPANET, the forerunner of the Internet.

Why yoga and meditation? A few reasons: The first was, simply, to catalyze a mode of being suitable to the modern technological age, one that could lead to the "voluntary improvement of individual performance." Here, from the research proposal:

Improvement of human performance has for some time been one of the prime aims of our technology. This has been achieved, in our society, largely by providing the human with significant tools and automation procedures that, with proper training, augment his abilities to perform […] The goals of our technological culture at this time are epitomized by our exploration into outer space, such as our landings on the moon and other technological feats requiring a high degree of skill and expertise in controlling our external environment… However, for the exploration of the inner man, our educational concepts, training methods, and research, seem less suitable[11]

'Far out' is the only adequate term that could encompass the long-term goals of the project. Through cataloging, researching, and integrating all the data on yoga, meditation, and altered states into an information system, the engineers hoped that man would soon, through mastery of yoga, reach the ability to control computers directly through the voluntary use of brainwave signals.

Studies will undoubtedly soon be carried out using these physiological instruments in conjunction with computers, in the most advanced type of man/machine communication and human augmentation system we can imagine […] Many years may pass before

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[9] ARC and SRI, along with centers on the East Coast, were hubs of innovation that ushered in the information age.
[10] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives
[11] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

significant progress and useful results can be produced in the control of computers directly from brainwave signals. In the meantime, it would seem prudent to explore the use of yoga, meditation, and other techniques as a means of developing the brainwave control that will be necessary for the direction of computers.[12]

While Spiegelberg was getting his computer kicks, his student Stewart Brand was becoming a celebrity. His "Why Haven't We Seen a Photograph of the Whole Earth" campaign put him in the papers, and his *Whole Earth Catalog* (first released in November 1968) was a tremendous success. By 1971, at the height of the project's success, Brand decided that the time had come to move on, "just to see what happens." After all, he realized that his catalog would soon become an artifact of its own. As he would several times in his life, Brand presciently understood that he stood at the forefront of a constellation of changes to come, and wanted to describe what he saw there. After bumming around the computer programmers at SRI and MIT, Brand declared in a 1972 *Rolling Stone* article that Ready or not, computers are coming to the people.

Brand's (1971) *Last Whole Catalog* was his most successful, winning the National Book Award in 1972 to the horror of book critics everywhere. He decided to throw what he called the "Whole Earth Demise Party," to be held at the lavish and expansive Palace of Fine Arts on June 14th, 1971. Anyone who had anything to do with "making" the Whole Earth Catalog was invited. Expecting a raucous bash, thousands packed the auditorium with all the countercultural trappings, regalia, and contraband. Brand wandered around barefoot in a monk's black Cossack meeting and greeting. But the reason for the party soon emerged.

At 10:15 pm, the director of the event, Scott Beach took the microphone and addressed the audience. He held up a thick wad of cash - $20,000 in *Catalog* profits. "There is to be a consensus of opinion on what to do with the money," Beach directed. "And then the money is to be signed over to one person, to do whatever is decided" (Lopez, 1971, p. 1).

With that, Stewart Brand stepped back and observed. He was aiming to make a point about the counterculture, that it "wasn't ready to do much of anything"; and for most of the evening, and for some time after, it would appear Brand proved his point. "Burn it!" cried some. "Flush it down the toilet!" cried others. The sum was reduced to $15,000 after a participant made off with the money. "Brand stood on the stage with a straight face," an article at the time noted, "writing every suggestion on the blackboard" (Lopez, 1971, p. 1).

By dawn, Brand was asleep on the floor, "with the smile of a man at peace with himself, satisfied that his ploy had revealed more about the values of the counterculture than the contents of his magazine – the magazine that had become so much a part of it" (Lopez, 1971, p. 1).

Perhaps 100 people remained. The decision was finally made by vote: The remaining $15,000 would be given to a young man nobody knew named Frederick L. Moore, Jr. "Most guests said they had not seen Moore before the party," the article reported. "'But we know him because he introduced himself,' one girl explained. Moore gave his occupation as 'human being' and left in a van" (Lopez, 1971, p. 1). "Stewart Brand just shook his head," Markoff (2005) reports. "It had

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[12] Source: Frederick Spiegelberg archives

been an interesting experiment, but he never really expected to see Moore again. *Maybe he'll send a postcard from Mexico*, Brand thought as he left the Exploratorium" (p. 237).

Throughout the night, Moore made his way to the open microphone struggling to make his voice heard about the personal and collective empowerment that comes through sharing information:

> If we are going to build a change—in a changing new world, or whatever we want to call it, 'new age,' then it's going to be because we are going to work together and we are going to help each other… We feel that the beginning of a union of people here tonight is more important than letting a sum of money divide us. (Markoff, 2005, pp. 236-7)

And with that, Frederick Moore and $15,000 made off into the night—or early morning, to be exact. In the spring of 1975 he catalyzed what would become the personal computing revolution through cofounding the Homebrew Computer Club with the *Catalog* profits. The club, writes Isaacson (2011), "encapsulated the *Whole Earth* fusion between the counterculture and technology" (p.60). From the first flyer: "Are you building your own computer? Terminal, TV, typewriter? If so, you might like to come to a gathering of people with like-minded interests" (p. 60). Perhaps Brand was mistaken. Maybe the counterculture was ready to do something.

An engineer at Hewlett Packard saw the flyer and showed up to the meetings in cofounder Gordon French's Menlo Park garage. He was incredibly shy and nervous, yet undeniably brilliant. His name was Steve Wozniak. Soon, he'd start bringing along his old friend from high school, a bearded and impetuous acidhead with a messianic complex, fresh from a trip to India motivated by Dr. Richard Alpert's (1971) *Remember, Be Here Now*. His name was Steve Jobs.

And the world would never be the same. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change it, are the ones who do!

Conclusion

I have said that Spiegelberg's is a story of three overcomings: of the spiritual crisis of Interwar Europe symbolized by world war; of the mechanized outlook of postwar cold war American society symbolized by the mushroom cloud; and of the widespread belief that technology was an antagonistic force in the aim of global unity, symbolized by the whole earth.

Through an emphasis on Being, the '*Here and Now'*, and the realization of unity through the recognition and transcendence of polarity, the thinkers on the network of the drive towards wholeness sought to establish modes of being suitable to the technological age of global modernity that transcended the dominant approaches in the West that Martin Heidegger called calculative thinking.

Certainly, Spiegelberg's understanding of Heidegger was unique. Nihilism and pessimism are hallmarks of Heidegger's thinking, and the notion that technology could aid in man's task of liberating earth (and thereby Being itself) seems far out of line with most Heideggerian interpretations. Indeed, it seems plain far out. And if Heidegger were here I suspect he would

disagree with Spiegelberg's interpretation. Cybernetics, viewing the world as system, seeing technology as a tool—all of these epitomize for Heidegger the very apotheosis of calculative thinking in the modern age. But then, we're still left with those curious comments on the saving power in the very essence of technology. Here is not the place to go down such a rabbit hole (and it is a rabbit hole, be assured of that).[13]

Regardless, the contrasting yet complementary views of Brand and Heidegger live on in what Benjamin Lazier (2011) dubs the Earthrise Era—the age inaugurated by images of the Whole Earth taken from space that Brand in large part catalyzed. Cosgrove (2001) elucidates this nicely when he contrasts the two discourses that have framed the Apollo images since the 1970s, the "one-world" discourse, on the one hand, and the "whole earth" discourse, on the other:

A "one-world" discourse […] concentrates on the global surface, on circulation, connectivity, and communication. It is a universalist, progressive, and mobile discourse in which the image of the globe signifies the potential, if not actual, equality of all locations networked across frictionless space. Consistently associated with technological advance, it yields an implicitly imperial spatiality, connecting the ends of the earth to privileged hubs and centers of control. (p. 263)

Here we see Heidegger's concerns well represented, echoing statements he made as early as the 1930s.[14] But in the one world discourse we also see the cybernetic systems view of reality epitomized by Stewart Brand—a world viewed in terms of interconnected networks. Now, Consider Cosgrove's (2001) definition of the "whole earth" discourse:

A "Whole-Earth" discourse stresses the globe's organic unity and matters of life, dwelling, and rootedness. It emphasizes the fragility and vulnerability of a corporeal earth and responsibility for its care. It can generate apocalyptic anxiety about the end of life on this planet or warm sentiments of association, community, and attachment. (Cosgrove, 2001, pp. 262-3)

Here we see implications of rootedness associated with the images, rootedness of the sort Heidegger claims has been lost in modernity. This reciprocal interplay between the two discourses lies at the heart of our modern attitude towards technology. Spiegelberg allows us to

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[13] Recall, for example, Spiegelberg's lifelong comparisons of Heidegger and Eastern thought. Recent studies have conclusively demonstrated that many of Heidegger's central concepts—those that would establish him first as philosophy's secret king and then, after his ascension, as arguably the twentieth century's most important thinker—were lifted in secret and at times wholesale from German translations of East Asian texts. These include ideas on Being (*in-der-Welt-sein*, *Dasein*), nothing, emptiness, and the clearing, and the conceptual centerpiece of his arguments on technology, enframing (*gestell*). Heidegger displayed a systematic method for concealing East Asian concepts in Heideggerian garb until scarcely a trace of the original source material remained. Heidegger's appropriation allows us to understand how Spiegelberg could claim in 1976 that "no other philosopher […] seemed to me so immediately related to my own search for the essential answer to the ultimate questions of existence" (Mukowksy, 1976, p.5). It renders understandable Spiegelberg's lifelong suspicion that Heidegger was influenced by some degree by the East. And it lends credence to Spiegelberg's unique interpretations of Heidegger's work.
[14] See Heidegger (2000), p. 40.

see the interdependent nature of one world and whole earth, and how we came to live in both at once.

Heidegger reminds us of the dangers of technology. And they are real dangers. But the simple fact remains that, even if it's a whole earth disclosed by the very process he assails, it is one that can and has instilled the rootedness he feels has been lost in modernity. Where the danger is, grows the saving power also. Yes, we live in one world, with all the planetary imperial spatiality that goes along with it. But we also inhabit a whole earth.

Much ink gets spilled over Brand's remarks in the opening pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog* that "We are as gods." (Why 'gods', and not god? Is the statement alluding to the Greek deities? Perhaps the Zen conviction that we are all endowed with Buddha nature?); We would do well, however, to remember 'Genesis', specifically 'the Fall'. Adam and Eve, having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, became "as gods, knowing both good and evil."[15]

This has been the story of a peculiar tree of knowledge that bore some strange fruit. Certainly, few wound up taking a bigger bite than Steve Jobs. But the central seed sower was Frederic Spiegelberg, who experienced a miracle while walking in the fields that he spent the rest of his life trying to remember. Remembering that miracle is also what this story is about. Each of these thinkers did so in their own way, and each for their own reasons. "It's all the same, it's all the same," wrote Richard Alpert in1971; "Any trip you want to take leads to the same place." The miracle is always the same, and so the lesson is always the same:

Remember, *Be Here Now*.

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[15] Source: Papers of Stewart Brand—Stanford University Archives

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The Future History of Consciousness

David Hutchinson[1]

Abstract: Consciousness is the key fact of life, yet the study of it is in its infancy. Spirituality and science both hold valid truths in this field, and they are bound to meet in a practical sense as science is moving rapidly into the subjective areas such as dreams, thought processes, and awareness. We are on the edge of a momentous shift in knowledge and ability with consciousness, driven by exponential change in theory and technology.

"The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible." (Clark, 1962, p. 32)

For every one of us, the experience of consciousness is the key fact of life—its highs and lows, agonies and ecstasies, beauties and transcendences, poetry and squalor, fears and loves, the tingle and spark and slap of every moment. Experience happens to the individual, and is filtered through billions of unique bodies and minds. For millennia, the turn and shape of consciousness has been a personal matter, subject only to the influences on an individual: reading, thought, diet, illness, drugs, meditation—but no more. The times are changing, and the twenty first century will see a revolution in the way we understand, work with, and experience consciousness. We can prepare for it, brace ourselves, use it wisely, or let the rising swell sweep us out to a vast and uncharted sea.

The understanding of consciousness and the mind is in its infancy today, especially as it relates to technology. Tools to analyze the brain at the working level of neurons are just emerging, and maps of the brain are about as detailed as Columbus used when sailing out for the New World. But watch out. The future is tapping on the windowpane, asking to come in. Neuroscience, computational models of cognition, and analytical tools are racing ahead, but nobody knows what is around the next turn.

Technology is not a settled field; I suspect it never will be. It is moving too fast, and its knowledge and effects are multiplying at an exponential rate. Nobody knows what will be possible in fifteen years, much less a thousand. A thousand years from now there will be human beings, but will they have the same limbs and organs as today? Will they have new senses, augmented brains? What will they think, dream, imagine? What stories will they tell their

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children? Will they be as gods, and look back with fondness on their mortal ancestors of the 20th century?

"Two voices speak for the future, the voice of science and the voice of religion. Science and religion are two great human enterprises that endure through the centuries and link us with our descendants" (Dyson, 1998, pp. 6-7).

In my life I have sat around campfires, and dissected corpses; pored over Sanskrit verses, and visualized tesseracts; I have listened intently to the voices of science and the spirit. They both speak with authority, and both have a claim to describing reality. How can that be?

For several hundred years, religion and spirituality have railed against the notion of scientific reductionism, seeing it as a kind of blindness to a true understanding, and the depiction of the world as mechanical, inert, dead. William Blake wrote, "May God keep us from single vision & Newton's sleep" (Blake, W., quoted in Damon, 1965). Science is rejected by theologians east and west as the great Satan.

A hundred years ago Sri Aurobindo described two negations. "Thought comes to deny the one [spirit] as an illusion of the imagination or the other [physical reality] as an illusion of the senses." (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p.7). He was addressing the problem of how the mind responds to two radically different experiences (physical sensation versus the inner spirit), and how a strong belief in one leads to an absolute denial of the other. It is more than a difference of opinion or culture. It is a complete denial of the one by the other. He wrote that at the dawn of relativity and quantum theory, but it is still valid. The paths of science and spirituality were never farther apart than they are today.

The divide between singularitarian technodreamers and spiritual savants is as wide as the universe. You will not find chanting or prayer at a transhumanist conference, nor will you find a demonstration of artificial intelligence at a spiritual gathering. They are members of separate clans who speak different languages. Chakras? fMRI? Reincarnation? Neural decoding? Even their gods require interpreters if they want to speak to each other. Language, books, computers and networks have each brought spectacular leaps forward in the development of consciousness.

But we stand on the edge of a shift that will dwarf all the preceding. Imagine: it is a few years in the future, and machine learners will be reading through millions of books and journals, billions of web pages, trillions of pieces of information, to save, categorize, parse, summarize, and synthesize. Then in the blink of an eye, a natural language interface will be marketed, allowing you to have a discussion with this worldwide exocortex, a brain outside your brain holding the world's knowledge. A year later there is a brain-mind interface available that gives you instantaneous access to the world brain. And then you can talk to anyone, anywhere, through this medium, with the power of thought alone.

Through this series of inevitable, fantastically realistic, and fully practical steps we have entered a new world, where our understanding of knowledge, wisdom, education, and the very nature of humanity has shattered, and must be put back together again, like Humpty Dumpty.

It is premature to postulate a theory of everything, one that would link the arrows of Kurukshetra to the arrow of time, the eight siddhis to Hebbian synaptic learning. No person today has caught the formula that can simultaneously measure enlightenment and Kolmogorov complexity. We need a Turingesque Patanjali, an Einsteinian Aurobindo. Unexplored mountain ranges loom austere and white in the distance, harboring unmet and unimaginable civilizations.

Some believe that a single parsimonious equation holds the key, a lucky theory found in a dusty book or in the racetrack trails of bosons around a supercollider. They look with sinking hope to quantum mechanics, holography, zero-point energy, entanglement, or field theory. Despite long debates and enthusiastic conferences, however, none have explained mind or consciousness. Not really. They have not solved problems in cognition, generated testable and falsifiable hypotheses, created syntheses between existing accepted sciences, or opened new areas for investigation. What we have right now are philosophies, intriguing analogies, tantalizing hints, vague abstractions—not workable solutions.

Are we due for a Kuhnian revolution? Yes and no. Kuhn saw one half of the problem; his conceptual beast, hopping on one leg, can't quite run the race. Science walks on two legs: theory *and* practice, idea *and* technology. The two are not separable. As Freeman Dyson (1999) notes, tools bring observation that stimulate new theories, and theories stimulate the development of new technologies, in an ever-increasing progression.

Humanists, priests, and hippies perennially wring their hands over the encroachment of the machine, and with good reason. The ugliness of concrete bunkers, the fumes of combustion engines, and the narrow lanes of rational argument have choked the human spirit. But we need to look beyond the past, zoom in with the eye of imagination and see what is happening: exponential change, driven by information technology. We are asleep at the wheel— governments, institutions, universities, humanity. "God will grow up while wise men talk and sleep" (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p. 55). What will we do when our Lilliputian world is shaken by the first steps of this Titanic Being?

> Humans are not evolutionarily prepared for exponential change; it has rarely happened in the past, and has never been sustained as it is today. "It's as if you kneel to plant the seed of a tree and it grows so fast that it swallows your whole town before you can even rise to your feet." (Lanier, 2010, p. 8)

Or try taking a checkerboard, and put one grain of rice on the first square, two grains on the next, four on the next. Watch out: by the last square of the checkerboard, the final amount would be enough to cover India with a blanket of rice two meters deep. Exponential change is unthinkable for the human mind.

The word du jour to describe the point of explosion is singularity. The idea has caught fire among those who dream of radical technology—immortality, vast augmented intelligence, disembodied light-speed travel among the stars, the Last Generation, Humanity 2.0 playing at will with the structure of space and time.

A singularity in mathematics and physics represents a phase shift, a radical transformation, a boundary point where reality morphs beyond recognition. The phase shift that modern

visionaries are speaking of is consciousness, though they use the word intelligence. John von Neumann used it first in this sense, saying that we are "approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race…" (quoted in Dyson, 2012, p.299). I.J. Good spoke of it in 1965 as an intelligence explosion, adding "the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make" (Good, 1965, p. 3). In the 1980s Vernor Vinge established the word singularity as a technological tipping point.[2]

Slow down, says 'the pessimist'. Humans occupy an insignificant corner of the cosmos; our frail and fugitive species has arisen in the last fraction of cosmic time. Not so, says Big History: the cosmos, life, and mind are a continuous, connected process. Each step tends toward greater complexity and consciousness.[3] In this cosmic view, science and technology are the growth tip that Gaia is using to feel her way into the future. Language, writing, books, science, computers, and networks form a progression through time; they are naturally artificial extensions of human consciousness. Each was a leap forward allowing the knowledge and ability of our species to extend beyond what a single person could understand, remember, or accomplish.[4]

In this idea of a continuous process linking the evolution of the cosmos, the emergence of life, the development of intelligence, and the emergence of science we can find a first hint of how science and spirituality may be integrated.

A snail, crawling on the Grand Canyon of geologic history, fails to feel the tectonic shift. Forty years ago a brain-computer device (cochlear implant) was considered science fiction, yet these implants are routine today.[5] Ten years ago nobody thought that a computer program could beat the world chess master. Five years ago the notion of working with single neurons through light (optogenetics) was unheard of. Three years ago the idea of telekinesis (moving matter by thought) was still a dream. A year ago recording inner consciousness, such as dreams, was unimaginable. Last year the notion that a computer could out-perform people in answering questions in natural language, over the entire realm of human knowledge, would have been laughed at. Yet all of these impossibilities have come to pass, and the trend is accelerating. This future isn't what it used to be. Denial of scientific progress in the realm of mind and consciousness is like closing your eyes to avoid a lightning strike.

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[2] The first description of this was "intelligence explosion" by the mathematician and cryptologist I.J. Good, in 1965. See "I.J. Good, "Speculations Concerning the First Ultraintelligent Machine", *Advances in Computers*, vol. 6, 1965. "Let an ultraintelligent machine be defined as a machine that can far surpass all the intellectual activities of any man however clever. Since the design of machines is one of these intellectual activities, an ultraintelligent machine could design even better machines; there would then unquestionably be an 'intelligence explosion,' and the intelligence of man would be left far behind. Thus the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make."

[3] See Fred Spier's *The Structure of Big History*, or David Christian's *Maps of Time*. Kevin Kelly also discusses this in *What Technology Wants*. "Big History studies the past across physics, astronomy, geology, biology, and human history. As it does so, it seeks common themes, paradigms, and methods…" (*Big History,* p. xxiv). The six epochs that Ray Kurzweil describes (physics, DNA, brain, technology, mind-machine interface, singularity) describe a similar continuity and progression.

[4] *Hamlet's Blackberry* by William Powers (2010) describes these revolutions as technologies "of the mind," and examines their potentially disruptive influence.

[5] After all, the auditory nerve has 16,000 channels, and at the time one or two channels were the only technology possible. See *World Wide Mind* (2011) by Michael Chorost.

If you want a glimpse of this future history, there is a borderland where science and consciousness meet, in the dead of night, glance at each other in passing, dimly recognize the other, and set up housekeeping. That borderland is science fiction, where telepathy and reincarnation, transcendence and uploading, biology and spirit come together to romp and beget strange offspring. Many a programmer is steeped in spiritual visions from science fiction literature, and many a meditator grew up on dreams of lasers, computers, and robots. Science and spirit may be segregated in the halls of Academe, but in the lands of literature and the imagination, they are producing chimera worthy of the 21st century.

If technology were to enable a leap in consciousness, it would precipitate a Cambrian explosion of creativity, development, and transformation. Why? Even in a mundane sense, consciousness is the force behind the major events in life and the world. Ants may build hills, but humans terraform the world.[6] Consciousness acting through human beings is the predominant force for better or worse on all life on the planet. Its development is more earthshaking than any other, including Darwinian evolution. In one possible future, humanity may evolve into something different, a transhuman and perhaps non-human species. Such a being will have a mind that is unknowable, beyond today's conception. This is because that it will stand beyond today's human.

Okay, let's face it; it's time to set down our prejudices, walk across the aisle, and shake hands.

Science and spirituality need to be brought together in practice. The theories and descriptions of the one must connect with and explain those of the other. Their phenomena must be related. Their tools and techniques must work together. There is no other future. Unfortunately, nobody even knows how to begin. Prayer and machine algorithms, incense and fMRI, meditation and brain-mind interfaces, the occult and optogenetics exist in two mutually-exclusive universes. The twains need to walk hand in hand, but they appear to walk right through each other, ghostly presences inhabiting different dimensions.

Science is rapidly moving into realms long thought to be the exclusive domain of the Romantic poet and the armchair psychoanalyst: dream, thought, awareness, meditation. Science is breaking down the barriers and letting light into rooms long locked with scriptural mantra and ecclesiastical legerdemain. The meeting of science and spirit is inevitable. Truth be told, they have been enmeshed in the mind for thousands of years, unbeknownst to all but the rare polymath. As soon as there were tools, they were used for spiritual practice as much as for tilling the earth or cooking food. Language, books, and the arts all use technology, understood in the wider sense, and the practice of spirituality has made these an essential part of its practice throughout history.[7]

The study of consciousness itself is fraught with disagreement—optimists expect a techno-rapture any day, pessimists deny that humanity will ever change. A vast muddled middle, go happily about their lives, unaware that the tsunami is racing for their cozy beach huts.

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[6] For an ecstatic meditation on this idea, see the short video by Jason Silva: http://vimeo.com/29958619.

[7] Many modern writers (e.g. Kevin Kelly, David Deutsch, W. Brian Arthur, William Powers, and David Nye) see a linked series of successive technological "revolutions" starting with language and progressing up to current information technology.

Spirituality has ignored science, assuming that growth can only occur through the innate tools of consciousness itself: concentration, prayer, meditation, visualization. Even if we set aside a protected corner in the temple of mind for them, the future will not be limited to purely interior practices. In a few short years, less than a generation, it will include the rapidly advancing techniques of neurology, brain-machine interfaces, nanotechnology, algorithms, implants. Wild branches of the scientific vine are pushing into the temple, cracking the comfortable walls that have stood for millennia, bringing a paradoxically organic growth spurt. The resultant symbiosis of spirit and science will be stranger than technologists or mystics have imagined.

"We are creating a blueprint together—a design for our collective future. The possibilities for… spiritual progress are tremendous" (Rushkoff, 2011, p.8). Spirituality is facing its most important challenge in history. Will we be able to detect and measure spiritual consciousness? Will an artificial entity supersede humanity? Will thought projection or telepathy become routine? Will human beings augment their mind/brain, producing radically new kinds of awareness? Will the spirit itself change?

Change is upon us. A new normal is chipping through its egg, and looking around in wonder. How will coming generations integrate this with their understanding of intelligence, consciousness, and the human being? What is needed is a synthesis of neurology, information science, artificial intelligence, and spirituality. I believe it will happen; it must happen. It will be unprecedented, extraordinary, beautiful, and frightening. New entities will walk into our dreams and visions, and our lives.

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Sri Aurobindo's Lila
The Nature of Divine Play According to
Integral Advaita

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Abstract: This essay addresses the concept of Lila, or Divine Play, in the context of Integral advaita as described by Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri. In order to convey the characteristics of Integral Lila, the first part of the essay examines Integral Advaita. The second part of the essay directly addresses Sri Aurobindo's description of Lila, a play that is at once a dalliance of the Divine and a teleological drama unfolding toward a denouement that may be at hand. In the context of Lila, the essay examines evolution, the individual poise of Brahman and the participatory nature of Integral Yoga.

Keywords: Haridas Chaudhuri; Integral Non-dualism; Integral Philosophy; Integral Yoga; Integral Advaita; Sri Aurobindo; Lila; *Purnadvaita*.

The slow self-manifesting birth of God in Matter is the purpose of the terrestrial Lila.
(Ghose, 1997, Vol. 12, p. 247)

Lila, as a concept denoting play, is applied to much of Indian thought, both spiritual and secular. According to Apte's *Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, the noun *lila* means anything from "Sport, dalliance, play" to "any languid or amorous gesture in a woman" (Apte, 1965, p.813). Clearly not reserved strictly for the spiritual, lila is nevertheless employed as a justification for the mystery of existence in various Indian religions. Depending on the spiritual system claiming the term, lila denotes a specific Divine play whose nature corresponds to the fundamental epistemological and spiritual beliefs of the tradition in question. Thus the tenor of the definition of lila provides a unique vantage point for any spiritual tradition that utilizes the term.

In this essay I will examine the concept of *Lila*[2] in the context of Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga. The essay is divided into two sections: The first examines the distinguishing characteristics

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[2] The terms that originate from Sri Aurobindo's writings will be expressed in this paper capitalized or lower case according to his usage. The secular use of the words out of Sri Aurobindo's and Chaudhuri's context, for example the dictionary and general use of the term *lila* used above, will be expressed in lower case.

of *purnadvaita* (integral nondualism) in the context of Integral yoga. In this section I use primarily the material from Haridas Chaudhuri who has produced numerous studies examining and comparing Sri Aurobindo's Integral advaita, a complex and nuanced distinct interpretation of nonduality, with other religious schools. His studies have distilled out the major characteristics of Integral advaita that will be used in the remainder of the paper. These characteristics, which will be examined thoroughly in the section on purnadvaita, include the following: validity of three quasi-independent poises of being within the larger framework of Brahman[3]; the evolution of consciousness from the nescient world of matter toward superconscious beings who will evolve past a sense of separation from, and ignorance of Brahman; and the participatory role of human beings in this unfolding evolution.

The distinguishing properties of Sri Aurobindo's Integral advaita provide the philosophical and spiritual framework in which Lila is embedded. The second section examines the concept of *Lila* as referenced in the works of Sri Aurobindo, focusing primarily on passages form *The Life Divine*, and the implications of this interpretation of Lila.

Lila in Integral yoga is indeed the idle play of the Absolute, but the play involves a uniquely teleological and participatory agenda—an agenda that the Absolute has somehow put forward—that leads toward the evolution of consciousness. The three poises of being provide a context for this evolutionary agenda. The participatory nature of the individual poise of being creates a quasi-independent dynamo for the evolution of consciousness. But this evolution is conceived "in sport" (Ghose, 2009, Vol.2, p.611) in that its denouement, the recognition of Brahman in all things, has never been absent; or as Chaudhuri describes it, liberation or "*mukti* [is the] realization of eternal identity with the Divine" (Chaudhuri, 1950, p.221). Thus the Lila of Integral advaita is a specific play at once teleological and idle, and one in which humans are definite distinct players with unique agency to further Brahman's game.

Advaita in the Context of Integral Philosophy

Haridas Chaudhuri explores Integral Advaita from several perspectives. In *Being, Evolution & Immortality* (Chaudhuri, 1974) and in the essay, *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* (Chaudhuri, 1960), he compares eastern nondual practices with western dualistic ones, examines the various ways in which nondual Advaita Vedanta traditions have manifested in Asia and distinguishes Integral advaita from the other nondual traditions. Chaudhuri takes on a perennialist perspective with regard to advaita, suggesting that the traditions that emphasize the nondual realization include, among others, "Vedanta, Tantra, Vaisnavism, Taoism, and Zen," and he suggests Christian mysticism and Sufism also have qualities of nondual traditions (Chaudhuri, 1960, p.26). He speaks to the wisdom of these philosophies, discussing their strengths and shortcomings. Though each has its own wisdom and practices that emphasize the

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[3] In this paper the use of the word Brahman is synonymous with the Absolute, the Infinite, God and Being. Though at certain points Ishwara, Purusha and other terms might be more specifically appropriate, this level of parsing the nature of existence is beyond the scope of this essay. The chapter "Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara—Maya, Prakriti, Shakti" in *The Life Divine* (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, pp. 336-379) distinguishes the nuances of these different expressions of Being. Brahman contains them all: "Brahman the Reality is Atman, Purusha, Ishwara….The Supreme Brahman is that which in Western metaphysics is called the Absolute: but Brahman is at the same time the omnipresent Reality in which all that is relative exists as its forms or its movements…" (p. 338).

ever-available access to the lived experience of the Absolute, Chaudhuri contends that none of these schools embraces the whole of human experience.

According to Chaudhuri, only Sri Aurobindo integrated the strengths and wisdom of these various religious traditions to create a *purnadvaitavada*, or Integral Advaita. Chaudhuri (1950) clarifies the inclusiveness of Integral advaita in *Sri Aurobindo: Prophet of the Life Divine*[4], identifying the distinctions between Integral nondualism and *kevaladvaitavada* (unqualified nondualism), *visistadvaitavada* (qualified nondualism) and *dvaitavada* (dualism). He discusses how each of these three spiritual schools have a legitimate contribution to make, but none of them alone can be said to honor the full range of the existence: the co-existence of the individual along with the cosmic contexts and the transcendent Sachchidananda. Any of these three schools of Eastern thought touch on an abiding truth of existence, but only Integral advaita finds an integral poise including the three into a larger whole.

The key to Chaudhuri's analysis is the observation that the absolute can have paradoxical manifold simultaneous expressions without diminishment. Brahman can divide itself into individual beings with agency and self determination, while expressing the unfolding cosmic designs as well as the inescapable ultimate transcendent Sachchidananda.

> [I]ntegral nondualism affirms being as the undivided unity of the formless and multiple forms. According to ancient nondualism, ultimate reality is the formless, the indeterminable. Forms and determinations are unreal from the ultimate standpoint. In the view of Integral nondualism, forms and determinations also are very real from the ultimate standpoint. They are the glory of the creative urge inherent in Being. They provide meaning and reality to the self-expressive impulse of Being. (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 31)

This affirmation of formlessness and form sets the stage for an exploration of distinct poises of being that exist inseparably within the cognitively incomprehensible seamlessness of Brahman. "As supra cosmic transcendence, Brahman is not a blank featureless unity, but an infinitely opulent unity embracing an unlimited wealth of content and measureless possibility" (Chaudhuri, 1950, p.218). Chaudhuri suggests that no previous religious tradition has effectively integrated the truths in the various nondual and dual wisdom traditions in Asia. Exploring *kevaladvaitavada*, *visistadvaitavada* and *dvaitavada*, he details both the accuracy and the limitations of these schools of thought, and sets up an interpretation of Integral advaita that includes the wisdom of each.

With regard to unqualified nondualism, whether that of Shankaracharya's advaita, Buddhism, Samkhya yoga, or other traditions, Chaudhuri has a mixed review. These wisdom traditions have brought to consciousness the capacity to experience the ineffable unity of being at the very heart of the mystery of existence, which has of course been a gift to humanity. But two shortcomings exist about their interpretations of the range of existence. First, the emphasis on the transcendent has uniformly minimized the immanent expression in this world. Involvement in this world is, according to these advaita schools, a potential "entanglement either in the meshes of Prakriti

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[4] Much of the material Chaudhuri uses can be found in *The Life Divine* in the chapter "The Triple Status of the Supermind" (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, pp. 152-160). Chaudhuri's work is both an exegesis of this chapter and a comparative analysis with other religious traditions in India.

(*Samkhya*) or in the cobwebs of Maya *(Shankara Vedanta)*, or in the fetters of Karma *(Buddhism)*" (Chaudhuri, 1950, pp. 44-45). The shortcoming in this perception of the manifest world is the conviction that involvement in this world of nature and people is entangling illusion fraught with dangerous spiritual setbacks.

Integral advaita emphasizes that depths of sustained liberation should include the embodiment of the individual in the realm of this cosmic expression of Brahman; the world is nothing other than Brahman's creative expression and the liberated individual is the fruition of Brahman rising to consciousness in Jivatman. As Chaudhuri (1950) describes,

> The empirical individual is without a doubt a product of Ignorance, but the same cannot be said of the spiritual *individual* (*jivatman*) which is essentially a particular poise of being or mode of manifestation of the supreme Spirit. Identical with Brahman in essence and existence, the spiritual individual has also a unique function and form of manifestation of its own, in consequence of which it differs from other poises of being of Brahman, the supreme Reality. (p. 216)

From this point of view the world itself—again provided that the individual has been liberated from "all taint of ignorance" that keeps the ego in a state of illusion of separation and self importance—is an inseparable expression of Brahman, valid in its own right and, as a creative manifestation of Brahman, worthy of creative interface and participation by the individual.

Qualified nondualism or *visistadvaita,* according to Chaudhuri, makes the contribution to the dialogue of religious wisdom that *jivatman,* the spiritual self of each individual, is in fact an inseparable aspect of Brahman. *Jivatman* "is not ontologically separate form the supreme Lord, but is rather eternally dependent upon Him as His standing self-differentiation" (Chaudhuri, 1950, p.213). However, the insufficiency of the qualified schools of Advaita, according to Chaudhuri, is that their understanding of the nature of existence fails to capture the nature of relationship of the Jivatman and Brahman.

No analogy or conceptual framework can do justice to the mysterious nature of Being. The term *self-differentiation* from the passage above speaks to the wisdom of both unqualified advaita and qualified advaita: This is all Brahman, all without the possibility of otherness. But paradoxically—and as the qualified advaitans emphasize—the human aspect of Brahman does in fact have a quality of independence within the larger frame of being Brahman.

Chaudhuri (1950) suggests that humanity is an aspect of Brahman, but with a standing independent agency. This paradox is of course at the heart of liberating insight. "The Individual Self is not a mere power or form or quality or function of the Absolute; it is the Absolute itself in a particular poise of being" (p.213). The shortcoming of the Qualified Nondualism is summed up as a sort of inverse to the Unqualified Nondualism:

> In other words, *visistadvaita* is mistaken in emphasizing the Saguna aspect of Brahman at the cost of the Nirguna aspect. Brahman is at once Nirguna and Saguna. And the liberated soul is at liberty to choose either the state of blissful absorption in Nirguna Brahman or the state of rapturous communion with the Saguna Brahman (p. 214).

Here the Nirguna aspect of Brahman is the transcendent state of the movement beyond form. The Saguna aspect is the world of form that is a poise subsumed in the formless unfolding. Both poises, Chaudhuri suggests, are valid.

Dualism, or *dvaitavada*, validates the abiding quality of the spiritual individual before, during and after spiritual awakening. What liberation eradicates is the ego, the "empirical self which is an organization of Nature (*prakriti*) for the centralization of man's manifold experience" (Chaudhuri, 1950, p.212). The spiritual self is in fact "an eternally real component of ultimate reality"(p.212). However, Dualism overshoots the mark when it perceives each Jivatman is ontologically independent from one another and the larger scope of Ultimate existence. Dualism as a system of thought acknowledges the individualization of Brahman into component parts "*as if* it were entirely separate from other individual soul forms and also form the universal Divine" (pp.210-211). This "poise of being in the Spirit" is critical to Integral nondualism, but it must be taken within the larger truth of Being: "The basic and essential unity of Spirit is in no way abrogated by this free play of differentiation" (p. 211).

Integral advaita reconciles the validity of all three of these spiritual schools.

> When the Spirit is realized in its full Integrality, it is found that advaita, visistadvaita, and dvaita are all true, although none of them represents the whole truth. They are all true in so far as they endeavor to translate in terms of logical thinking three equally real poises of being—three supramental forms of self-manifestation—of the same indivisible ineffable Spirit. (Chaudhuri, 1950, p. 211-212)

Thus each is valid, but not sufficient to embrace the range of being that is described by Integral advaita. Below is an extended passage from *The Life Divine* (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22) in which Sri Aurobindo describes the coexistence of three poises of being, all of which, he proposes, can be grasped by the Supermind:

> We, human beings, are phenomenally a particular form of consciousness, subject to Time and Space, and can only be, in our surface consciousness which is all we know of ourselves, one thing at a time, one formation, one poise of being, one aggregate of experience; and that one thing is for us the truth of ourselves which we acknowledge; all the rest is either not true or no longer true…. But the Divine Consciousness is not so particularized, nor so limited; it can be many things at a time and take more than one enduring poise even for all time. We find that in the principle of Supermind itself it has three such general poises or sessions of its world-founding consciousness. The first founds the inalienable unity of things, the second modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in One and One in Many; the third further modifies it so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality which, by the action of Ignorance, becomes in us at a lower level the illusion of the separate ego. (pp. 155-156)

This passage speaks to the limitations of the human mind such that we embrace a single poise of being that is true and limit that observation as the exclusive truth. Thus *advaita*, *visistadvaita* and *dvaita* all have truths to offer humanity, but none are sufficient to describe the paradoxical inclusive expression of Brahman. The three poises described in the above passage correspond to

the wisdom of the three spiritual schools that Chaudhuri analyzes above. The Unqualified Nondualists describe the "inalienable unity of things"; the Qualified Nondualists adhere to the "manifestation of the many in the one"; and the Dualists affirm "the evolution of a diversified individuality." The coexistence of the three poises of Being is beyond the scope of our conceptual analysis of the regular human mind, but the profound expression of the three can be simultaneously experienced by the Supermind, toward which Sri Aurobindo suggests consciousness, in the guise of humanity for the time being, is evolving. Chaudhuri (1950) captures the inclusive and indefinable nature of the coexistence of the three poises of being within Integral Nondualism:

> The spiritual individual is, in point of truth, a center of universal consciousness, a focus and medium of the transcendent Divine. Eternally free in itself, the spiritual Individual is essentially identical with the All of existence and also identical with the all-transcending One. That is why *purnadvaitavada* maintains that supra-cosmic transcendence, cosmic universality and unique individuality are three equally real, non-temporal poises of being of the same supreme Spirit. (p. 220)

Lila

All exists here, no doubt, for the delight of existence, all is a game or Lila; but a game too carries within itself an object to be accomplished and without the fulfillment of that object would have no completeness of significance.

<div align="right">(Ghose, 2009, Vol.2, p.867)</div>

Sri Aurobindo's Commentary on Other Spiritual Views of Lila

To understand the unique manner in which Sri Aurobindo applies *Lila* to Integral Yoga requires that we first explore what he asserts Integral Lila is not. In his chapter, "The Divine and the UnDivine" (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, pp. 403-427), Sri Aurobindo describes possible variations on a doctrine of Lila that other religions and advaitin points of view might advocate. First with regard to dualistic thinking, whether some schools of Sankhya and Vaishnavism or certain Christian interpretations, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes his interpretation of Divine play from theirs. According to the dualistic schools, this worldly life is often seen as unDivine.

> The soul by taking on manhood, perhaps by the very fact of birth itself, has fallen from the Divine, has committed an original sin or error which it must be man's spiritual aim, as soon as he is enlightened, thoroughly to cancel, unflinchingly to eliminate. In that case, the only reasonable explanation of such a paradoxical manifestation or creation is that it is a cosmic game, a Lila, a play, an amusement of the Divine Being. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 424)

Birth as an original sin or error clearly does not fit into the Aurobindonian understanding of Integral advaita. This understanding might be seen as teleological, but with these dualistic schools the teleology is promoted in the sense of eradicating a mistake. Sri Aurobindo's teleological play, which will be further examined below, does not start with a separation from or

mistake of the Divine. Clearly, *Lila* of the dualistic schools could be employed to their explanations of the mystery of existence, only the play involves a very different paradigm.

Sri Aurobindo (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22) goes on:

Or, perhaps, as some religions curiously suppose, He has done this so that there may be inferior creatures who will praise and glorify Him for his eternal goodness, wisdom, bliss and omnipotence and try feebly to come an inch nearer to the goodness in order to share the bliss, on pain of punishment—by some supposed eternal—if, as the vast majority must by their very imperfection, they fail in their endeavor. But to the doctrine of such a Lila so crudely stated there is always possible the retort that a God, himself all-blissful, who delights in the suffering of creatures or imposes such suffering on them for the faults of his own imperfect creation, would be no Divinity and against Him the moral being and intelligence of humanity must revolt or deny His existence. (p. 424)

This dualistic rendering of a narcissistic God not only misses the mark of Lila in the Integral sense, but would demand a sort of spiritual call to arms by Sri Aurobindo, were it to be the case.

The applications of the term *Lila* to various other nondual schools of thoughts are dealt with subtly. With traditional Advaita in the Shankaracharya tradition in question, the obvious question of what is the motivation for this mask of imperfection on the ultimate transcendent Brahman that underlies all of our experience of existence?

It may be He pretends to be unDivine, wears that appearance like the mask or make-up of an actor for the sole pleasure of the pretence or the drama. Or else He has created the unDivine, created ignorance, sin and suffering just for the joy of a manifold creation. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p.424)

Perhaps for the advaitin sages that have experienced the Absolute, an explanation of any kind seems unnecessary. To transcend this realm of earthly experience and to see the vaster beautiful truth that embraces all possible manifestations is enough. Many advaitins may feel that the realm of seeking a logical explanation of any kind is to reenter into the small provincial world of our human drama. Since many nondual teachers do describe the typical human experience as an illusion, far removed from the liberating insight of true revelatory experience, engaging the mind to begin to fathom the mystery of Brahman's purposes may seem not just idle, but counter to the experience of insight into the absolute, often described as sheer wisdom, love or bliss.

Sri Aurobindo offers—and then refutes—two possible traditional nondual explanations of the mysterious puzzle of our existence within Brahman.

He suggests that the human drama with its shrouded comprehension of the Absolute is, a) an aspect of Brahman that He created of Himself as an idle pleasure of enactment or; b) simply the experience of the joy of being variously manifested. These two explanations affirm the status quo. One might argue that if bliss simply exists as the backdrop to all this creation, there is no need to meddle with complex thoughts of Brahman's intention. The fundamental knowledge that Atman is Brahman is enough to trust in the Divine and let the unfolding creation take care of

itself. The direct experience of Brahman, beyond the grasp of most of humanity, is sufficient. To fathom the intention of Brahman is unnecessary and quite possibly counterproductive to that direct experience.

Sri Aurobindo, however, does not adhere to this relationship between Atman and Brahman. He sees submission to an arbitrary universe with odd-ball beings, a few of whom can glimpse the Divine, as unbecoming to an all-blissful Brahman. Why should the vast majority of beings be destined to live in an ill-suited illusion while in actuality embraced by an abiding Love? With God of creation in all things, would this perspective not be a dim view of his purposes?

> [E]xistence of the individual is not an error in some self of the Absolute which that self afterwards discovers… Neither is the individual existence a subordinate circumstance in a Divine play or Lila, a play which consists of a continual revolution through unending cycles of pleasure and suffering without any higher hope in the Lila itself or any issue from it except the occasional escape of few from time to time out of their bondage to this ignorance. We might be compelled to hold that ruthless and disastrous view of God's workings if man had no power of self transcendence or no power of transforming by self-knowledge the conditions of the play nearer and nearer to the truth of the Divine Delight. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 402)

Sri Aurobindo clearly does not adhere to a view of Lila that would affirm the idle cycle of things. The view of a God that would provide for such a turn of affairs in which the mass of beings suffer in a small realm of being while only a very few beings perceive the delight that is Brahman, Sri Aurobindo offers as "ruthless and disastrous." Further, in emphasizing humanity's agency in bringing about self transcendence, Sri Aurobindo suggests that submitting to a worldview that holds with things as they are would indicate that we are missing the value of the very gift we have been given in this human form. He suggests here that we can and should engage in our own transformation.

Lila in the Integral Yoga Perspective

> *[E]ternal and immutable delight of being moving out into infinite and variable delight of becoming is the root of the whole matter…* (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 111)

As described in the section above, Integral advaita distinguishes three poises of being: transcendental, universal and individual. These three poises exist distinctly within Brahman because Brahman can be paradoxically manifold and beyond manifold without ever losing its Absolute nature as Being. Transcendent Sachchidananda, the laws and expression of the material cosmos and the dawning consciousness of individual beings coexist. Each is a realm valid in and of itself, and each is an aspect of the play of the Absolute Brahman.

> As with the being of Brahman, so with its consciousness, Maya: it is not bound to a finite restriction of itself or to one or law of its action; it can be many things simultaneously, have many co-ordinated movements which to the finite reason may seem contradictory; it is one but innumerably manifold, infinitely plastic, inexhaustibly adaptable. Maya is the supreme and universal consciousness and force of the Eternal and Infinite and, being by its

very nature unbound and illimitable, it can put forth many states of consciousness at a time, many dispositions of its Force, without ceasing to be the same consciousness-force for ever. It is at once transcendental, universal and individual; it is the supreme supracosmic Being that is aware of itself as All-Being, as the Cosmic Self, as the Consciousness-force of cosmic Nature, and at the same time experiences itself as the individual being and consciousness in all existences. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 356)

In order to comprehend *Lila* in the context of Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga, this point, clearly identified by Sri Aurobindo above, must be understood. A nondual expression can manifest variously, obviously. That is the significance of nonduality: no individual being or object exists outside the creative expression of Brahman. All is Brahman unfolding. But the distinction that Sri Aurobindo makes above is that multifarious poises of being are expressing independently within the larger frame of Brahman. The transcendent, the cosmic and the individual exist on relatively independent levels of existence. Granted a rough conceptual sketch would put the individual consciousness within the cosmic, which in turn exists within the transcendent. But each has an independent expression simultaneously. This distinction of being, examined thoroughly by Chaudhuri (1950), as described above, begins to elucidate the nature of Being within which the Divine Lila of Integral yoga unfolds.

Evolution

The question of why such a complex system of Being exists as the expression of perfect Brahman is addressed repeatedly by Sri Aurobindo. Why, if cosmic material of all nature and life forms of all manner are perfection unfolding, is this delight of Being so hidden from consciousness in this worldly poise? Why do the vast majority of life forms on earth, including humans, in spite of their Divine status, fail to identify themselves as such? Our vision of our divinity is imperfect. If Sri Aurobindo's observations are correct, in spite of our Divine essence, most humans do not perceive this true nature. Is this some sort of deluding ruse that Brahman is playing on aspects of Itself?

Sri Aurobindo's response to these questions is simple: the Lila of Brahman involves the evolution of consciousness toward Sachchidananda.

In that power [of human capacity of self transcendence] lies the justification of individual existence; the individual and the universal unfolding in themselves the Divine light, power, joy of transcendent Sachchidananda always manifest above them, always secret behind their surface appearances, this is the secret intention, the ultimate significance of the Divine play, the Lila. But it is in themselves, in their transformation but also their persistence and perfect relations, not in their self-annihilation that that must be unfolded. Otherwise there would be no reason for their ever having existed; the possibility of the Divine's unfolding in the individual is the secret of the enigma, his presence there and this intention of the self-unfolding the key to the world of the Knowledge-Ignorance. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 402)

Thus the "secret intention" of the Lila is the "transformation" from unconscious matter to conscious beings to individuals in the cosmos who recognize their place in the Divine and the

Sachchidananda that permeates life and existence with that level of awakening. The "self-annihilation" of the schools of Advaita that promote transcendence from this realm of matter and individual consciousness does not agree with the transformation that Sri Aurobindo proposes. The material world and the beings whose consciousness has arisen thereof, are valid expressions per se of this creative unfolding mystery. To emphasize the primacy of transcendence from this world of form and individual life denigrates the miracle of our existence as evolving expressions of Brahman in this realm of cosmic and individual existence. Lila, from the Integral perspective, validates the Maya of this realm, its expression and development, as fundamentally valid expressions of Brahman in the context of the mystery of the play.

However, for Sri Aurobindo the creative and teleological play of Lila is superior to the concept of Maya. In comparing the Integral perspective, which embraces both the transcendent and the material poises, to the advaita of Shakaracharya, which gives primacy to the transcendent poise Being, Sri Aurobindo remarks:

> The world, as God has made it, is not a rigid exercise in logic but, like a strain of music, an infinite harmony of many diversities, and his own existence, being free and absolute, cannot be logically defined....Maya is one realisation, an important one which Shankara overstressed because it was most vivid to his own experience. For yourself leave the word for subordinate use and fix rather on the idea of Lila, a deeper and more penetrating word than Maya. Lila includes the idea of Maya and exceeds it. (Ghose, 2009, Vol. 13, p. 89)

Maya, often translated to English as illusion, indicating the illusion of manifest existence, is understood by Sri Aurobindo differently. He describes Maya as the "consciousness" of Brahman (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p.356). This definition of Maya gives it substantially more credibility than regarding it as illusion. If this elevation of Maya is taken as a premise, "then certain consequences inevitably impose themselves" (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p.112). These include, first, that we are unknowingly supported by Brahman in this Lila in all moments and realms of being, and, second, that we are only partially evolved toward the desired ends of this Lila.

Lila, the play of affairs of the Divine, involves the transformation of Maya toward the realization of its true nature. In Moksha, the liberated mystics have achieved a level of consciousness that is essentially the Maya of manifest existence perceiving its place as Brahman. The possibility for humanity to rise above the station that it currently holds, that of illusion of separation and suffering, even as it is already one with Brahman, offers a glimpse of evolution and the manifold nature of Being.

> In the first place...since in the reality of our being we are the indivisible All-Consciousness and therefore the inalienable All-Bliss, the disposition of our sensational experience in the three vibrations of pain, pleasure and indifference can only be a superficial arrangement created by that limited part of ourselves which is uppermost in our waking consciousness. Behind there must be something in us—much vaster, profounder, truer than the superficial consciousness—which takes delight impartially in all experiences; it is that delight which secretly supports the superficial mental being and enables it to persevere through all labours, sufferings and ordeals in the agitated movement of the Becoming.... Oneness finds itself infinitely in what seems to us to be a falling away

from its oneness, but is really an inexhaustible diverse display of unity. This is the miracle, the Maya of the universe, yet perfectly logical, natural and a matter of course to the self-vision and self-experience of the Infinite. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 112)

There is no way for us to be anything other than perfect transcendent Being unfolding, yet there is this illusion of separateness. In the larger frame of Being, regardless of our pains, some part of us "takes delight impartially in all experiences." The illusion of separateness and the pains that result are indications of our imperfect evolution toward Sachchidananda. Our divided consciousness is:

> … an imperfect response, a tangled and discordant rhythm preparing and preluding the full and unified play of the conscious Being in us; it is not the true and perfect symphony that may be ours if we can once enter into sympathy with the One in all variations and attune ourselves to the absolute and universal diapason. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 112)

This imperfection of human experience is logical from the point of view of the graduated development from nescient matter toward individuals whose consciousness can realize the Sachchidananda that permeates all things. Imperfection is necessary in the movement from inert matter to life to embodied aspects of Brahman experiencing Itself—all of which is part of Brahman's Lila.

> The strangeness of the play diminishes, the paradox loses its edge of sharpness if we discover that, although fixed grades exist each with its appropriate order of nature, they are only firm steps for a progressive ascent of the souls embodied in forms of matter, a progressive Divine manifestation which rises from the inconscient to the superconscient or all-conscient status with the human consciousness as its decisive point of transition. Imperfection becomes then a necessary term of the manifestation: for, since all the Divine nature is concealed but present in the Inconscient, it must be gradually delivered out of it; this graduation necessitates a partial unfolding, and this partial character or incompleteness of the unfolding necessitates imperfection. An evolutionary manifestation demands a mid-stage with gradations above and under it,—precisely such a stage as the mental consciousness of man, part knowledge, part ignorance, a middle power of being still leaning on the Inconscient but slowly rising towards the all-conscious Divine Nature. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 425)

This passage describes both evolution, the firm steps for a progressive ascent of the souls embodied in forms of matter, and the position of humanity in this ascent, a "mid-stage" of evolution, part insight, part ignorance. The description of evolution as 'progressive Divine manifestation which rises from the inconscient to the superconscient or all-conscient status with the human consciousness as its decisive point of transition' is both indicative of the evolutionary movement of Maya and the important position that humanity holds in this game of the Divine. Humanity is on the verge of achieving the critical evolutionary step of consciousness toward individual Beings who can achieve and sustain their relation as Brahman in this individual poise in the world of the cosmos: matter, soul, and even community. Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga proposes that humanity can rise out of its stupor and ignorance, and that each individual should employ the agency to rise up toward the Divine. Lastly, this passage reminds us that the Divine

is always in the background, holding and sustaining human beings even when enveloped in the fog of their illusions of separateness: 'since all the Divine nature is concealed but present in the Inconscient, it must be gradually delivered out of it'. The nature of evolution is paradoxical: Humans are unconscious players in a game they have already won. The key to the game is that they must discover this for themselves.

This evolution from a limited largely unpleasant perception of ourselves to the Being-Consciousness-Bliss of Sachchidananda raises the question of cruelty: Why is humanity seemingly unwittingly involved in a game, much of which involves suffering. This game—whose dénouement, which exists just beyond the grasp of the ego for most of us, is incomparable joy—may seem rather tragic to the observer on the sideline: so much suffering to the multitudes of individuals. Why would the Absolute create players ignorant of their role in the game? Sri Aurobindo holds that an aspect of Atman must have consented to this play of the Divine:

> A manifestation of this kind, self-creation or Lila, would not seem justifiable if it were imposed on the unwilling creature; but it will be evident that the assent of the embodied spirit must be there already, for Prakriti cannot act without the assent of the Purusha. There must have been not only the will of the Divine Purusha to make the cosmic creation possible, but the assent of the individual Purusha to make the individual manifestation possible. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 426)

Prakriti, in broad terms, refers to the earthly realm of material world and egoic beings that seem, phenomenologically, separate from Brahman. Purusha is the transcendent aspect of Brahman and Atman. That 'Prakriti cannot act without the assent of the Purusha', whether cosmic or individual suggests that the Divine cannot make players completely ignorant of their status as Divine. There is consent of some sort in this realm of Purusha that renders the illusion of suffering separate individuals moot. There is never complete severance from the Divine; our individual Atman is always there just behind the curtain of ignorance.

> But if the human soul is a portion of the Divinity, if it is a Divine Spirit in man that puts on this imperfection and in the form of humanity consents to bear this suffering, or if the soul in humanity is meant to be drawn to the Divine Spirit and is His associate in the play of imperfection here, in the delight of perfect being otherwise, the Lila may still remain a paradox, but it ceases to be a cruel or revolting paradox; it can at most be regarded as a strange mystery and to the reason inexplicable. (Ghose, 2009, Vol. 21-22, pp. 424-425)

We are each, then, the Divine Spirit's "associate." A part of us colludes with the Divine to play this game of imperfection. This image of individual Purusha admitting us into this game of evolution seems to render the game an odd curiosity, 'a strange mystery and to the reason inexplicable'.

Sri Aurobindo, however, proposes several nuanced justifications for the initiation of this Lila. First and foremost, Sri Aurobindo affirms the mystery of this game. He addresses the question of why we have this game to re-evolve into Brahman, when one has from the start never been separate: "The only question is the reason why this kind of progressive manifestation was itself necessary; that is the sole point left obscure to the intelligence" (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p.

426). He offers that the movement is itself a mystery beyond our ken: But it may be said that the Divine Will and delight in such am arduous manifestation and the reason for the soul's assent to it is still a mystery. But he goes on to say that a play of self-concealing and self-revealing is one of the most strenuous joys that a conscious being can experience. More than a mere game of transcendental hide and seek, this play involves the most poignant aspects of being alive. This then, the expression of Brahman in myriad individual forms whose accomplishment is discovering their innate divinity from the shroud of ignorance, might be one reason for this Divine game, the delight of self discovery.

Another sort of proposed justification for the play of the Divine that Sri Aurobindo suggests "is a new affirmation of Sachchidananda in its apparent opposite. If the Infinite's right of various self-manifestation is granted, this too as a possibility of its manifestation is intelligible and has its profound significance" (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 427). What sort of seamless bliss existed before the poise of cosmos began is, of course, unknowable. But the choice to take this "plunge into Inconscience," (p. 427) to take form in matter and cosmic energy, perhaps was preceded by simple uncomplicated bliss of Brahman. This plunge into the material world followed by a gradual evolutionary uncovering of the divinity innate in all things, then, could be for a freshness of perspective and affirmation of itself from the depths of the inert conditions of cosmic existence.

Whatever the motivation for the source of this teleological Lila may be, Sri Aurobindo is clear that there exists an abiding Sachchidananda at every level of the game. The game's sought resolution, that of abiding creative Being-Consciousness-Bliss, has never been absent, even as evolution of consciousness brings humanity closer to Sachchidananda. Perhaps the motivation for initiating the play is too vast for our psyches to grasp. Sri Aurobindo realized levels of communion with Brahman that unveiled the Being-Consciousness-Bliss, steadily present and gracious, unfailingly behind and within the movement of all things.

> The world of which we are a part is in its most obvious view a movement of Force; but that Force, when we penetrate its appearances, proves to be a constant and yet always mutable rhythm of creative consciousness casting up, projecting in itself phenomenal truths of its own infinite and eternal being; and this rhythm is in its essence, cause and purpose a play of the infinite delight of being ever busy with its own innumerable self-representations. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 111)

Thus Lila, idle Divine play, is the most fundamental motivation for existence as it stands.

The Participatory Nature of Evolution

The individual poise of Integral advaita describes beings within the cosmic design of Brahman, mainly ignorant of their Divine status for the time-being, that have agency to further their own evolution. That Brahman should willingly divide itself into micro-beings, fragments of Itself, who don't know what they are, may seem rather arbitrary. This arrangement certainly seems capricious.

However, the cosmic design has given us autonomy to move and develop as we will; hence, we participate in the Lila of immanent consciousness evolving toward Divinity. The aspect of evolution that is participatory for humanity involves choice: to submit to complacency or to live in such a way that moves us toward experiencing the Divine in any given moment. Our position as humans allows us the opportunity to consciously move our souls toward the union with Divine, even as we stay in and engage with the manifest material world. Alternatively, we also can choose to live in the 'sensational experience in the three vibrations of pain, pleasure and indifference'. This latter choice is, of course, compelling to most of us.

This complex evolution is at the heart of Integral advaita and Integral Lila. Brahman has moved into the inconscience of the cosmos for some reason beyond comprehension. But the movement is clearly toward reawakening to our true nature, otherwise why stars? Why planets? Why water? Why life? Why liberation (Moksha)? Humans can choose to fully engage in this game of rediscovery of our Divine nature. Though the opportunity is at hand, we have shown our capacity to decimate our own existence, thus setting back the chance for imminent evolution. Myopic 'greed, hatred and delusion' as the Buddhists put it, may cause humanity to miss this opportunity, not just for the possibility of abiding indescribable Bliss, but toward the achievement of sustained 'God in Matter' and the next step in Brahman's Lila.

The following extended passage from *The Life Divine* eloquently describes the steps of evolution and ends with our participation in the unfolding process.

But if it is once admitted that the Spirit has involved itself in the Inconscience and is manifesting itself in the individual being by an evolutionary gradation, then the whole process assumes meaning and consistence; the progressive ascent of the individual becomes a key-note of this cosmic significance, and the rebirth of the soul in the body becomes a natural and unavoidable consequence of the truth of the Becoming and its inherent law….Our explanation of the evolution in Matter is that the universe is a self-creative process of a supreme Reality whose presence makes spirit the substance of things—all things are there as the spirit's powers and means and forms of manifestation. An infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, an infinite delight of being is the Reality secret behind the appearances of the universe; its Divine Supermind or Gnosis has arranged the cosmic order….The material universe is the lowest stage of a downward plunge of the manifestation, an involution of the manifested being of this triune Reality into an apparent nescience of itself, that which we now call the Inconscient; but out of this nescience the evolution of that manifested being into a recovered self-awareness was from the very first inevitable. It was inevitable because that which is involved, must evolve; for it is not only there as an existence, a force hidden in its apparent opposite, and every such force must in its inmost nature be moved to find itself, to realise itself, to release itself into play, but it is the reality of that which conceals it, it is the self which the Nescience has lost and which therefore it must be the whole secret meaning, the constant drift of its action to seek for and recover. It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organised and capable of awaking to its own Reality. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, pp. 784-785)

Evolution, as described here, is the "secret meaning" of the Lila. Out of the nescience of the material universe, we are recovering our wholeness through self-awareness. Fulfilling that awareness of our Divine nature in this realm of being in time and space is the Reality secret behind the appearances of the universe. The evolution will take place through each of our life choices, through the conscious individual being.

Thus as bits of Brahman ignorant of our identity, we are given the capacity to evolve, but with no guarantee of success. The paradox is as brilliant as it is bizarre. The general movement of consciousness in the cosmos is toward awakening: to find itself, to realize itself, and to release itself into play. The force of this energetic awakening is at work in us and in everything. Yet the animal nature out of which we have emerged has consolidated an egoic center that must be transcended to achieve Sachchidananda. We are at once moved by the zeitgeist of this existence which moves us toward self-knowledge and we are left to our own devices to sort out if and how humans will collectively achieve this final step from ignorance to self-knowledge.

The Dénouement: Superhumanity

Evolution's end, then, is a being in this realm of the material universe and individuality that knows the Sachchidananda of Brahman even as we exist on this cosmic and individual level of being. Sri Aurobindo describes our current status as a penultimate state of consciousness, near to this final stage. Our task as individuals and as a race is to grow from what we are into a more luminous existence—from pleasure and pain into a purer and vaster and deeper bliss, knowledge, and power.

> There is an evolution and we have to complete it: a human animality or an animal humanity is not enough. We must pass from the inadequate figure of humanity into a figure of the Godhead, from mind to supermind, from the consciousness of the finite to the consciousness of the Infinite, from Nature into Supernature. (Ghose, 2009, Vol.12, pp. 227-228)

This notion of Supernature and Supermind are the final stages of this Lila, the achievement of the game's resolution. *Super-* of course suggests that which is above or beyond. Beyond mind lies the harmonious integration of Sachchidananda with our current practical worldly faculties. The accomplishment of Superhumanity is the fulfillment of the Divine play.

Superhumanity, then is beyond humanity in that it achieves the Supermind or Truth-Consciousness, that which experiences Sachchidananda, the Divinity behind and within all things, and lives in the individual poise ensconced in that level of awakened consciousness. Super-humanity is the next step in evolution and the fulfillments of this Lila.

> A life of gnostic beings carrying the evolution to a higher supramental status might fitly be characterised as a Divine life; for it would be a life in the Divine, a life of the beginnings of a spiritual Divine light and power and joy manifested in material Nature. That might be described, since it surpasses the mental human level, as a life of spiritual and supramental supermanhood. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p.1104)

Our next phase, should we come to achieve it, would involve a disarmingly simple task: To surrender our egos and discover the divinity that has always been there sustaining and delighting in our lives. Then the place humanity would hold is aptly described as a "Divine light" manifested in the cosmos. Humanity has access to this way of being in the world. Sri Aurobindo describes "a new consciousness in which humanity itself shall find its own self-exceeding and self-fulfillment by the revelation of the divinity that is striving for birth within it. This is the sole true supermanhood and the one real possibility of a step forward in evolutionary Nature"(Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, pp. 1105-1106). Yet—to reiterate—there is ample room for failure.

The Lila may or may not be fulfilled by this species of being. Sri Aurobindo, who lived through two world wars and the inception of nuclear violence, perceived our possible failure to achieve our evolutionary potential. He saw humanity's will as central to the possibility for our potential unfolding:

> Not individuals only, but in time the race also...can have the hope, if it develops a sufficient will, to rise beyond the imperfections of our present very unDivine nature and to ascend at least to a superior humanity, to rise nearer, even if it cannot absolutely reach, to a Divine manhood or supermanhood. At any rate, it is the compulsion of evolutionary Nature in him to strive to develop upward, to erect the ideal, to make the endeavor. (Ghose, 2009, Vols. 21-22, p. 745)

The will of Brahman is toward evolutionary development. If the will of humanity is lacking, Sri Aurobindo is clear: "If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed…" (p. 879).

The movement of Lila, then, involves humanity in this evolutionary drama. The participatory opportunity for humanity includes all the variables in human nature that move us toward insight and wisdom. Primary among these is *will*. Dedication to awaken from our somnambulistic lifestyle will determine the fulfillment or failure of Brahman's Lila through humanity. Understanding the movement of Brahman in this larger frame of Divine Lila gives purpose to nondual insights. Sri Aurobindo's mapping of the evolution of consciousness serves as a source of inspiration to seekers of all sorts, from the committed to the lackadaisical. The movement toward a spiritual Divine light manifested in material Nature, and the knowledge that we ourselves can be that light, ought to be enough to turn our attention toward helping to resolve this Lila.

Lila

In us is the thousandfold Spirit who is one,
An eternal thinker calm and great and wise,
A seer whose eye is an all-regarding sun,
A poet of the cosmic mysteries.
A critic Witness pieces everything
And binds the fragments in his brilliant sheaf;
A World-adventurer borne on Destiny's wing
Gambles with death and triumph, joy and grief.

A king of greatness and a slave of love,
Host of the stars and guest in Nature's inn,
A high spectator spirit throned above,
A pawn of passion in the game Divine,
One who has made in sport the suns and seas
Mirrors in our being his immense caprice.

(Ghose, 2009, Vol.2, p. 611)

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Structure and Process:
Integral Philosophy and Triple Transformation

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Abstract: This paper looks at the ongoing debate between perennialism and pluralism in religious studies and considers the category of the integral, as described by Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) in the context of this debate. After exploring the case for perennialism vis-à-vis pluralism, it compares the contemporary taxonomy of a perennial core to mystical experience developed by Robert K. C. Forman with the idea of the "triple transformation" developed by Sri Aurobindo as a way to the realization of an "integral consciousness." Through this consideration, it indicates the aporetic nature of an integralism which can simultaneously uphold the concerns of perennialism and pluralism non-reductively. Such an aporetic goal challenges the epistemological assumptions of the modern knowledge academy and is shown to make sense only as an ever deferred processual ontology as against the knowledge academy's telos of a totalistic structuralism.

Key Words: Integral Consciousness; Integral Philosophy; Integral Yoga; Perennial Philosophy; Religious Pluralism; Sri Aurobindo.

At the forefront of contemporary debates in religious studies is one that pits perennialism against pluralism. The idea of perennialism may be as old as *homo sapiens*, but its early modern origins in the west can be traced to figures like Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) and Agostino Steuco (1497–1548), Italian Renaissance churchmen and philosophers who taught the consonance of religious and philosophical ideas and the continuity of these principles from Hermetic, Cabalistic and Platonic sources to Christianity. The term 'Perennial philosophy' arose in this milieu, perhaps coined by Steuco and adopted from him by Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716). These philosophers extended the idea that there was a core of philosophical principles (transcendental) and ideal values (subjective) which were present throughout human history and in many religions and philosophies.

Around the turn of the 19th/20th century, the idea of perennial philosophy revived with some new connotations, influenced by eastern, particularly Vedantic thinking. The mid to late 19th century American Transcendentalist movement may be seen as preparing the ground for this turn, but a hybrid east-west discourse in perennialism gained greater prominence after the 1893 Parliament for World Religions in Chicago. This event has been seen as the start of the modern

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interfaith movement and had a strong universalist sentiment behind it. Swami Vivekananda's speech during this parliament highlighted the idea of Vedantic Transcendentalism, particularly through the Upanishadic image of the many rivers which lose their names and forms in the ocean (Swami Vivekananda, 1893, para. 2).

The Sanskrit term *sanatan dharma* soon became privileged as a descriptor of Hinduism tied to Indian nationalist projects. By 1909, we find Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) using this term, which is close to a literal translation of "perennial philosophy," as a synonym for Hinduism (Sri Aurobindo, 1997a, pp. 3-12). In this version of its use, perennialism refers to a transcendental foundation to reality which renews itself in a variety of experience throughout place and time. Though Aurobindo's understanding of the *sanatan dharma* increasingly voiced itself in terms closer to pluralism,[2] the Hindu nationalism which developed around a championing of this term, took its meaning from the privileged transcendentalism of Shankara's Advaita Vedanta. In the U.S., scholars and intellectuals affiliated with the Vedanta centers founded by Vivekananda helped in normalizing the translation of this term in terms of perennialism. Aldous Huxley's compilation *The Perennial Philosophy* (Huxley, 1970) may be thought to have completed this process through its popularity.

The publication of Huxley's book may be seen as the founding moment for the modern scholarly movement of perennialism, one championed overtly or covertly by eminent proponents such as Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), W. T. Stace (1886-1967), Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) and Huston Smith (1919-present). Perhaps the most prominent contemporary proponent of this school is Robert K. C. Forman.

Today, the notion of perennialism seems to be the politically correct choice for a liberal spirituality, and as such has a number of connotations: (1) At the popular level, it forms the 'gospel' of 'New Age' followers, and in this context, means something vague such as 'All religions say the same thing'; (2) Even in Huxley's book, some of the connotations of the older Renaissance genealogy of 'Perennial Philosophy' continue and a number of 'perennialists' understand its basis in this form: 'There is a core of common ethical and spiritual goals; and practices leading to these to be found in many world religions'; (3) The Advaita Vedanta formulation, which has been touched on earlier: 'All the names and forms through which religions have approached God are names and forms which originate from the single nameless, formless and changeless ocean of Infinite Consciousness'.

If we consider these propositions carefully, we see that all of them are problematic in their own ways. Clearly, all religions are not 'saying the same thing'. If we talk of a core of ethical and spiritual ideals and practices, the question arises on what is to be included and what excluded from this core, as also in which religion or ideology does this core originate and where does it find its best example? Thinking of questions like these makes the contested nature of this proposition evident. As for the proposition that all names and forms of the Divine originate and lose themselves in the ocean of Infinite Consciousness, this is clearly a privileged transcendentalism, a superior truth claim that can and has been contested. Among the schools of Indian Vedanta, for example, it is one of at least three major ontological statuses which claim theistic primacy and Buddhism would not accept it either.

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[2] See, for example, Aurobindo (2005, pp. 904-906).

The critique of the perennialist position in modern religious studies comes from a variety of directions, but all of these may be seen as forms of pluralism. Pluralism starts from an empirical and anti-idealist position and refuses to privilege a hegemonic transcendentalism. One strand of this position comes from the theological critique of Inclusivism initiated by Paul Hacker (1913-1979) and furthered by his student Wilhelm Halbfass (1940-2000).

Hacker (1983, pp. 11-28) argues that inclusivism is a typically Indian response to the problem of theism and characterizes it as a speaking for the other by co-optation. He sees the transcendental monist standpoint of Advaita Vedanta as a quintessential example of this. Distinct religious identities, histories and soteriologies are erased here in favor of something which subordinates them and swallows them in facelessness. The problematic nature of this kind of inclusivism is seen more prominently in the developmental hierarchism of Ken Wilber (1949-present), who identifies goals of becoming which are increasingly inclusive and find their culmination in a total systemic inclusion and organization corresponding to a state of nondual transcendence (Wilber, 2000). Wilber calls his system integral, but it is better characterized as inclusive in the sense of inclusivism. This can be contrasted to the integral, as I will try to show later.

Pluralist critiques of this kind of perennialism also form a basis for postmodern thinkers who find it important to preserve the right of Becoming over Being. What Hacker sees as a "typical Indian response," is characterized by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) as a "white mythology," the privileging of Logos or the will to rationality, turned systemic in its post-Enlightenment modern phase, and acting as a denaturing agent attempting to translate all singularities into the terms and taxonomies of a universalist anthropology or as in the case of Wilber, a transpersonal psychology. The initiating goals of the Enlightenment are seen here as the search for a totalizing systems theory of everything of exactly the kind being proposed by Wilber, arrived at either through structuralism or through comparative studies, leading to a taxonomic organization of knowledge.

In these two forms of perennialist inclusivism, that of Advaita Vedanta and of the white mythologies of the knowledge academy, we thus find two reductions of the plural transcendental and universal respectively—one which erases the plural through dissolution and the other which tames the plural through structuration. On the other hand, in considering pluralism, an important approach is the neo-Kantian refusal of ontological realities outside the constructions of language. Each religious tradition, here, would be seen as such a construction with its historically generated corpus of signifiers and the qualitative ontologies relating to these. Even transcendence here would be inextricably bound to a linguistic singularity and retain the flavor of its history and its practices.

Are we then left with the perennial and the plural as a binary to which there is no proper resolution? It isn't that there have been no attempts at dialog. The debate between perennialism and pluralism in our times is perhaps best exemplified in the difference in views between Robert K. C. Forman (1990) and Steven T. Katz (1978, p. 26) (who is a constructivist, holding that mystical experience takes different forms in different religious contexts). Such debates have the benefit of a dialectical engagement, which helps to expand the discourse. To account for differences in articulation of mystical experiences from different religious traditions, Forman has

posited the Pure Consciousness Event (PCE), which he claims characterizes an apophatic perennial core to mystical experiences, which is translated subjectively and expressed objectively in a variety of ways. Undoubtedly this is a reduction of the field of mystical experience, and is problematic in this sense, but it is important as an attempt to resolve of the perennialist/pluralist binary.

According to Forman (1998, p.234), the PCE can be subjectively translated in terms of three kinds of experiences: he calls these theistic, monistic and nihilistic. The theistic experience pertains to all religions or sectarian practices which proceed by affective relationship with the Transcendent One. Devotional schools such as Christianity or Vaishnavism could be brought under this rubric. The monistic experience proceeds by attempting to erase all difference and realize an inclusive Unitary Source, or one Reality. Advaita Vedanta is the quintessential example of this kind of realization. The nihilistic experience pertains to a rupture from phenomenal experience and a disappearance into a Transcendental which can only be described in terms of 'absence', a negative theology. Various Buddhist schools could be seen as exemplifying this. Forman, therefore, refuses to privilege any of these schools, but indicates something which forms their transcendental core, but which cannot be named, except in abstract terms, such as PCE. Yet, clearly, there is a reduction here, the plural seen as subordinate and phenomenal, while the perennial becomes the noumenal essence.

This brings me to the notion of the integral, which I touched on with respect to Ken Wilber. Wilber, of course, is not the founder of the term 'integral', even in its contemporary philosophical or psychological usage, though his popularization of the term is swiftly turning his use of it hegemonic. In the U.S., the academic precedents for this term can be found in Haridas Chaudhuri (1913-1975) (1974), the philosopher and educationist who founded the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), and Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968), a Harvard sociologist who coined the term "integral culture" (Sorokin, 1964, p.75). The usage of both these figures can be traced in turn to Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950). The use of the term by Wilber himself can also be traced to Sri Aurobindo, whose definitions and contexts of use are thus instructive to our discussion. Sri Aurobindo uses the term "integral" in two contexts, that of an "integral yoga" (Sri Aurobindo, 1999, p.118) and of an "integral consciousness" (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p.358).

"Integral Yoga" lays out a process of psychological integration. In his own practice of this process, we find the use of disciplines and goals belonging to a number of Indian spiritual traditions, particularly those related to certain schools of Vaishnavism and Tantra, along with practices taken from the Bhagavad Gita, an older Vedanta and the Veda. On the face of it, this may seem like another instance of the attempt to structure an inclusivistic organization of consciousness, as with Wilber. But the traditions from which Sri Aurobindo developed his transformative psychology can be seen to continue in forms which further their own cultural history in his practice. Moreover, they are not used in an additive way as components towards something which includes them, rather each one may be seen as having been expanded into a version which retains its origins but includes other elements.

In this sense, it may be thought of as an enlargement of disciplines along synthetic lines. Such processes of synthetic enlargement are not unique to Sri Aurobindo and continue the 'unauthorized' history of Indic spiritual traditions. It is in this sense that Sri Aurobindo's

magnum opus on his yoga is called *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo, 1999). In this text, we see enlarged descriptions of different traditional disciplines through a development of their own practices and goals, leading towards a point of convergence in something which he has called the Supermind, characterized by an "integral consciousness"(p. 114). It should be pointed out in passing that the term "integral yoga" is better known in the west through its trademarked version, taught by Swami Satchidananda (1914-2002). But this compendium of practices is merely additive and cannot be considered as anything more or other than this. From Sri Aurobindo's description, then, the "integral" in integral yoga pertains to a 'process' of integration which completes itself only in the structure of an "integral consciousness."

What then is an integral consciousness and is it anything different from the inclusivistic erasure of histories and the facelessness of a transcendental monism as in Advaita Vedanta? Taken from Sri Aurobindo, I would like to distinguish the integral consciousness of Supermind in terms of two primary features which distinguish it from the inclusivistic structures either of a transcendental monism or a totalistic developmental systems theory. These characteristics are:

1. The constituents of an integral consciousness are not merely its parts, assembled into an inclusive organization, but each nameable "part" is also the entire integral being.
2. To think an integral consciousness, one must think radical monism and radical pluralism at the same time.

Both these premises obey a mathematic of infinity. The first of them is also related to the famous Upanishadic verse on *Purna* (wholeness) heading the Isha Upanishad (2012):

Purnam adah purnam idam
Purnat purnam udachyate
Puransya purnam adaya
Purnam evavasishyate

That is the Whole, this is the Whole,
The Whole arises from the Whole
Subtracting the Whole from the Whole
Verily the Whole remains.[3]

One could simply replace 'whole' by 'integral' as described by Sri Aurobindo, in this verse, to arrive at an understanding of the first of the features I have laid out. To contemplate the second, it is necessary to realize that unity and infinity are not logically commensurate categories in a finite mathematics. We may think of one as a numerical instance or a grouping of finites but infinity is non-numerical. To think radical unity and radical infinity at the same time defies the laws of reason, and hence from a Kantian viewpoint, can only be considered empirically transcendental. Hence, even if we aim for such an impossibility 'processually', we cannot (and should not) conceive of it 'structurally'.

Yet this transcendentalism is quite different from a transcendental monism or from a Kantian idealism. By preserving pluralism in its fullness, it is better thought of as a Transcendental

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[3] Author's translation.

Empiricism. In contemporary philosophy, this phrase has been used by Gilles Deleuze (2001, p.25) to describe his condition of direct access to the "virtual field" of 'univocity' free from conceptual structures but potent with infinite possibility at each of its points and moments. In Deleuze's case, this "being of sensation" is arrived at through an unhinging of the mind and a return to it from the vantage of immanence. For Sri Aurobindo, one may distinguish such ontology as belonging to a consciousness "beyond" mind and thus available only to structures of becoming not presently available to us. In both cases, this is to be approached 'processually' and cannot be grasped 'structurally' due to the constraining limits of reason.

If we try to think of examples in spiritual literature describing such an ontology, where the perennial and plural are not reduced to each other, the Infinite not tamed by the Unitary but retaining its disruptive power, we find an instance in Krishna's vision or *darshan* in the Bhagavad Gita (2012, XI: 10-46). Throughout the dialog of the Bhagavad Gita, which goes back and forth between Arjuna and Krishna, Arjuna seeks ethical and spiritual conviction for taking arms in this civil war. After many arguments, Arjuna finally questions the authority of Krishna. What is the source of Being and Knowledge which issues this call to Power? In reply, Krishna bestows on Arjuna "the divine sight," *divyadrishti*. Arjuna then sees Krishna's "supramental" form, the *vishwarupa*.

In this apocalyptic vision, Arjuna views something completely illogical. The Bhagavad Gita describes this in terms of a plural univocity, something in which radical unity and radical infinity coexist. Arjuna says, "I see before me an infinite radiance extending on all sides, I see all the gods, all the humans, all the sages in your body"[4] (XI: 15-19). He sees impersonality, personality, the formless, the plethora of possible forms, the past, the present and the future. He sees that which can be expressed and that which cannot be expressed. This excessive plenitude of the Personal Instance tears at his mind, since its logic of the infinite is beyond its structural limits and Arjuna pleads for Krishna to revert to his "four-handed" cosmic form. It is clear that Arjuna received something he was not prepared for. Sri Aurobindo comments on this in his *Essays on the Gita* (Sri Aurobindo, 1997b, pp. 377-395).

In trying to think radical unity and radical infinity together, we arrive at an aporia. In the *Viswarupa Darshana* of Krishna, the Bhagavad Gita parts this aporetic curtain and shows us an image which, as human beings, we cannot cognize. This is not a sundering of the knot of Becoming and a plunge into the trance of Being; neither is it a denial of Being and a revelry in the play of signifiers. This is a living at the margins of the messianic, the aporetic impossibility, where two incommensurable infinities meet. It is only at this horizon of Grace that the structures which are yet to be formed can become established, leading towards the incomprehensible 'integral'. This is what the *Viswarupa* shows us—an evolutionary possibility, an 'integral' which has meaning only as emergent process beyond the limits of human capacity, never as pre-conceivable structure.

This understanding of the integral as process is to be contrasted with the inevitable misrepresentation of the idea in its entry into the knowledge academy, whether as integral philosophy, integral psychology, integral theology or integral theory. This eventuates because the modern academy is a discourse with its own rules, boundaries and expectations, and whatever

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[4] Loose translation by author.

enters these boundaries becomes subject to the *nomos*[5] (Bourdieu 2000, p.96) and *doxa*[6] (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 164-169) which structure these boundaries. The modern academy is a product of the knowledge drive of the Enlightenment, a will to Knowledge construed in the epistemological key, a totalistic theory of everything representable as absolute rational structure or generative grammar. The modern world is held together by the modern knowledge academy and the world market, ubiquitous and universal structures which develop increasingly transnational "integrated" manifestations subsuming cultures and histories into translated universal commodities and flavors in a realtime systemic archive. Modern 'subjects' are in this sense yoked to this enterprise of modernity, as knowledge workers within the walls of the knowledge academy, involved in producing transcendental and universal inclusivistic, referred to by Derrida (1985) as 'white mythologies'.

This is clearly not the 'integral' in the sense in which I have defined it, following Sri Aurobindo. It is an addition and structuration of fragments to make a potentially boundless universal fragment with a transcendental erasure of all structures beyond it. It is not the whole which is wholly present in each of its parts, nor the plural which cannot be reduced to a finite unity, nor the singular which co-exists with the infinite. This is a difference in kind not a difference in degree. This structuration becomes most dangerous when it becomes a developmental systems theory to classify things, people, classes, races, qualities in terms of their distances and degrees of progress from/to the integral. It becomes a religion worse than other religions because it harbors pretensions towards a totalitarian religion, a comprehensible and predictable 'theory of everything'.

What Sri Aurobindo's use of the "integral" implies, then, is a theory of praxis, a plural process with an incomprehensible and aporetic goal, not a structural epistemology. Still, considering Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics of the integral, as carried in *The Life Divine* (Sri Aurobindo, 2005) and his outlines of process in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo, 1999), one could ask the question as to how such a metaphysics and psychology escapes from being a universal inclusivistic perennialism? To answer these questions, one must situate Sri Aurobindo's texts in the cross-cultural dialogic context to which they belong. Though this metaphysics and psychology appear to be written for modernist academic reading, they are also translations of an Indic discourse and meant to be considered as methodological interventions in this regard.

What translates into philosophy and psychology in an Indic discursive history are *darshan* and *yoga*, respectively. According to the norms of that discourse, these two, *darshan* and *yoga*, cannot be isolated; they are like two wings of one enterprise which privileges becoming over being—process over structure. Thus it is *yoga*, a transformative psychology which leads and *darshana*, the metaphysics, which provides a structural taxonomy and relational logic conducive to the achievement of the telos of 'yoga'. The categories and relations of theoria (*darshana*) are thus not to be seen as an absolute epistemology, but rather as a practical epistemology subservient to praxis (yoga); or, in other words, both metaphysics and philosophy constitute, between them, a system described through a theory of practice.

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[5] Term used by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) to refer to the written or unwritten constitutional law of a field; "principle of vision and division."

[6] Term used by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to denote what is taken for granted in any society; the experience by which "the natural and social world appears as self-evident."

Metaphysical texts like *The Life Divine* (Sri Aurobindo, 2005) and psychological ones such as *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo, 1999) need to be seen as preceded by practices and ideas belonging to an Indic cultural discourse. *The Life Divine* began as a commentary on the Isha Upanishad and translates the core of this text into a metaphysical description and a practical epistemology delineating the philosophical necessity and structural properties of an "integral consciousness" and its relations to Being and Becoming at an individual and cosmic scale. Similarly, *The Synthesis of Yoga* is preceded by practices and experiences that belong to a variety of Indic yoga traditions and are articulated in terminology belonging to the cultural history of these traditions in his diaries under the title *Record of Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo, 2001). The schematic for this practice takes seven lines of synthetic discipline, thus extending a number of yoga lineages, and proceeding synchronically towards an integral consciousness. This simultaneous and synergistic addressing of the different needs and strands of human becoming, aiming each and all together at an integral consciousness, is what makes it an 'integral yoga'.

Still, there is clearly a conscious and deliberate translation from one discourse to another—from a pre-modern Indic discourse which privileges pluralism and process to a post-Enlightenment modern one which privileges a structural totalism. This is a dialogic move, an attempt to reposition the Indic discourse in a post-Enlightenment academic frame. But such a translation is also a strategic revision of the post-Enlightenment discourse, a privileging of process over structure and of the plural over the unitary (universal) or monistic (transcendental) perennial. It is also a redefinition of the perennial in terms of an integral which refuses to erase the plural or contain it in the form of a boundless finite. Such an "integral" refuses structural comprehension except as supramental telos contingent on unpredictable and creative evolutionary development.

Yet, in this translation, Sri Aurobindo does not refuse the drive for simplification or abstraction, possible from structural or comparative perspectives on the plural, so long as they are considered provisional forms of becoming and not static structures. Such simplifications can yield new synthetic practices as part of a continuing evolution with its processual possibilities. Approaching the philosophy of the plane of consciousness that can provide the integration of the plural and the unitary, in this key of a theory of process, Sri Aurobindo (2005, pp. 922-952) later formulated his idea of the triple transformation. The triple transformation is reminiscent of Forman's perennialist reduction, but seen as a creative structure of becoming rather than static structures relatively descriptive of a transcendental core.

The tripe transformation encompasses three approaches to integration, taken separately and synergistically. Actually, one may say this more properly for two of the approaches, the third being dependent on the achievement of the first two. This third is the supramental or integral transformation, which is based on an ontology of integral consciousness, discussed above (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 951-959). The first two, as preparatory stages towards the third, include a personal (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 940-944) and an impersonal (or universal) integration (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 944-951).

The personal integration, known as the "psychic" integration, is aimed at identification with the deep subjectivity' of an immanent Person, and can thus be thought of as inherently relational and theistic. The impersonal integration, known as the "spiritual" integration, is aimed at

identification with universal and transcendental forms of Being and Consciousness and thus can be mapped to Forman's monistic and nihilistic perennial ontologies. The achievement of both of these integrations and their normalization in the wakened (*jagrat*) personality are considered preparations for the third integration, which, as discussed above, is indescribable and suprarational, conserving simultaneously radical pluralism and radical unitarianism in its universal and transcendental forms.

From the above, we can see a relation between Forman's perennial categories and Sri Aurobindo's integral consciousness as prepared through the categories of the triple transformation. But the formula of the triple transformation can only be understood processually, with its final integral stage an aporetic unknowable which can be experienced, if at all, through an evolution beyond the ontology of mind. The preparation for this evolution, then, requires an aspiration without content and yet a process towards an inclusivity which refuses the erasure of plurality. With this in mind, we can consider Forman's reduction of the perennial to the theistic, monistic and nihilistic, and the relationship of these categories to Sri Aurobindo's triple transformation in terms of three dimensions of spiritual experience.

The theistic dimension of immanence is the depth dimension, the monistic inclusivism may be considered the width dimension and the nihilistic transcendentalism can be considered the height dimension. These are the three dimensions of mystical mind space. The depth dimension is that which plunges us into the deepest or innermost being within us. This is the immanent divine, the "Psychic Being" or true person in each human being. This hidden subject is the source of a process of internal integration, an alignment of body, life and mind through a one-pointed theistic exclusivism. But this can simultaneously move towards a dialogic universalization, leading towards the transpersonal and impersonal, an identity with the width dimension.

The width dimension is the cosmic consciousness, it is everywhere, spatially pervasive; one can think of a cosmic or universal physical existence, a cosmic or universal life-energy or vitalism, a cosmic or universal ideation or mental existence. The extreme realization of such a cosmic consciousness would be a spatialized inclusivism, the absolute systemic structural epistemology sought secretly by the "white mythology" of the Enlightenment (or its temporal extension, the post-Enlightenment academy). Of course, the academy seeks this as structured information archive, but in subjective space, this inclusivistic cosmic consciousness is given by Sri Aurobindo the name of Overmind. Beyond the structural Monism of Overmind is the transcendental Monism of Sacchidananda, the nameless, formless, causeless and timeless ocean into which all individual and universal categories are swallowed and erased. This can also be seen as a nihilism, since it is absolute and relationless and experienceable only in a trance of exclusion.

Though Forman asserts a common "perennial" transcendental core to these three dimensions, clearly there are discontinuities between these as experienceable by mind-constrained creatures, due to the exclusivism of their categories, including an exclusive monistic inclusivism. A pure or exclusive theism loses both the relative and pure monisms. This can be asserted for each dualistic school of practice. Similarly, a pure or exclusive monism/nihilism loses the theism of the psychic being as well as the relative monism of the Overmind. Yet, as indicated earlier, the Psychic Being can expand its theism dialogically, moving towards the inclusive pluralism of Overmind. Though

this may be thought of as a taming of the plural, a boundless finite rather than a radical infinity which co-exists with a radical unity, such a universalized monistic theism may be thought of as a preparation for the aporetic supermind. Refusing both an exclusive theism and an exclusive monism as forms of telos, one may approximate to this human correlate of supermind as a horizon opening to a yet nameless horizon. This purveyor of the unthinkable integral becomes the philosophical telos which magnetizes our becoming, the fourth dimension which gathers to itself the three dimensions of mystic mind without erasing them or their singularities, and capable of projecting them individually and exclusively as dimensional spaces of experience.

Thus, there is no proper order to the process leading to Supermind. Nor is there a proper tradition. One may approach from any tradition, but one must have a will to the integral, as that which is plural, cosmically inclusive and transcendental all at once, without the erasure by any of any of these states. Such an aporetic and unthinkable experience can be an evolutionary telos, approachable from any tradition as starting point. As part of the Enlightenment's academic drive to discover an integral anthropology, we can consider the building of this transhuman/posthuman trajectory through an archive of practices and a phenomenology of experiences that respect these three dimensions of mystical space as the precursor to arriving at integrality. It is when our language culture changes to a point where we can express these dimensions of experience synthetically and can envisage the aporetic horizon in the currency of communication that we can tell ourselves that we are approaching the gates of an integral psychology or an integral philosophy. Before that, not to see it as an incalculable process aimed at the unthinkable, is nothing if not dangerous.

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United Religions Initiative:
Global Community Emerging

Sally Mahé[1]

Abstract: This article provides a brief introduction to United Religions Initiative (URI), a global grassroots interfaith network that promotes peace and justice through intercultural and interreligious dialogue using a process known as 'appreciative inquiry'. While accomplishments of URI are highlighted, it is emphasized that more cooperation, more compassion, and more commitment to good relationships will be needed across the world for global unity, justice and peace.

Keywords: United Religions Initiative; URI; Global Community; Interfaith Movement; Interreligious Dialogue; Cooperative Inquiry.

In the mid 1990s, as a new consciousness was emerging that advocated cessation of killing in the name of religion and cooperation for peace, a frequent response was: "impossible"! People bantered that the history of humanity overflows with different religions fighting each other. Clearly, something different was needed if "impossible" was going to give way to inevitable.

What can help shift historic patterns of hostility, ignorance, isolation and political manipulation among religions to unprecedented levels of friendship and collaboration among people of different faiths?

In 1995 upon the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations (UN), Bishop William Swing, the Episcopal Bishop of California, boldly asserted: "If the nations of the world are working together for peace through the UN, then where are the world's religions?" (http://www.uri.org/about_uri/charter, Para.1). Experts heard his call. Dr. David Cooperrider, Professor of Organizational Development at Case Western Reserve University, donated four years of commitment, expertise and talent. Dee Hock, founder of VISA turned organizational visionary, brought a design plan and confidence that a "bottom up" organization was not only possible but imperative to accomplish the goals of interreligious harmony. People from all parts of the world were invited to assess the strengths they brought to this possibility and envision a new kind of organization into being. The organization came to be called United Religions Initiative (URI). It was to be: inclusive, self-organizing, dependent on people at the grassroots,

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honor equal participation of women and men, encourage youth participation, and bring together a maximum mix of stakeholders from all sectors of society.

The first phrase of URI Charter's Preamble grew from thousands of conversations. "We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.
(http://www.uri.org/about_uri/charter/preamble_purpose_and_principles, Para.1).

Since its Charter was signed in 2000, the United Religions Initiative has grown to include more than 550 grassroots groups and organizations in 79 countries. Each group or organization is self-sustaining and retains its own identity but is also part of URI's global network of Cooperation Circles (CCs). Each Cooperation Circle has its own name, size (minimum of 7 members), governance structure and mission, and they all share a commitment to diverse participation and to advancing the central purpose and principles of URI. As a URI core staff member for over 16 years, I've had a good seat from which to participate in developing a global organization that believes in the power of people to self-organize in order to fulfill their aspirations for peace, justice and healing.

So, what are we seeing? What is our experience teaching us?

A Common Document Rooted in Shared Values Provides Stability

Diverse people are compelled toward action by purpose and principles that articulate their core values, passions and longings. In the United States, citizens are stirred by the words of the Preamble to the Constitution: "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union…" (http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html, Para.1). In the same way, people have consistently been drawn to the United Religions Initiative by the words of its Charter. URI's preamble, purpose and principles call people to a common cause, guide behavior, bind people together and open opportunities for long-term, diverse, and high-functioning grassroots activities.

Recognition and Appreciation: Focusing on What Works Rather Than What Doesn't Work Is Worth More than Money

An enduring reality of a grassroots activity is that most people involved are not paid but act from personal commitment. Working with hundreds of groups in URI and watching when folks come alive and when they wear out, I realized that people, like flowers, respond to essential 'nutrients', among them the need to be recognized, to be successful, to have their value amplified, and the meaning of what they do deepened.

URI as an organization embraced an approach to positive change called Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperinder & Whitney, 1996, 2005; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). Wilted from tedious work, crises, hatreds and injustices that overwhelmed their dreams and positive efforts, we found people coming back to life when a simple organizational process gave them a chance to

remember their core values, renew their sense of personal power, and imagine a world worthy of their children.

At its birth, URI was gifted with Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a leading approach to organizational development. Methodologically, AI is an approach toward positive change, as well as a point of view that seeks to emphasize: a) what is working well in an organization; b) important values that people bring to their work; and c) the aspirations and visions of achievement that are shared by all of its stakeholders. According to David Cooprinder the founder of AI, "In its most practical construction, Appreciative Inquiry is a form of organizational study that selectively seeks to locate, highlight and illuminate what are referred to as the life-giving forces of an organizational existence. Appreciative Inquiry seeks out the best of what is to help ignite the collective imagination of what might be"(Cooprinder & Whitney, 1996, p. 3).

Appreciative Inquiry became part of United Religions Initiative's DNA as it found its footing in creating safe spaces for people of different traditions and faith backgrounds to come together in respect and cooperation. In its early years, when the voices of doubt were loudest, Appreciative Inquiry helped URI focus on the quality of our questions and the ability to spark people's imagination toward what is not here yet, but what might be.

Maintaining the Tension Between Giving Guidance and Leaving Freedom to Innovate Produces Positive Results

Giving unlimited numbers of people the freedom to innovate creates an amazing and unanticipated diversity of activities and impact. Cooperation Circles (CCs) take on activities as diverse as creating a Golden Rule Day Proclamation for their city, to maintaining ambulance service for a village, to calling scholars to share papers on the intertextuality of Holy Books. However, grassroots support also calls for systematic guidance and training. An organizational culture that welcomes this tension by encouraging unbridled innovation while providing guidance and training, is challenging but constructive.

URI has learned that people in Cooperation Circles run out of steam, leadership changes or expertise may be lacking to fulfill aims. In addition to providing an open field for initiatives to flourish, a grassroots-led community also needs to provide emotional support, bright ideas and training in various kinds of competencies. To support people in CCs, URI provides some training in such as areas as peacebuilding, fundraising and management.

Conversation and Dialogue Balance Action-Oriented Programs

Early analysis of URI interfaith groups indicated an even split between those organized around conversation and sharing spiritual practices, and those involved in action/service-oriented programs in their communities. Over the years, however, a pattern emerged across cultures that grassroots groups involved in interfaith work often choose a combination of "inner work" and "outer work."

Recently, speaking with members of the Interfaith Council of Bainbridge Island in Washington State, I experienced renewed commitment as we went around the circle sharing stories of faith and life experience. Active interfaith work that takes on vexing local issues will continue to be reinvigorated, balanced, and anchored by such sharing. Most often, especially in areas of entrenched conflict, such as in the Middle East, grassroots interfaith organizers find that their personal relationships with so-called "enemies" make the biggest difference in their lives and propel their work.

Platforms to Connect Grassroots with Policy Makers Are Critical

Over the years, URI has seen effective alliances among students, religious leaders, civil servants, government officials, the military, the media, and corporate executives. Making an effort to reach out to 'sectors' we don't normally interact with is invaluable in creating opportunity for significant change. In August 2011 in Kampala Uganda, URI leaders in the Great Lakes region of Africa organized a two-day gathering where an Ugandan army colonel, students from Makere University, locally based NGO leaders, diverse religious leaders, political officials and the Vice President of Uganda joined in common cause in an unprecedented meeting to raise different perspectives and share commitment to securing peace and reducing terrorism in Uganda. People who might have been considered others in the room to be 'the enemy' or 'out of reach' began to experience themselves as allies.

Strong Relationships Create Community Resilience

Strong community relationships help unleash people's resilience, creativity, and hope whether preparing for disaster relief, responding to crises, or sharing the doom and gloom surrounding issues like the economy, peace, and the environment. Grassroots organizing among people from different faiths creates such relationships and strengthens communities in times of difficulty. When terrorist bombs hit the island of Bali, an already established interfaith community ran to the scene to offer joint prayers of grief and support. In New Orleans, it is well documented that faith communities, networked to some degree with one another, provided the most successful response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. We may be living in a dangerous world for quite a while. Grassroots organizing emphasizing relationship-building and cooperation skills is a sterling investment in community resilience and ultimately survival.

What Does the Future Hold?

Grassroots organizing has the opportunity to wield new power as communication tools emerge connecting humanity across continents and to bridge historic divides of all kinds. New networking and new relationships are developing everywhere and interfaith activists have gotten the message. More and more, responsibility for positive change will be distributed among the many taken up by "we, the people." More competence, more cooperation, more compassion, and more commitment to good relationships will be needed across cultures and among people everywhere as we learn how to tap "the better angels of our nature" and exert our collective influence to make a better world.

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