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Toward Development of Politics and the Political
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Political Aspirations for the Special Issue,  
Toward Development of Politics and the Political  

Sara Nora Ross

There is no question that in our age there is a good deal of turmoil about the manner in which society is run. Probably at no point in the history of man [sic] has there been so much discussion about the rights and wrongs of the policy makers...[We begin] to suspect that the people who make the major decisions that affect our lives don't know what they are doing...They don't know what they are doing simply because they have no adequate basis to judge the effects of their decisions. To many it must seem that we live in an age of moronic decision making.

—C. West Churchman (1968, p. iv) in The Systems Approach

Welcome to Integral Review’s (IR) special issue on the theme Toward Development of Politics and the Political. Not only is this theme political. Beyond the content that shows up in a journal, the act of publishing itself is also political, political behavior we engage consciously at IR. This special issue integrates its political essays with the politics of publishing, the politics of inviting works to publish, and now the politics of writing an editorial. I use this editorial space for three purposes: to share our motivation for doing this special issue, to introduce its contents, and to reflect on such influences as these for integral thinking about politics and the political and what that can mean—I would say, must mean—in today’s world.

Our stated aim for this special issue was to make a “politically significant contribution to public knowledge and discourse, to illuminate a comprehensive range of considerations that need to be integrated into effective approaches to today’s—and the future’s—political behaviors and complex political issues, policies, and systems.”¹ This aim is consistent with IR’s mission to publish a transdisciplinary and transcultural range of works that, taken as a whole, model integral ways of perceiving, thinking, researching, and serving the world we live in... In general, they will reflect some holistic understandings of issues in individual and social life, change, and development....[IR] encourages attention to the interactive dynamics among individuals, communities, organizations, societies, and international bodies. It invites attention to categories such as the socio-cultural, political, economic, technological, and environmental...to portray the range of factors that need to be integrated into effective approaches to today’s complex issues.²

¹ From the original call for submissions to the special issue.
Thus, we have the conviction that *integral* ways of perceiving, thinking, researching, and serving the world apply holistic understandings to change and development, and that these are necessary to conceive the factors essential in solutions to complex issues. This conviction drives our commitment to publish *new* thought, research, and praxis. Realizing the potential of new work to help address such turmoil as Churchman declared 40 years ago, the purpose of this special issue is to offer new perspectives on politics and the political.

To accomplish this aim, we invited works drawn from one to many disciplines. We conveyed a broad conception of politics and the political. For example, works could relate politics to forms of power, government, and policy making (one dictionary definition) or, more broadly, governance. They could treat politics as the total complex of relations among people living in society (another dictionary definition). They could emphasize political ecology, political economy, political geography, political psychology, political regression, or political development. Regardless of authors’ areas of emphasis, the treatments of politics and the political would be consistent with our normative interest in *developing* political relationships, behaviors, impacts, strategies, assumptions, processes, structures, systems, and formal and informal institutions. We welcomed such examinations at any scale from micro to macro. That meant works could range from the scale of individuals, groups, and nations to international and multinational entities and the global commons of humanity. And indeed, such an array comprises this issue.

The message *to develop* in the political domain comes also from one of the 20th Century’s most integral thinkers. A hard-hitting invitation for transforming political thought and action, Bateson’s message may be more poignant now than when he first delivered it 40 years ago.

If I am right, the whole of our thinking about what we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. This is not funny, and I do not know how long we have to do it in…. The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way…. The step to realizing—to making habitual—this other way of thinking—so that one naturally thinks that way when one reaches out for a glass of water or cuts down a tree—that step is not an easy one. And quite seriously, I suggest to you that we should trust no policy decisions which emanate from persons who do not yet have that habit.

—Gregory Bateson (1972/2000, pp. 468-469) in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*

How is one to “get” the dots Bateson connects here? What makes reaching for a glass of water comparable to cutting down a tree? And what relates doing such concrete tasks as *those* with the demands of making policy decisions? What *kind* of thinking is Bateson elevating to essential *habit*? As his extensive writing makes clear, he elevates *integral* thinking because in present-day contexts, the time to restructure the whole of our thinking grows only shorter while consequences of *not* doing so grow only greater.

Resonating with Bateson, our motivations to do a special issue looking toward development of politics and the political meant we too looked for integral thinking, “thinking in the new way,” in selecting manuscripts for publication. How were these evaluated for inclusion?
“Integral”³

Baseline Integral Criterion of IR

Here at IR, one of our baseline “integral” criteria is that works published exhibit some developmental or evolutionary awareness. This can and does look very different, depending on the nature and scale of an author’s endeavor. And that is because nature and scale of an author’s work involves different ways of focusing attention, driven by the author’s unique purposes. The deployment of developmental or evolutionary awareness in this special issue, for example, takes a multitude of forms when authors do one and sometimes more of the following:

1. Advocate for developmentally different dynamics including additional perspectives in a particular context to transform them.
2. Analyze different dynamics in a particular context so they can be understood developmentally.
3. Examine events or conditions to contrast “what is” with what needs to be developed (or was developed, or is in the process of developing).
4. Propose a method, policy, or action for developing something that one judges needs to develop for greater justice and/or effectiveness.
5. Report on a case or method that reflected developmental concerns either in the case/method itself or the report, or both.
6. Theorize or demonstrate a way to reframe assumptions, concepts, and/or approaches so their replacements contribute to more developed thought, research, or praxis (and praxis includes policy).

Such developmental and evolutionary purposes as these characterize probably all the works published in IR to date. Purpose shapes the nature of whatever humans produce. This brief discussion of how developmental awareness can show up is a platform for the following look at the concept of integral, where I suggest that different scales of attention make “what’s integral” show up differently.

Contested Term

It was about six years ago, when we were first considering how to entitle this journal, that I was not in favor of using the term integral anywhere in connection with it. My reasons were simple: already in 2004, the term integral was contested, with diverse meanings and projections slapped on it from various directions. To position the journal and its publisher in those unclear waters seemed to me, at the time, likely to divert energies that should be invested in the publishing mission itself. It would save time and energy to steer clear of those waters. Of course, as it turned out, we did not steer clear of them at all, but rather directly into them. We (the original editorial committee of ARINA, Inc., IR’s publisher) decided the journal’s main title could and should be Integral Review and that we would figure out how to tango with the politics and meaning-making around “integral” as we went along. And, that we have done.

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³ Editors at IR can use the term integral in different ways. This writing reflects my perspective.
Thus, in conceiving how to approach this editorial, I was surprised to find myself feeling compelled to speak to the meaning of *integral* for this special issue. Prediction confirmed: it is time- and energy-intensive to deal with the extremely multifaceted challenge of using, communicating, and teaching about particular uses of *integral*. That is because there are already so many meanings and projections associated with it.

For some, “integral” refers to an individual scale of personal or spiritual consciousness or the kinds of individual practices one performs. For some, it may refer to Ken Wilber and/or AQAL, for some it may refer to identifying multiple perspectives, for others it may be different yet again, and for yet others it may be “all of the above, and more.” So be it!

The complexity of this multifaceted challenge signals to me that it is indeed time to develop a new paradigm for assessing “integral”—one that rises above such limitations as indicated above and many others besides. And one of those limitations is the time and communication dimension. I propose it is time to implement more content-free applications of “integral” by using it in the high-level fashion its core definition has always really suggested. We can elevate our use of the concept by elevating how we think about and with the concept and using methods that support that meta level use. Then we do not have to abandon the useful concept because its surrounding waters have become so murky. We can give the term *integral* a fresh start in a new generation of applications, which would perhaps be accessible enough that Churchman’s, Bateson’s, and others’ concerns for more integral thinking and policy would be closer to being addressed and transdisciplinarity would potentially have new modes of cross-cutting analysis. That is my current thesis.

**Assigning Meaning to “Integral”**

For many years, my meaning for “integral” has been in the dictionary sense of *essential to completeness*. This definition can be problematic, because as we know from a developmental perspective, what might be considered integral, essential and/or complete is different when done at different levels of complexity. We cannot assume a given concept means the same thing to everyone. This in turn confronts us with another fact of social life: language is inherently limited in conveying concepts (which is why I am discussing them here at all). When these facts of life are integrated, we can predict that virtually every abstract concept can and will mean something different to people with different concerns related to it and to people reasoning at different levels of complexity about those concerns. A developmental perspective generates this essential principle.

Is such a principle a propulsion into relativism around what integral “means” (or, for that matter, what any other concept means)? Not at all. Rather, it should propel us in three constructive directions.

- It should remind us that such abstract concepts are *only* concepts, not to be reified as *if* they “are” a specific or concrete “thing.”
- It should ground us in the essentialness of developmental awareness.
- It should divest us of certain assumptions and thus free us not only to be precise about criteria for considering what’s integral—essential to completeness—but also to be clear about the contexts of and scales at which we apply various criteria.
From the analytic perspective used here, what might be considered essential and/or complete will also depend on such additional factors as
- the complexity of a phenomenon,
- the information available,
- the complexity of the perception(s) of the phenomenon and the information, and
- the resulting complexity of the assessment(s) task itself, and
- methods and capacities to perform the assessment.

If there are so many crucial variables in the task of deciding what is essential to completeness, how can we put this particular definition of integral to good use?

In my analysis, clarifying the nature and scale of an endeavor is an important starting point. It affords a cross-cutting route into figuring out if and how an endeavor reflects an integral approach that is suitable in and for the endeavor’s context. Such a cross-cutting method begins with clarifying the nature of an endeavor and its scale. Once we have clarity about those variables, then we can analyze with lenses aimed both at and beyond the endeavor’s specific content. Only then, I would say, are we positioned to consider the appropriateness or sufficiency of the endeavor’s depth, certainly a criterion for completeness regardless of subject matter. Because systems of complex relations are nested within a multitude of other systems—and this recognition is a key one in considering the depth of integral analysis—scales are not mutually exclusive; multiple scales may be interrelated and/or integrated within one written work (e.g., see in this issue, Anderson, Atlee, Couto, Quilligan).

This discussion has introduced (though not completed) the notion that “integral” is an abstract concept that cannot be reified and will forever be contested if one insists it be given content-dependent applications. There is a way out of the contest. Rather than apply a pre-conceived notion of what might be integral, the “essential to completeness” angle affords reframing. Instead of trying to map an abstract, contested concept onto an endeavor as an evaluation method, we can focus our attention on the endeavor itself and ask, “Completeness of what, for what purpose?” This anchors us immediately in the endeavor’s context and scale. In other words, rather than take “integral” as a starting point, we can take the endeavor as the starting point and then consider what is “essential to completeness” about the endeavor. The endeavor’s scale should set the scope for our assessment. This means we need to adjust our lens to the endeavor and evaluate it given its nature and scale: align our evaluative units of analysis with the scale of the endeavor. Units of analysis will differ, depending on the variables to be analyzed.

For example, variables treated in this special issue range from the scale of constructs (e.g., power, legitimacy, becoming-responsible, integral politics), to the scale of attitudes toward
constructs and toward issues, to the scale of theories, to the scale of individual and group action, to the scale of intervention methods, to the scale of nations, to the scale of eras, to the scale of policy, to the scale of global interactions, to the scale of methods to evaluate policy, and to the scale of global crises. Many of these may be interrelated and integrated within one author’s work, resulting in multiple variables of different scales synthesized at another, higher scale.

These general ideas can be applied in a preliminary way right here. Figure 1 is a broad indicator of various scales addressed by authors in this issue. This approach to indicating the nature and scale of a given endeavor continues as I introduce the works by these authors.

In this Special Issue

Authors address their subjects at a variety of scales from the individual to global, and certain themes overlap and weave through these treatments. As devices for organizing this overview, I cluster articles by certain kinds of similarities in their nature and/or by shared themes. The vital caveat is that in no case can any of these articles be reduced to such simple categories: each offers more complexity than categorical schemes can convey.

Theory and Paradigm Development

Power: Unpacking, Reframing, Scaling

One way or another, perennial political topics of power and legitimacy weave through this entire issue, with quite a few authors offering complex renderings at contrasting and overlapping scales. In the hands of Phillip Guddemi, Richard A. Couto, and William R. Torbert, for example, an examination of power ranges from the most basic level of examining power as a construct, to a principled theory that reframes power and terrorism, to development of principles for the power of balance. The several participants in the rare kind of conversation modelled by Phillip Guddemi in his A Multi-Party Imaginary Dialogue about Power and Cybernetics—rare to our political detriment—question and deliberate the very construct of power, give it deep looks from dynamic relation angles, and come to a cybernetic reframing of power with implications for developing political wisdom. In The Politics of Terrorism: Power, Legitimacy, and Violence, Couto theorizes a new paradigm for understanding the politics of power and terrorism. In the course of doing so, he begins at the scale of first person experience and examines settings and interpretations, shifts to the scales of constructs, definitions, and theory where he reframes legitimate power and direct and indirect violence and terrorism, and develops this paradigm—which leads inevitably to his proposing a specific kind of reform of domestic and international policy toward terrorism as redefined here.

In excerpts of Torbert’s 1991 classic, The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry are essentials of his developmental action inquiry paradigm. As both political theory and action science, it describes a form of political power that encourages inquiry, even of its own foundations. He proposes new political principles of inquiry and quality—and what their elevation as principles means for society, academic disciplines, and practice. The emerging general theory of inquiry and its first, second, and third person practices span all scales.
Through these contributions and others introduced below, integral approaches to conceiving, using, and analyzing power, and to reforming policy and structures of power show up at micro to macro scales, a spectrum of potential influence on politics and the political.

“Integral Politics”? Defining, Proposing

Using distinctly different approaches to posit the need for, and then define, something called “integral politics,” Daniel Gustav Anderson and Tom Atlee nonetheless share complementary premises (e.g., becoming-responsible and conscious evolution, respectively) in arguing for integral political behavior originating at grassroots, micro scales and evolving at all scales. In “Sweet Science:” A Proposal for Integral Macropolitics, Anderson critically reviews two Wilber-integral models for their ontological assumptions and directionality and queries implications for politics founded on them. He develops his theoretical foundation from an opposite direction, elucidating it via drawing out Blake’s model in The Four Zoas, and contrasts its integral foundations with other models. Anderson analyzes at the scales of ontology, theory, and individual and collective behaviors. Atlee proposes his definition and dynamics of Integral Politics as Process, and explicates the ramifications across many domains of public life and behavior. Like Anderson, Atlee too has a conception of wholeness and organic coherence. In their analyses and discussions, both authors depict or at least meaningfully implicate micro, meso, and macro political scales, theorizing the dynamic behaviors associated with the kind of practical, principled integral politics they propose.

Organized Non-Partisan Political Interactions: Designing, Conducting, Learning

Interactive group efforts toward development of politics and the political reveal a variety of ways to integrate (implicit or explicit) theory and practice. The vista of multifaceted practice unfolds across six essays anchored in practical experience, two of these in the Integral Review—tradition of Russ Volckmann interviews with seasoned practitioners. Because these works discuss mostly in-person endeavors with individuals, they include the scales of self and groups, and therefore of social-perspective-sharing, a capacity long posited as characteristic of integral interpersonal design and practice.

Jake Chapman reports on Lessons from a Pluralist Approach to a Wicked Policy Issue, identifying archetypal voices commonly heard in his public policy work in the UK and making the case for a systems approach in public policy at the local level. Ken White analyzed findings from a series of action research with Generations Salon groups in the US, theorized about them, and now shares a different kind of archetypal analysis and introduces his three-dimensional model for practical, processual implications for why generational eras of US citizens can, and should, develop Politics in a New Key: Breaking the Cycle of U.S. Politics with a Generational/Developmental Approach. These contributions illustrate that archetypal patterns crisscross other scales of analysis, while affording their own individual- or time-transcendent scales.

Russ Volckmann sought interviews that draw attention to the scale of design principles and processes, seeking integral lenses on Design and Sustainability with Michael Ben-Eli and civic
engagement politics or 3D Democracy with Jan Inglis. As Volekmann observes, theirs involve political acts often taken outside the realm of formal politics. By contrast, Elke Fein and Hans-Peter Studer report from the field in Integral Politics: A Swiss Perspective, recount the history of their NGO’s several years of efforts, and announce the late 2010 planned launching of a political party, “Integrale Politik (ip).” Their report shares the meso scales of ip’s processual and organizational development.

The foregoing endeavors include the scale of design of activist and/or participatory processes and interventions and those designs’ relationship to public process and political structures, dynamic political cycles over short and long periods, issues that need to be addressed, and the evolutionary effects on, and of, culture and society at various scales.

Theory-Based Analysis

Elke Fein presents her project analyzing political discourse in Russia, in Adult Development Theory and Political Analysis: An Integral Account of Social And Political Change in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. She conducts her analysis by comparing and building on various kinds of systems: historical conditions in past and present, effects of those conditions, and how political discourse is conducted. By interpreting conditions, behaviors, and discourse through the lens of political and adult developmental theories, she models an integral approach to synthesizing theory and application in supporting her argument’s claims.

Meta / Analysis of Analysis

In The Superbubble behind “The Great Moderation.” How The Brandt Report Foresaw Today’s Global Economic Crisis, James Bernard Quilligan’s political economic framing reintroduces the Brandt Commission’s work on its 30th anniversary. The scope of international monetary policy is more inclusive of other 21st Century concerns than meets the eye; for example, Brandt emphasized that sustainable development could not reach intended goals until the global monetary structure ceased to undermine the very changes upon which sustainability depends. Quilligan analyzes key types of structural imbalances as he compares conditions before and since the Brandt analysis. He identifies the large-scale sovereign, currency, and purchasing powers currently structured into the global system and supports the Brandt argument for reform of international monetary policy. Reform there will in turn reform the global political balance of power—if long-term structural roots of the global economic crisis are to be transformed.

To consider, much less actively address, restructuring relationships at the global level invites examination of assumptions about globalization or assumptions guiding analyses around the concept of “culture.” Such tasks may both become easier and become more challenging after reading Meg Spohn Bertoni’s The U.S. Imperial Jugger-not: Saturation Points and Cultural Globalization. Easier in the sense of being liberated from a handful of erroneous assumptions about the effects of globalization processes; more challenging in the sense of seeing nonlinear relationships among very large systems. Spohn Bertoni’s project should set straight some common misconceptions about globalization and culture, and support more meta level views of global system dynamics, including her use of nonlinear dynamics concepts to expose the nature of the movement and saturation points of cultural globalization.
Such attributions of simple causation such as Spohn Bertoni puts to rest would be less likely to get traction if more meta level, systemic thinking characterised 20th-21st Century life and thought. Steven E. Wallis, in his *Towards the Development of More Robust Policy Models*, applies what he calls neo-integral thinking and metatheoretical methodologies to conduct critical comparisons of logic models. He proposes a deceptively simple quantitative test of robustness for policy designs’ logic models, for learning and reflection in policy model building, and assessment of a model’s sufficiency: how much complexity does it indicate was considered, by the way the model builds in the interrelationships of factors? Wallis proposes “neo-integral” thinking and methods should be applied to the creation of more mature policy models by encompassing greater complexity and a careful understanding of interrelationships.

**Toward Development of Politics and the Political**

To begin this piece with the Churchman and Bateson invocations from our past could introduce our motivations for publishing this issue, could highlight dismay at policy- and decision-making, could underscore continued urgency to set our planetary course aright, and could possibly reinforce attachments to the sidelines of theoretical armchairs and post-game or post-election 20/20 vision. These would be politics as usual, yes?

Yet our purpose here is to help our world develop beyond backward-looking politics as usual. The service of our present and future lies in the Eternal Now. The contemporary voices published here should give us hope. Why?

- Because they are doing pathfinding of the kind so essential to transforming 21st Century conditions.
- Because they are modeling pathfinding processes and directions that follow from them.
- Because such pathfinding and direction-setting make it clear there are countless roles for integral consciousness, thinking, and practice in developing politics and the political, writ large.
- Because there are tangible actions, projects, analyses, deliberations, policies, conferences, and reframings of directions to embark on *now* and they can and should take many forms at all scales. Why?
- Because systemic change depends on getting politics and the political developing and to get *that* development humming at all scales.
- Integral thinking and approaches are essential to structuring systemic change, and can be supported by a new paradigm for understanding and applying integral criteria.

We express our deep gratitude to each of the authors published here for their generosity in sharing their work, and special thanks to Thomas Jordan who helped with editing this issue. We hope this collection plays its intended role in fostering development of politics and the political.

**References**

(Original work published 1972)
Abstract: This treatise proposes the practice of becoming-responsible as a basis for integral micropolitics, defined as taking active responsibility for the well-being of the totality of living beings without exception, for the sake of that well-being alone. After reviewing two extant integral models for political action and interaction, demonstrating some of the limitations inherent in them, some ways are outlined in which the characteristic features of becoming-responsible—including critical clarity, compassion, competence, and consciousness—can be expressed in the realm of public concern; first, theoretically, drawing on a model proposed by poet and artist William Blake, and second, also historically, reflecting on an experiment in radical democracy in Chile (1970-1973), such that both examples critique and advance the claims and methods of mainstream integral theory as well as the alternative approach elaborated in this essay.

Keywords: Allende, Blake, Chile, democracy, integral praxis, integral theory, micropolitics, mimesis, politics, power, public sphere, responsibility, socialism, The Four Zoas, well being, Wilber.
Introduction

The fact of enormous suffering does not warrant revenge or legitimate violence, but must be mobilized in the service of a politics that seeks to diminish suffering universally, that seeks to recognize the sanctity of life, of all lives (Butler, 2004, p. 104).

Problem Definition

In relating to others, it is better to be just than unjust. Socrates makes this argument throughout the Republic, and it is perhaps his most convincing one. But beings, classes, nations, corporations, and institutions profit and develop materially and socially by injustice to others in the present (in terms of labor alone, Marx demonstrates this mathematically in the first volume of Capital and to others in the future (insofar as present profitable practices risk and exploit the existence of our species and others into the future), on the basis of division rather than integration, democratic control, or any sort of responsibility for the needs of the totality. Politics, at bottom, becomes an ethical problem of relating to others of all species in good faith (at present and for the future). A responsible approach to this is the problem I intend to explore in the present essay—how best to approach the practice of living among other beings and aggregates of beings such that an unjust order may be transformed and a just order may arise, delineating a proper object of responsibility for integral practice which has, thus far, tended to emphasize subjective states and lines of development (as self-realization or self-transcendence): practice for the sake of a public good, a concern for the integral wellbeing of an other and others.

Claim

My claim is that the conscious practice of taking responsibility for the well being of others, for the sake of that well being alone, gives a coherent and productive foundation for an integral approach to politics as an ethical problem in the public domain, and addresses an interconnected

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2 In this regard, the present inquiry should be understood as a form of ecocriticism—not as a rhetorical or aesthetic project (Bate, 2000; Garrard, 2004), but as a critical program for the welfare of life-systems in perpetuity.
set of problems in mainstream integral models, the demonstrable existence of irresponsibility in and of “higher powers,” and worse, an implicit justification for an order that allows that irresponsibility to persist (a problem detailed in Anderson, 2006). Plato anticipates this as well, of course: Socrates’ concern for the education of future generations, for instance, betrays a desire to take responsibility for a collective future by intervening in the present, transforming or developing that moment, through collective storytelling and spectacle-making (institutional and otherwise), and assuming the probable arising of irresponsibility (necessitating a pedagogy, which is precisely a plan for mitigating irresponsibility, by helping others become-responsible).

Definitions

I begin with the traditional definition of political theory as that body of thought cognate to ethics concerned with the public good, of relating to others in and of collectives and institutions responsibly. Micropolitics is the practice of becoming-responsible for an object, understanding the object for what it may be on the terms of its arising, persisting, and decomposing, and coming to appreciate and care for that object for the sake of its well being, be it oneself or another living being, a community or a world—in its totality. I have proposed four characteristics for becoming-responsible in this context: becoming-critical, becoming-compassionate, becoming-competent, and becoming-conscious (Anderson, 2008). For the purposes of macropolitics or politics as such, a subject is tasked with responsibility for the development and potential transformation of an object of public concern such as a “public” as such (as a tyrant, an oligarch, or in a participatory way as a citizen in a democracy)—or is excluded from that responsibility, becoming a responsibility of another, “handing over” by virtue of life circumstance any control over the terms of one’s future, or the future of one’s community.

For the purpose of this essay, I define “mainstream integral models” as those proposed by Ken Wilber or his followers, or any of Wilber’s claimed theoretical antecedents, including Hegel, Aurobindo, or Gebser. This is not intended to be a comprehensive or exclusive category, but a provisional and expedient one. I do not claim to analyze these authors exhaustively, given the scope of this work.

Plato’s pedagogy is either problematic or in part satirical. Following the structure of Socrates’s argument: because God is the author of good things but not bad things, children must be raised with a certain kind of faith or else the direct and observable presence of evil in what they have been instructed to see as a divinely ordered world may disturb them, complicating their development and disrupting the State (pp. 623-630). Jameson (1974) by contrast explicates Marx toward a utopian transformation of consciousness by means of engaging with the difficulties of life rather than a rejection or avoidance or enforced denial of them (p. 116).

The concepts public, public sphere, and “counterpublic” are both necessary and vexed: necessary because any notion of political action is predicated on interpersonal communication outside the home or the workplace, positing (explicitly or not) a mediated space in which communication can occur; vexed because a public so defined has hardly been a homogenous reality at any time or place (Habermas, 1989; Ranciere, 1995; Berlant, 1997; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Warner, 2002; Butler, 2004; Fraser, 2009)—bracketing the yet more vexed questions of the kinds of subjects such a public may demand, exclude, or make possible, the mediation of discourses through institutions and private technologies, and the relationship of a public to the state form (and by homology the subject to citizenship). This essay may prompt such questions for future integral work, but it hardly seeks to resolve them.

This principle is developed in detail in Gampopa (1981), Shantideva (1997), and Chagdud (2003)—the practice of bodhicitta. I explore the phenomenological, hermeneutic, and semiotic implications of being in a world among others in D.G. Anderson, 2008.
or nation in relation to others. Because this is an unjust relation—some, by accident of birth or life chances, have control over the lives of others who themselves have no control over the terms by which they must live—I assume it is better to ensure that all who are capable of becoming-responsible for themselves and for others find the opportunity to do so, which is to say, I assume the present regime of “uneven geographical development” (Harvey, 2000) to be unsatisfactory and in need of transformation. Specifically, I do not object to “hierarchy” as such or differentiation as such, nor do I assume unity or totality to be necessarily oppressive; I do have reason to object to the terms and conditions of the present order, the kinds and qualities of hierarchy and differentiation prevalent and possible now.

What does it mean for a subject or a collective to take responsibility for the transformation of an objective situation like this one? Recorded history shows again and again that simply having or taking responsibility is not the same as becoming-responsible as defined above. It is possible to be responsible for another and to exploit that other, behaving irresponsibly toward that other. It happens all the time, it happens a lot, and it happens over and over, repetitively, even—significantly—mimetically. Many, in positions of relative responsibility, are uncritical and incompetent; the regime keeping them in place is predicated on a lack of compassion and consciousness, as I have suggested (Anderson, 2008; compare section Holarchy and Macropolitical Praxis). The coincidence of becoming-responsible (a practice), with being responsible (the fate of having a position of responsibility for others), can be called politics in good faith, in which the subject is motivated to act or refrain from acting for the sake of the object, at present and for the future, to be helpful and to prevent harm. This is conscious, creative, self-critical work; it is authentic leadership (see section Politics in Good Faith). It is an upstream swim.  

But two other valences are possible. The first can be regarded as politics in bad faith, which Clausewitz calls “hostile intentions,” and can be understood as will-to-power, the diagnosis of which may be Nietzsche’s most useful conceptual contribution to an understanding of the condition of modernity. This is the exploitation of a divided order such as the one I describe above, in which a “higher” force directs the transformation of a “lower” one, which lacks agency, while the resources of the “lower” fuel the uncritical and mechanical sword-waving and self-indulgence of the higher. Clausewitz (1993) characterizes this kind of intervention precisely as “an act of force to compel or enemy to do our will” (p. 83). The second valence, to be distinguished from this structured relation of dominance and exploitation, is the infamous Hobbesian state of war, in which no one is responsible for anything, violence characterizes all transactions, growth and culture are impossible, and chaos wins the day. This last possibility will remain in the background of this inquiry.

Politics in good faith is earnestly to be wished for, to be worked for—a just sociopolitical order that makes an integral and non-parasitic development of the totality possible and actively encourages that development too. Politics in bad faith or a hopeless state of conflictual free-for-all are to be avoided. To advance this end, I present the following proposal.

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7 Since present circumstances are best understood as a product of multiple histories moving on the power of causation in time (Anderson, 2008), transformative leadership must work against this kinetic energy, or at least redirect it.
Plan for this Inquiry

These are ambitious intentions, appropriate to more than one book-length treatment. It would be impossible to deduce any of them exhaustively even in the generous space allowed for this essay. Further, the archive I have assembled in order to illustrate my point is an admittedly eccentric one; I have drawn from sources representative or emblematic of the problem at hand, ones that carry a certain kind of rhetorical force. Even so, this is a long essay, but a principled (and not self-indulgent) one. The imperative to show and suggest with appropriate nuance if not always demonstrate the logic behind the claims I make and significant points of departure for further inquiry justifies the length. This seems a responsible compromise and appropriate to a provisional inquiry, a beginning: to make the broad strokes and the skeleton of the rest available for consideration, to evoke and when necessary provoke further thought. To facilitate reading through and around this essay, I have included numbered section headings which are cross-referenced where useful, and pointed back to the companion piece to the present inquiry (Anderson, 2008) at regular intervals.

The trajectory of this argument corresponds in a suggestive but imperfect way to the pedagogic sequence of the Four Noble Truths in traditional Buddhism: first defining a problem, then identifying its nature, proposing that the problem is not insoluble or inevitable or somehow a good (that an alternative way is possible and desirable), and pointing toward a practical method to address the problem. As an intervention, it begins with an analysis of two metaphysical models for integral politics—Karen Litfin’s (2003) Wilber-inspired proposal for Aurobindian evolutionary idealism as a means for understanding the present sociopolitical order and as an imperative for transforming that order, and Wilber’s (2000b) definition of the holon in holarchy, which I show to be inherently political, even in its ideological disavowal of political significance. These metaphysical models, at least as Litfin and Wilber present them, prove untrustworthy. This leads to a proposal for an alternative model which is simultaneously integral and responsible as defined in (0.3), which I develop from a juxtaposition of two unlikely postmetaphysical moments: William Blake’s prophetic epic The Four Zoas, which develops a detailed conceptual and imaginative foundation for a responsible integral macropolitics, and the

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9 This follows from Gurdjieff’s (1999) aphorism, “If you go on a spree then go the whole hog including the postage” (p. 35).
10 I have drilled down into certain arguments in some detail to point toward questions that will be productive of future inquiry. For instance, in the course of my treatment of The Four Zoas, I identify in passing a foundational problem in Wilber’s means of knowledge-production, and suggest that a postmetaphysical interpersonal ethics of alterity (as distinct from the ethical aspects of political theory proper) rather than identity or sovereign command may be developed from Blake’s vision.
11 Teasing apart the precise relationship between the terms ideology, spectacle, and make-believe in the present inquiry constitutes a point of departure for future inquiry.
12 Blake published his work himself, on copper plates; the manuscript presents remarkable difficulties for any reader, and relies heavily on the work of editorial interpretation. Due to the peculiar nature of Blake’s early printing habits, all citations to this text refer first to the plate number and the line of the poem as collated and resequenced in the Erdman edition (1982), so that line three of page two will be cited as (2.3). This practice allows for easier comparison to other editions of Blake’s work. Also, citations to Paradise Lost refer to the book and the verse line, also for ease of comparison.
Popular Unity period of Chilean history (1970-1973), which gives a historical example with direct consequences both for the macropolitics I explicate from *The Four Zoas* and the metaphysical models I offer up for criticism.

*The Four Zoas* uses visionary space to imagine clearly how the inter- and intra-personal politics of Empire works—interventionary politics *par excellence*—and points toward a politics of responsible action. Then the inquiry moves from an imaginative and conceptual space into a material, historical field, Chile moving toward radical democracy. I find this experiment on principle if not in all details a responsible intervention, along the lines the proposal for a macropolitics of responsibility in *The Four Zoas* suggests. Further, the coup staged on 11 Sept 1973 by a “higher power” to reintegrate Chilean resources and resource management into a larger, deeper, and more complex regime was by the measure I construct from one of Blake’s visions an irresponsible, undemocratic, counter-integral act of war, of “hostile intentions” as Clausewitz defines them—politics in bad faith. By contrast, following Wilber’s prescription, one is compelled to claim that this coup was a moment of self-transcendence for Chile, insofar as it was reintegrated into the “superholon” of global capital and drawn forward in evolutionary terms toward the “telos” of that regime (a term of spiritual significance for Wilber). In this regard, Wilber’s doctrine “flickers” or mechanically reproduces in its ontology the divisive and parasitic social and political order of which it is an artifact: late capital (or globalization or neoliberalism [Harvey, 2000]) and its “postmodern” cultural logic (Jameson, 1991). Wilber’s evolutionary idealism is, *for the purposes of understanding and expressing politics*, an exercise in make-believe with potentially dangerous consequences, regardless of the theological and therapeutic value Wilber’s model and the “orienting generalizations” on which it is premised surely has for those who choose to believe in it (a value I do not wish to dismiss or denigrate, only to recontextualize).

For the sake of argument, I assume that social institutions and social formations (the state form, the family, the corporation, and so forth) can be understood abstractly as though they are unitary and homogenous, as Wilber does—but not without some reservation. It suffices at present to suggest that the ambivalence on the nature of the state form and other social institutions in the present work and in Anderson (2008) is attributable in no small part to real contradictions in and of the state form under neoliberalism. Harvey (2000) summarizes one of these, on the state in relation to others and to “globalization” as an economic and political activity, with particular relevance to my argument on the homology between the structure of Wilber’s ontology and political conditions under neoliberalism:

The preservation and extension of state power is crucial to the functioning of free markets. If free markets, as is their wont, undermine state powers, then they destroy the conditions of their own functioning. Conversely, if state power is vital to the functioning of markets, then the preservation of that power requires the perversion of freely functioning markets. This is, as Polyani outlines, the central contradiction that lies at the heart of neoliberal political economy. It explains [...] why the great eras of globalization and freer international trade have been those where a single power (such as Britain in the late nineteenth century or the United States after 1945) was in a position to guarantee the political, institutional, and military conditions for market freedoms to prevail. (Harvey, 2000, pp. 180-181)
Berlant (1997) considers this contradictory relation of “above” and “below” from another perspective, that of the absence of any meaningful public sphere as defined against private interests: personal matters not obviously of public concern such as the details of sexual practices, desire, and affect become contested, intensely, and made irrationally political and publicized under neoliberalism (pp. 1-24). The subject, like the state in Harvey’s analysis, is for Berlant an irreducible but functioning contradiction. Thus, the state, the subject, and the specific nature of diverse and changing social and political institutions will remain a convenient (if marked for future analysis) fiction of homogeneity and coherence in this essay. That said, I will distinguish for practical purposes between two sorts of social aggregates or formations: on the one side are mechanical formations, products of history such as a given state or corporation; this is to be distinguished from what I will call intentional communities, which are organized responsibly; the discussion that follows in major sections Imagining a Postmetaphysical Macropolitics and An Experiment in Radical Democracy assumes it is possible to transform an aggregation of the former kind into one of the latter through a certain kind of practice. Hershock (1996, 2000) develops this distinction in mythopoetic terms appropriate to this context. A dialectic prevails: a social agent methodically cultivates virtuosity, a kind of creative competence. Defined in contrast to the practice of “absorption into a featureless or universal consciousness along the lines of Indian yoga,” virtuosity functions “as a practical method for attaining improvisational excellence—a virtuosic ability to respond to any contingency or demand” (Hershock, 1996, p. 160). Part of this is to consciously transform one’s behavior and intentions toward others, forming through one’s self-performance “dramatic affinities among patterns of narrative movement” or “reciprocally meaningful confluence” (Hershock, 2000, p. 94), working in counterpoint or contradistinction to prevalent modes and mores rather than in imitation of them (developed at length in section Imagining a Postmetaphysical Macropolitics). These dramatic affinities themselves become a condition for cultivating virtuosity, as in “liberating conduct or concern with others, not in the privacy of meditative absorption” (Hershock, 2000, p. 97). This is not a Promethean or a consumerist project: it is about coordinated, collaborative work.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should also describe my own position. I am an American of working class origin, male, and of European descent. As such, I have surely benefited from the injustices I describe in this proposal socially and materially; I have also suffered from them. This can also be said for my nation, the United States of America, which has both materially benefited and suffered from the injustices it has participated in, but which also has remarkable history of disciplined efforts toward transforming those injustices, many of them successful in unexpected ways. This essay aspires to be another such moment of Americana of the latter kind.

Metaphysical Macropolitical Doctrines

Evolutionary Idealism

Evolutionary Idealism: Introduction

Karen Litfin’s (2003) proposal for an integral approach to global relations and macropolitical action represents an early and untested contribution, and is therefore most fairly understood as speculative—that is, intended to open a field for inquiry rather than to present a wholly authoritative, unproblematic project. Litfin’s evolutionary ontology attempts to make space (in
my view useful, even necessary space) for transformative practice inclusive of spiritual disciplines in political theory, descriptive and prescriptive. This is a valuable contribution. The present analysis of Litfin’s ontological model is designed to keep this space intact, in fact to predicate authentic transformation on the disciplined practice of becoming-responsible rather than the invocation of a long-discredited idealistic historiography appropriate to one aspiring to the position of a Hegel or a Dilthey—or in a different respect, an Engels (De Certeau, 1988).

**The Claim of Evolutionary Idealism**

Litfin finds the present global political order problematic, and attempts to diagnose a cause for this. She claims that “the global problematique is rooted in a mode of consciousness that is becoming increasingly recognized as dysfunctional” (p. 31); this mode of consciousness is taken to include cultural manifestations such as secularism (p. 30), “deconstructive postmodernism” (p. 31), reason (p. 36), and the scientific method (p. 37)—leaving faith, pathos, and emphatic declamation as legitimized means of knowing and knowledge-production (see section Mechanics of Make-Believe). Litfin attributes the problems of late capital inclusive of the characteristic maldistribution of wealth between the global north and the global south (Smith, 1997) and the catastrophic ecological consequences of unmitigated capitalistic development (Burkett, 1999) to this worldview (p. 31), which in her view is not a precarious existential situation for trillions of vulnerable life-forms (Agamben, 1998; Butler, 2004), but a monologic story now in the throes of a crisis of legitimacy (p. 30).

Litfin’s solution to the problem of a dysfunctional paradigm she diagnoses, and therefore her proposal for resolving the global political-economic and environmental catastrophes she identifies, is to tell a new story.15

Recognizing that the old story is out of synch with the world we now inhabit, we turn our attention to our individual and collective (un)conscious in order to decipher that story and move towards a new one that will entail new practices (p. 33).

Litfin calls this position *evolutionary idealism*, which she defines as “an integral view of the world as the unfolding of Spirit” (p. 32) and as “an integral worldview that understands the universe as a revelation or manifestation of consciousness, Spirit, or intelligence” (p. 33)—a position explicitly indebted to Aurobindo and Wilber, and an expression of Wilber’s specific

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13 In terms of conventional public discourses, Litfin’s approach is appropriate to theology and metaphysics. I recognize that there may be postconventional means of verification for a truth claim, but Litfin does not discuss these substantively in the context of her proposal for an integral macropolitics.

14 Litfin’s approach in this regard is not unique. For instance, Tarnas (2006) takes a similar position, arguing that astrological forces affect human consciousness in ways that then produce or determine workaday experiences.

15 The totalitarian overtones of Litfin’s proposal, in which the multitudes are to be reeducated (indeed to introspectively reeducate themselves) into the Correct Story, are surely unintentional; it would be unwarranted to attribute an explicitly totalitarian agenda to Litfin’s project on these grounds.
Hindu-Hegelian synthetic theology, but attributed broadly (if incorrectly) to world culture generally.\textsuperscript{16}

**Arguments for Evolutionary Idealism**

Litfin makes three arguments in favor of Spirit’s reality and utility as a concept for the purposes of understanding and transforming global politics. Her first is that “much of both pre-modern Western thought and non-Western thought has accepted Spirit as the fundamental reality” (p. 41). For the present, the implausible claim that much of pre-modern Western thought and (depending on how one understands her meaning) all of non-Western thought (a remarkably diverse category of cultures and concepts) uniformly posits Spirit in the manner Litfin and Wilber do can be bracketed and left aside, because even if one assumes it for the moment to be so, it does not constitute a warranted and supported argument \textit{vis a vis} contemporary politics; it merely recontextualizes (arguably marginalizes) Spirit into a large-scale historical or anthropological artifact of a premodern, superstitious past—or as an exotic, Orientalized other. Put another way: masses of people have affirmed and accepted the reality of many things that seem unacceptable at present; correspondence of contemporary concepts to practices of ancient cultures presents some difficulty methodologically for this reason. For instance, one may argue that many cultures in the past and in the “mystical” East have practiced slavery and believed in the benefits of slavery, and practiced misogyny and believed in the value of misogyny, and for this reason, contemporary problems can should be solved by the reinscription of slavery and misogyny into world culture. I very much doubt that Litfin intends to marginalize the core of her ontology, the reality of Spirit, in the manner that her first argument in favor of that ontology leads if pursued to its conclusion. This argument is best discarded.

Litfin’s second argument in favor of Spirit: Hegel seems to have put his faith in it (p. 41-42). I suggest some ways in which this argument is immediately problematic in Anderson (2008); Marx’s comment that for Hegel “\textit{sense}, \textit{religion}, state-power, etc., are \textit{spiritual} entities” regardless of the objective actions taken by those powers or their means of subsistence (p. 111) anticipates several decades of scholarship on Hegel in this regard. In brief, neither of Litfin’s first two arguments overcomes one major argument against Spirit as Litfin herself deploys it: if one accepts the claim that all contexts, including the present, are expressions of a Spirit that knows better than we do (Litfin, 2003, p. 41), then the crisis of the present should be understood in the first place as a consequence of that Spirit’s demonstrable and necessary \textit{incompetence} and \textit{irresponsibility}—in Wilber’s terms, because the “higher” holarchy has the greatest freedom to act, that higher holon, Spirit, must have the greatest freedom to act for the good of those holons under its aegis, which it has clearly \textit{not} done, as the problematic of the present as Litfin

\textsuperscript{16} Following Wilber, Litfin claims “the modern West became the first major civilization in human history to deny substantial reality to the Great Chain of Being” (p. 36). This is an unsubstantiated claim, and easily refuted with one of many historical examples, one being Theravada Buddhism. If one holds to Litfin’s claim, one must then claim that Theravada does not represent a major civilization. A more productive approach may be to identify in history specific cultural artifacts that may have proposed a Great Chain of Being analogous in some detail to the one Wilber (2000b) posits. Finally, there is some danger in identifying evolutionary idealism with all spiritual traditions generally—it may lead one to conclude that criticism of evolutionary idealism amounts to attacking all spiritual traditions without exception, or spirituality as such.
diagnoses it proves. Spirit as Litfin proposes it is (in Wilberese) the *telos* of a *pathological superholon*\(^{17}\) (see section *Retelling the Epic of the Superholon*). This argument, also, is best disregarded.

All this points to two problems with Litfin’s third argument in favor of Spirit: “The appeal of evolutionary idealism will then depend upon its internal coherence” (p. 50). First, internal coherence is useful—I aspire to it myself—but it does not alone verify a truth claim.\(^{18}\) The example of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (Henderson, 2006) shows that a motivated individual with no special qualifications can improvise an internally coherent model for the intelligent design of the Cosmos\(^{19}\)—no one confuses the Flying Spaghetti Monster with a verifiable existant, or accepts Henderson’s explicitly satirical claim regarding the cause of global warming as science,\(^{20}\) but both positions are acceptable theologically and perhaps useful to some for that purpose (on principle at least, even in a ridiculous case such as Flying Spaghetti Monsterism). Second, evolutionary idealism as Litfin presents it is not coherent internally, as I have suggested already. To give another example, Litfin claims that reason has overcome superstition in the West (p. 37), which compromises her later claim that Western culture is predicated on a superstitious cult of scientific materialism (p. 37), not reason.

\(^{17}\) The logical necessity of an incompetent Spirit for one seeking to accommodate Wilber’s metaphysical position while also accounting for the Terror of the present Situation (Gurdjieff, 1999, pp. 1184-1238) is not a problem unless and until one insists on trusting this incompetent Spirit or attempts to make it responsible for matters of public or personal concern. Wilber tends to do this. For instance, in one of the informal writings of his that he has chosen to make public Wilber asserts that “enlightened awareness […] alone knows how to proceed” with a method for addressing ecological problems, where enlightened awareness is equated with “One Taste” which is characterized as “Spirit itself” (Wilber, 2000a, p. 212).

\(^{18}\) One may argue (fairly I think) that insisting on a description of reality that is free of internal contradiction assumes a reality that is without contradiction or explicity by reason without contradiction, or is even particularly “real.” I assume instead that an argument in favor or against a particular view ought to be reasonable—that logically coherent arguments are qualitatively superior to thinly reasoned ones—and that one’s premises ought to respond to the empirical contours of the object of one’s analysis, such that a contradictory object will be presented as contradictory or at least paradoxical. My objection to these metaphysical models for macropolitics (those of Litfin and Wilber) is not the contradictions latent in their ontologies; experiences are contradictory, complex, paradoxical. Rather, I object that these contradictions are not explicit as contradictions, and that the arguments given in support of them are themselves contradictory and more than occasionally implausible.

\(^{19}\) Litfin’s description of Spirit connotes precisely this theology (Forrest & Gross, 2004) in that Spirit is posited as “an animating intelligence [that] underlies the development of not only life forms, but of all creation” (Litfin, 2003, p. 41).

\(^{20}\) Henderson (2006) includes an elaborate riff exploiting a logical fallacy inherent in some arguments in favor of the teaching of “intelligent design” theory in American public schools in place of more trustworthy science curricula, specifically the assumption of necessary causality between two phenomena when only correspondence and no plausible causality can be demonstrated—suggesting that because there are fewer pirates on the high seas at present than in the nineteenth century, the decline in pirate population must be a cause of climate change in the diction of a corporation producing and selling commodities of conviction called the “Enlightenment Institute” (pp. 126-164)—a mashup of Wilber’s Integral Institute and Andrew Cohen’s *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine. Tarnas (2006) presents an argument related to the one Henderson (2006) critiques.
Evolutionary idealism is a coherent theological position and very likely a useful one for those who are committed to it, but as Litfin’s argument elaborates it from subjective spiritual or mythopoetic speculation to objective macropolitics, concerned with lives lived among others in material conditions, her arguments for evolutionary idealism crumble into incoherence. This incoherence is compounded into a preposterous totalitarianism in Litfin’s description of political praxis.

**Praxis According to Evolutionary Idealism**

Litfin’s proposal for transforming the present sociopolitical order by invoking a “new story” is not without difficulty. One can argue that it is narrative of a particular kind that holds nations together in the first place (Anderson, 1991), often through forgetting significant details as much as remembering others (Renan, 1993), an insight that informs Great Books education as practiced in North America (Adler, 1956; Hutchins, 1954; A. Bloom, 1987)—a cultural matrix from which American neoconservatism arose at the University of Chicago (with the introduction of Leo Strauss’s political science). *Story* is how power enforces certain values, sometimes through the figure of authors imagined as epic geniuses or timeless sages, as H. Bloom (1994) and Wilber (2000b) tend to present them (Foucault, 1977; Guillery, 1993; Eagleton, 1984; Michael, 2000). As Renan argues, in order to impose a story for the purpose of consensus consumption, the regime must ask that socius to forget or ignore certain things—to forget national embarrassments, humiliations, and mistakes. For instance, theological traditions often ask adherents to forget certain kinds of scientific evidence that invalidates particular theological tenets.\(^{21}\) Readers of the *9/11 Commission Report* (2004) may or may not notice the total absence of any analysis of American foreign policy since the second World War, remarkable for a document committed to explicating an attack from abroad by motivated actors, but this is forgotten, arguably in the interest of reassuring a vulnerable national sensibility already convinced of the official story, that the terrorist attack was an assault on American values rather than American power. Apropos of “story,” Garcia Marquez (1995) shows how this kind of forgetting can work in the global south—after the banana company (through its subsidiary, the state\(^{22}\)) massacres thousands of striking workers, only Jose Arcadio (Segundo) Buendia and a random child caught in the moment are able to testify to the historical event. The others forget as if by magic, insisting on the veracity of the official story:

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\(^{21}\) Members of the LDS Church, for instance, must put their faith in the historical existence of ancient North American tribes such as the Nephites, Lamanites, Jaredites, and Mulekites, as recorded in the *Book of Mormon* (Smith, 1841) despite the lack of any archaeological or historical evidence to support their claimed existence. *This is wholly unproblematic as an article of faith*, as a metaphysical or theological position. Only when mistaken for scientific theory does this point of theology become contestable, and contested.

\(^{22}\) The *9/11 Commission Report* (2004) claims that “the American homeland is the planet” (p. 517). This is at first blush a gesture of rote imperialism, but in a subtle way also expresses the subordination of the state to the regime or “telos” or “attractor” of global capital. Since the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, the U.S. has been the capitol of global capital as it were, and its champion-in-chief—its main military exponent. The doctrine presented in the *9/11 Report* suggests, among other things, that the purpose of the American state is to defend, protect, and promote the strategic interests of capital anywhere, because defending these interests maintains the U.S.’s position in holarchy as evolving toward the protocols of the telos of global capital (to express my point in Wilber’s diction—see section *Retelling the Epic of the Superholon*).
“You must have been dreaming,” the officers insisted. “Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing will ever happen. This is a happy town.” In this way they were finally able to wipe out the union leaders. (Marquez, 1995, p. 310).

The cost of Jose Arcadio Segundo’s adherence to empirical fact is his necessary withdrawal from civil society and into a kind of mysticism. My point is that stories of the type Litfin attributes the world’s problems to are not simple; they are institutionally and ideologically enforced (and as often theological and cultural as materialistic or scientific, contra Litfin’s characterization of the present ideological moment); they are contested; they are not at all uniformly distributed, nor readily replaced.

Effectively, to impose a “better story” is to reinvent a web of nation and subject and global interconnection, inclusive of educational infrastructure (see section An Experiment in Radical Democracy - Introduction). It is not a matter of Providence so much as a matter of power, politics, and responsibility. As I have suggested (Anderson, 2008), some have control over the terms of their lives and some do not. The challenge is to democratize this. Further, as I show in (section Holarchy and Macropolitical Praxis) it is not at all clear that the new story Litfin proposes, insofar as it reterritorializes Wilber’s evolutionary ontology into global politics, is in fact a new story at all. I agree with Litfin that the ideologies spun by capital are typically counterproductive, an argument as old as the Frankfurt School but perhaps positioned most creatively as presented by Debord (1995). However, I propose instead not to disseminate the content of a new narrative or a set of themes or a new paradigm, but (following The Four Zoas) to make possible the recovery of cultural memory from the top to the bottom of any stratified socius—democratizing the production of values and personal autonomy in a responsible way (Anderson, 2008). E.P. Thompson (1963), P. Anderson (1979), Ginsburg (1980), Braudel (1981, 1982, 1984), Shapin & Schaffer (1989), Buck-Morss (1991), LeGoff & Nora (1985), Gilroy (1993), Roach (1996), de Certeau (1998), Linebaugh & Rediker (2000), and Zinn (1995) represent divergent and sometimes conflicting approaches to this task, the last recalling a bloody three-year war fought by American soldiers for control of the Phillipines and its resources, wholly forgotten in the mainstream narrative of American self-identification (pp. 305-306). Responsible historiography has the advantage of exposing the problems of accrued and contradictory ideologies for what they are, make-believe, rather than risking a top-down propagandism passing as personally-meaningful “re-storying.”

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23 This selection of scholarship is not intended as a rhetorical gesture of canon-formation of the kind so characteristic of Wilber’s rhetorical strategy (“from Aristotle to Spinoza, from Leibnitz to Whitehead, from Aurobindo to Radhakrishnan” [Wilber, 2000b, p. 116]), but as a practical syllabus for those motivated to address the question of how changes occur in historical time in integral and critical (not idealistic) terms.

24 Karasu (1994) evokes the sense of this concept of make-believe precisely:

People are increasingly satisfied to believe whatever they want to, or whatever they wish for; perhaps they are scarcely aware that they’ve left off reasoning, reflecting, attempting to see things as they really are. By the time they become aware, darkness will have set in (p. 11).

This context should be contrasted against the role of “attractors” in Wilber’s metaphysics (section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon).
It is worth noting, finally, that Litfin reproduces Wilber’s problematic post-Dilthey tendency to attribute broad social transformations to “worldviews” produced by conspicuous intellectuals. For instance, Litfin claims that modernity has “architects,” inclusive of “Descartes, Newton, and Locke” (p. 36)—that the predilections and methods of a shortlist of great men have produced the present complex of contemporary forms of consciousness, an implausible but familiar theory of determination (Foucault, 1977). Similarly, Wilber (2000b) argues that because early scientists chose as their object of analysis “the dumbest holons in existence,” such as stones, reality as understood in an everyday way, by everyday people, has been reduced “to a flat and faded landscape defined by a minimum of creativity and a maximum of predictive power” (p. 56)—with Newton’s analyses of matter as well as his arguably more systematic exegesis of Biblical prophecy (another kind of “predictive power”) the unspoken subtext of Wilber’s claim. This invites one to ask: are the findings and methods of individual seventeenth-century scientists, working on the edges of their culture’s normative values (rather than representing them in an integral way), truly responsible for the contingencies of contemporary consciousness, in which people behave mechanically, view their worlds mechanically, and experience their lives with minimal creativity and maximal predictability? I suggest that another explanation may be more plausible: our social world, our work lives and political lives, have become structured such that minimal creativity is possible, that outcomes are maximally predictable—and further, that the regime or “attractor” in Wilber’s diction of the prevalent social order works to reify and reinforce this mode of consciousness (see section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon), beginning with an unplanned social experiment born in England in the eighteenth century. This was the transition from seasonally-variable agricultural work and urban, industrial capitalism, first coincident with the arising of early science—a process that, in Gurdjieffian terms, derailed healthy human development in order to make machines of people for the purposes of labor power for the accumulation of capital or for consumption that drives the same (Marcuse, 1964). In short, I suggest that if one wants to understand the conditions and determinants of the day-to-day consciousness of people and the conditions of possibility for their future life chances, one would do better to look to their day-to-day lives (at work, in the family, in committed relationships) rather than to European and postcolonial intellectual history, which is useful for other purposes, particularly the practice of becoming-critical.

This is the political significance of the opposition I assume throughout this essay between material history and degenerated or misapplied forms of mythopoetic speculation: responsible history reserves the right to be self-critical, which is to say, the right to being wrong and corrected.

Ferguson (1990) gives a useful history of the arising of the concept of the “worldview” as a means for understanding historical transformations, as an expression of the psychological and social needs of a particular time and place but imagined as universal, as inherent, archetypal determinants of consciousness and its forms. Tarnas (1991) should also be understood in this context.

In the Manuscripts of 1844, Marx (in the context of his discussion of alienation from humanity and nature) argues:

[[t]he savage and the animal have at least the need to hunt, to roam, etc.—the need of companionship. Machine labor is simplified in order to make a worker out of the human being still in the making, the completely immature human being, the child—whilst the worker has become a neglected child (p. 95).
Holons and Holarchy

Introduction

The “new story” Litfin proposes, the one she claims is identical in some regards to all ancient traditions, is Ken Wilber’s ontology, which finds its first detailed elaboration in Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality (2000b). This section will recount the plot, so to speak, of Wilber’s presentation of this ontology, in order to understand in some detail what the consequences of this ontology of holons (things) in and as holarchy (organization of things, structured relations in and among things) might be if used to interpret global politics, as Litfin has attempted. A challenge arises immediately, because Wilber expressly disavows reading social collectives such as nation-states, corporations, or ethnic groups in the same way as other putatively self-conscious phenomena (for Wilber the category of the singularly self-conscious includes compounded or aggregated things such as atoms, rocks, and the cosmos at large) (Wilber, 2000b, pp. 72-73). I have argued elsewhere that this is a self-contradictory objection on Wilber’s part (Anderson, 2008); further, I will show presently that Wilber himself identifies social or aggregated units as holons regardless of his advice against doing so, and further, that holons and holarchy as Wilber describes them represent with some accuracy global political phenomena, inclusive of relations of dominance, subordination, and actual injustice among global powers. Litfin is very much justified in elaborating from Wilber such a politics. On these grounds I will retell Wilber’s ontology as it expresses these political units in order to demonstrate the political significance of this ontology, which coincide with the particular social regime (or in Wilber’s terms, the “telos”) it expresses, integrated global capital (Guattari, 2000). My purpose is not to explicate the flaws in Wilber’s logic or demonstrate his misreadings of particular texts; such exegesis has been taken up elsewhere; it is instead to suggest ways in which Wilber’s holarchy flickers or mechanically reproduces in the field of metaphysics and spiritual aspiration the social and political structures of late capital, which are not integral at all. Further, because Wilber’s holonography reproduces the present political order and forecloses any legitimized means of transforming its problematic

28 This does not prevent Wilber from assuming a kind of singular self-consciousness on the part of social collectives or units of analysis such as academic disciplines, generations, or social movements insofar as they express categories of value according to his adaptation of the vMemes of Spiral Dynamics (Wilber, 2003a; Wilber, 2003b).

29 Harvey (2000), a geographer, observes that “[h]uman beings have typically produced a nested hierarchy of spatial scales within which to organize their activities and understand their world,” concerning “[h]ouseholds, communities and nations” as “obvious examples” (75). Holarchy as interested hierarchal relations should be understood as a means of social organization in the first instance.

30 Further, Mastustik (2007) argues for contextualizing Wilber as a critical social theorist in the tradition of Marx and the Frankfurt School. If Wilberian theory is to be regarded as wholly integral, a “theory of everything,” it should account responsibly for social and political phenomena—and should be held accountable for the social and political consequences of its positions, if Mastustik’s project is to be pursued.

31 To cite an early example, Helmeniak (1998) offers a detailed treatment of the category errors, logical fallacies, and implausible claims in Wilber’s foundational work, from a position much more sympathetic to Wilber’s project than mine (pp. 213-292).

32 W.I. Thompson (1998) points to this critique of Wilber (particularly in regard to mimesis and the near-totalitarian hyperbole of Wilber’s authorial self-fashioning as expressed in the politics of his cosmology) (pp. 12-13), but does not develop it in a thoroughgoing way.
terms of exchange, the unevenness of its development (as I will show), one may plausibly claim that it is not a transformative model but a conservative one in the last analysis, where conservatism is understood as an attempt to maintain the status quo for its own sake.

**Retelling the Epic of the Superholon**

Wilber (2000b) gives a series of characteristics that specify what holons\(^{33}\) are, how they behave, and how they relate to each other. This foundational moment in Wilber’s project is rehearsed in some detail to show its assumptions, functions, and consequences.

The first is the most basic: “*Reality as a whole is not composed of things or processes, but of holons*” (p. 43). Holons evolve relative to one another in a hierarchic fashion (itself evolving) that Wilber calls *holarchy*, such that all holons are both wholes as they are but also parts of a larger order. My hand is a whole hand, as it is; but it is also part of my arm, part of my body, and part of my work; my thumb is a whole thumb, but it is also part of my hand; each are both wholes and parts of other wholes. That is the logic of the holon as Wilber presents it, and to that extent, the holon is a remarkably useful and flexible concept.\(^{34}\) Wilber argues, convincingly in my view, that it is reductive to see any given holon (a thumb, a hand, a body) as *either* a whole or a part; at any time, a holon is both a whole and a part (p. 43). This tendency toward reductivity and incompetence is a characteristic Wilber uses to distinguish “dominator” or pathological holarchies from “natural” ones; a dominator holarchy is a regime that “occurs precisely wherever any holon is established, not as a whole/part, but as a whole, period” (p. 45). This distinction proves to be problematic.

Holons, according to Wilber, are capable of at least four things: “*self-preservation, self-adaptation, self-transcendence, and self-dissolution*” (p. 48). The first two of these can be understood as agency or autonomy, on one side, and communion or interaction on another; taken together, one finds that holons are self-interested social actors, interacting with others for their own reasons. The second two, self-transcendence and self-dissolution, imply a potential for development and growth in opposition to decline and decay. In short, the holon lives an ordinary, mortal life among other holons. Wilber extends the third capacity listed here, that of self-transcendence or creativity, into another characteristic: “*Holons emerge*” in the context of other holons that, to a greater or lesser degree, condition or even determine that holon’s trajectories (p. 54)—one might say its *life chances*. According to Wilber, “determinism arises only as a limiting case where a holon’s capacity for self-transcendence approaches zero, or when its own self-transcendence hands the locus of indeterminacy to a higher holon” (p. 55). This begs at least two questions: Under what circumstances might a holon’s capacity for self-transcendence approach zero? And under what circumstances does something or someone capable of self-transcendence pay out to an external agent or a higher power its own potential for future development, its “locus of indeterminacy”? Under a foreign invasion or occupation, a nation-state indeed becomes subject to the self-interested determination of a “higher” power, a possibility Wilber explores next.

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\(^{33}\) As a historical matter, the holon as a unit of organization is analogous to the scale holism (homology of microcosm and macrocosm) discussed at length in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

\(^{34}\) I express this function of the holon as a concept for explaining a given thing through the concepts *coherence, articulation, and totality* in Anderson (2008).
This kind of imperialism, and the potential for pathology or domination inherent in it, gives some significance of the fourth characteristic Wilber assigns the holon, that each one emerges “holarchically” (p. 56). This is because, according to Wilber, “[e]ach deeper or higher holon embraces its junior predecessors and then adds its own new and more encompassing pattern or wholeness” (p. 56). Thinking politically, two consequential interpretations follow from this. First, one must deduce from Wilber’s premises that an imperial holon must be more integral, more whole, more complex, and arguably closer to Spirit than the holons it absorbs into itself, insofar as it reterritorializes those holons into a “more encompassing pattern,” a deeper structure. Second, one must conclude that disengagement from a superholon is a counter-evolutionary, counter-novelty, and counter-integral gesture, insofar as the disengaging holon becomes of itself less deep and less complex. A coup d’etat or a hostile corporate takeover could be interpreted as a self-transcendent, evolutionary, even spiritual event, then, if it serves to accumulate depth and complexity, to hold the totality together; a postcolonial drive for democratic home rule would be the opposite (see section An Experiment in Radical Democracy). This returns Wilber to his distinction between pathological and “normal” holarchies. In the case of the former, “one holon usurps its position in the totality” (p. 58), a part claims to be a whole, reducing the rest of the whole to a part of itself; by contrast, the latter regime expresses “the natural interrelations between holons that are always both parts and wholes in horizontal and vertical relationships” (p. 58). Litfin’s “problematique” arises here as the pressing question par excellence of global politics: is capital as it has imposed itself on totality of the planet a “higher,” normal, natural holarchy or a pathological but normalized, naturalized, even spiritualized holarchy? Wilber moves to address this relationship between higher and lower, and the transcendence of the lower by the higher, by reference to Hegel.

Litfin’s invocation of Hegel may have its roots in Wilber’s explicitly Hegelian (and implicitly theological) interpretation of holarchic time, as expressed in the fifth characteristic of the holon: “Each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessors,” or, worded differently, the emergent holon “preserves the previous holons themselves but negates their separateness” (p. 59)—the agency that had characterized each holon becomes at best subject to the agency of another holon volitionally as in the case of the masochist’s contract, or at worst, is wholly

35 As Urizen does early in The Four Zoas—see section Mechanics of Make-Believe.
36 See Lenin (1967), Luxemburg (2003), and Aglietta (2000).
37 This poem is the epigraph to an essay by Franklin Jones (cited as Da Free John, Da Avabhasa, or Adi Da in Wilber’s writings), “The First Word,” which is reproduced in many of Jones’s publications as an introduction: “Do Not Misunderstand Me—I Am Not “Within” you, but you Are In Me./and I Am Not a Mere “Man” in the “Middle” of Mankind,/ but All of Mankind is Surrounded, and Pervaded,/and Blessed By Me” (Da, 2004). This is, clearly, a theological statement. Its expression of the guru-disciple relationship is a theological antecedent of the superholon-subholon, higher-lower relationship Wilber posits in his ontology (immediately recognizable if one substitutes “higher” for “I” and “Me,” and “lower” for “you” in Jones’s poem), where any holon’s development or self-transcendence is here reterritorialized into a top-down Providential mechanism, insofar as “[t]he higher embraces the lower, as it were, so that all development is envelopment” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 59). That is: Wilber’s ontology, and by extension the rest of his theoretical project, repeats or mimics this theological gesture, the devotional foundation of the religion of Adidam. I do not intend to affirm or negate the theological validity of Jones’s claim; rather, I intend to suggest that, true to its New Age roots (Ross, 1991), some of what Wilber presents as scientific theory should best be characterized as an expression of a specific theology or desire instead.
negated, handed over to a “higher” power regardless of the nature or intention of that power. The subaltern does not speak or act for him or herself (Spivak, 1988). Tellingly, Wilber’s example in this instance is a sociopolitical one: the Kingdom/Republic of Hawaii slowly becoming integrated into the United States (p. 60). For “lower” holons such as Hawaii, the Navajo Nation, the Philippines, Chile, Iraq—are the terms of Empire “communion” for the sake of development as Wilber suggests it must be in all possible realities (p. 60), or rather simple defeat, surrender of agency for no mutual gain, be a historical possibility in some cases, or some mix of both with costs and benefits evenly or unevenly distributed in the totality? Wilber attempts to mitigate this problem with a rhetorical strategy Blake parodies extensively (see section *Imagining a Postmetaphysical Macropolitics*), doublespeak: “the new and senior pattern or wholeness”—an oxymoron read literally—“can to some degree limit the indeterminacy (organize the freedom)”—two more oxymorons—“of its junior holons” (p. 60). This means *might*, expressed as *height*, makes *right*. The meaning of “right” here is fulfilled below in Wilber’s discussion of “attractors,” having to do with the ultimate significance of evolutionary change in Wilberian doctrine.

First, however, Wilber develops the properly political aspects of his Kosmic theory of right. The sixth characteristic of the holon and the significance of limiting the indeterminacy as Wilber invokes it has much to do with natural resources—physical ones, such as petroleum and minerals, but also human labor power and creative productivity in work: “The lower sets the possibilities of the higher; the higher sets the probabilities for the lower” (p. 61). Consider petroleum: the industrial North, a deep superholon aggregated of many levels or layers of subordinate microholons, is limited by the pace and volume of oil it can extract from those subordinate petroleum states and contracts in Asia and Africa (“lower” and subordinated holons), the global South generally; the terms of that extraction, the laws (“probabilities”) are established for the petrostates by the “higher” superholon (Karl, 1997). Wilber claims, “even though the higher level ‘goes beyond’ a lower level,” within a holon that is among other things a whole that contains as parts other wholes that are organized as levels, “it does not violate the laws or patterns of the lower level” (p. 61). This is a debatable truth claim because, as the fifth characteristic pointed out, the laws of lower-level subordinates are “organized,” under capital literally established in the first place, by the “higher,” as in the case of the so-called Seven Sisters (Samson, 1975), sometimes by explicit violence if implicit violence fails (Kinzer, 2003).

The next two characteristics are concerned with depth (seven), and the accumulation of depth (eight). As suggested earlier, a deep holon has more levels, while a shallower one has fewer levels: “it is not merely population size that establishes order of richness (or order of qualitative emergence), but rather depth” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 64). And depth has qualitative value for Wilber, insofar as “[e]ach successive level of evolution produces GREATER depth and LESS span” (p. 64, emphasis in the original). This is the evolutionary idealism Litfin invokes, in which the deeper holarchy demonstrates its evolutionary and therefore spiritual superiority by that very

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38 The masochist effects a transformation in himself by first establishing a program, and then negotiating that program’s execution. For this reason, masochism may be a useful site for considering power differentials as they relate to transformational dynamics, self-fulfillment, and justice (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 149-166; Deleuze, 1991).

39 The historical analysis of this event Kinzer (2007) presents confirms my interpretation of the imperialistic implications of Wilber’s metaphysics.
depth—as though the deeper holon inhabits a different kind of evolutionary time, relegating the colonized holons in a permanent past relative to the empowered or “higher” ones—hardly a responsible form of knowledge-production (Fabian, 1983). This establishes the criterion for distinguishing the “rightful place” of one holon among others in holarchy—its depth, its level. The natural place of a holon is where the higher power or “telos” of its moment in evolution has put it, precisely where it is (a circular argument). Further, this position evokes Wilber’s earlier suggestion that an imperial holarchy is by definition more advanced developmentally by evidence of its greater depth, differentiation, and complexity. In Wilber’s words: “The greater the depth of a holon, the greater its degree of consciousness” (p. 65). But Empires are fragile and fraught to the degree they are profound. As Wilber observes, “[t]he greater the depth of a holon, the more precarious is its existence, since its existence depends also on the existence of a whole series of holons internal to it” (p. 64)—thus the documented ruthlessness of the superholon in securing from its subordinates the resources it believes it needs to ensure its survival and continued hegemony, which it also believes it needs. Global capital, the deepest mundane superholon at present, is by degrees more conscious (and implicitly closer to Spirit) than any one of its subsidiaries by this model. For the purposes of the global South, global finance must be God; as for me, my employer must be my guru, as a leader in a higher level of an institutional hierarchy that subordinates me, organizes my freedom, and profits from my labors, regardless of Heaven’s “heights” or the “depths” of my soul (Wilber, 2000b, p. 66)—a thought experiment Wilber will later entertain, in discussing the twelfth characteristic of the holon.

Wilber next offers a diagnostic for determining the relative depth of a holon within a holarchy for the ninth characteristic: “Destroy any type of holon, and you will destroy all of the holons above it and none of the holons below it” (p. 69). This recalls one of the better developed propositions of Marxism, by which meaningful democracy (in the sense of full enfranchisement across all contexts) in the form of socialism is only possible after the full development of industrial capitalism (Rader, 1979, pp. 120-129); following this, if one were to remove the possibility of capitalist development, one thereby makes impossible the development of radical democracy, thus proving on Wilber’s terms either that a flattened, egalitarian socialist order must also be a deeper, more differentiated, and more evolved regime than late capital, the problematic of the present—or that Wilber’s diagnostic is fallible. Perhaps more significantly, Wilber’s model of evolution assumes a sequenced, single-voiced or “epic” teleology (Bakhtin, 1981) that seems to elide the possibility of coincident development on multiple lines in different contexts without reference to the One of Godhead, generally preferring the “higher” One to the “lower” multiplicity (both of which being necessarily nondual—see Anderson, 2008 and section Time and Telling), such that the lower holons on which the higher One or ones subsist become relatively less meaningful; “the more fundamental a holon is, the less significant it is” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 70). Following this, and recalling Wilber’s earlier example of the absorption of the Kingdom/Republic of Hawaii into the United States (and into global finance), Wilber would need to claim that native Hawaiian lifeways and other resources must be less significant than American macroculture (presumably the spectacle [Debord, 1995], since Hawaiian folkways were not integrated wholesale into all regions of American economic activity or folklife

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40 The School of the Americas and Operation Condor are two integrated, conspicuous, and well-documented examples of this (Lopez & Stohl, 1984; Gareau, 2004; Gill, 2004; Kornbluh, 2004; McSherry, 2005; Dinges, 2005).
uniformly) and needs (perceived or real) of the early and middle twentieth century (arguably as early as 1893), a difficult claim to justify qualitatively.

The tenth characteristic, “Holarchies coevolve” (p. 71), is significant methodologically for Wilber, because “the ‘unit’ of evolution is not an isolated holon (individual molecule or plant or animal) but a holon plus its inseparable environment” (p. 71). Regimes evolve; the by-stages of historical evolution of capitalism summarized by reference to corresponding stages in integral theory in Anderson (2008) is a conspicuous example. Manufacturing practices may migrate from Michigan to Manchuria or Mexico, but in any of those sites, the class differential (some control and direct the labor of others, buying that labor from them with wages, where subsistence can only be purchased) and the profit motive are reproduced. Wilber accounts for the possibility for formal circumstances to change, while structured relations of dominance persist not in spite of those changes but by means of those changes (which serve to keep the status quo intact) (Aglietta, 2000)—and Wilber’s accounting of this tendency in capital becomes part of his model of reality at this moment. A trait of capitalism, a historically contingent and unnecessary regime, is given ontological significance by Wilber’s holism. The eleventh characteristic of the holon reifies this class separation that capital both reproduces and depends upon: “The micro is in relational exchange with the macro at all levels of its depth” (p. 73). This means that global regimes produce local formations, which in turn reify global regimes, in part through the consciousness of those subject to this causal loop;41 “as holons evolve, each layer of depth continues to exist in (and depend upon) a network of relationships with other holons at the same level of structural organization” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 74). Wilber presents here a broadened purview for on an old claim, that of class consciousness. According to Lukacs (1967), “class consciousness consists in the fact of the appropriate and rational reactions ‘imputed’ […] to a particular typical position in the process of production” (p. 51), which is to say, one’s consciousness is conditioned by work and work among others in the same position or “level” relative to the superholon that subordinates them (in this instance, that of capital). Lukacs observes, however, that this is not always obvious; one of the functions of ideology is to transform a subject’s understanding of social phenomena that are wholly contrived into naturalized, normal, even spiritualized realities; in Lukacs’s (1967) words, “[t]he division of society into estates or castes means in effect that conceptually and organizationally these ‘natural’ forms are established without their economic basis ever becoming conscious” (p. 57), because if this basis were to come to consciousness, the “pull to pattern” Wilber identifies with ideology (to anticipate the story) would risk disintegration. Presently, this is increasingly articulated as a multitude against Empire (Hardt & Negri, 2004) constituted by beings with little in common culturally or historically except a subaltern position in the “depth” of holarchy—the same “level,” as Wilber expresses it.

Wilber concludes his narrative of evolutionary idealism on the topic of spirituality, unambiguously inscribing the ontology he builds into the Providential scheme suggested by the Hegelian speculation latent in his sixth characteristic of the holon. Wilber claims that “Evolution has directionality” (p. 74), which implies increases in “complexity” (p. 74), “differentiation/integration” (p. 75), “organization/structuration” (p. 78), “relative autonomy” for

41 As Marx expresses this position in the Manuscripts of 1844, “the social character is the general character of the whole movement: just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him” (p. 85).
the superholon, such that “the greater the depth of a holon, the greater its relative autonomy” (p. 78), and “telos” (p. 81), a concept Wilber develops at length: “the end point of the system,” its deep structure, tends to ‘pull’ the holon’s actualization (or development) in that direction (p. 81). These “attractors” or end points are “examples of the regimes or organizing forces of social holons and their inherent teleological pull to pattern” (p. 82). “Regime,” “telos,” and “organizing forces” are ideologies (Anderson, 2008), or the “political unconscious” of a given social order (Jameson, 1982). Wilber speculates that “God may indeed be an all-embracing chaotic Attractor” (p. 85)—which is to say, God may well be the political unconscious, the regime, the ideology of that order. Wilber’s speculative God, in this instance of consumer capital, is functionally a comprehensive marketing and human resource management strategy. Turned around: Wilber’s view of God and Kosmos in this instance is in his own terms a code (attractor, regime) that expresses this ideology, and arguably serves that regime which in Wilber’s view holds the holarchy together in an embrace (the nature and value of which is explored in sections Imagining a Postmetaphysical Macropolitics and An Experiment in Radical Democracy). This means there are no “pathological holons” except in resistance to the ideologies, regimes, “attractors” (any one of which or the aggregate of all might be God) that keep the superholon whole, intact, and functioning. Because depth is good, and increasing depth is good, the dissolution of depth any hypothetical withdrawal from the superholon implies is by definition a counterdevelopmental, counterproductive, counterintegral gesture in Wilber’s terms. Here, I think Wilber is fundamentally wrong, dangerously so.

Holarchy and Macropolitical Praxis

Wilberian holarchy is inherently political insofar as it is concerned with the relations among beings who are subordinated to others, such that those higher in the bureaucratic order, the superholon and its telos, are necessarily responsible for the development and well-being of the lower, while the lower is in possession if not control of resources needed to maintain the order by which the higher is higher and the lower, lower. That is: the superholon becomes responsible for those subject to it, and uses the resources of the totality (its labor, its creativity, its resources necessary for continued existence) for its own purposes, the accumulation of capital, or complexity, or depth, in this sense planting its banner in the dirt to claim the whole for itself as part of the whole. The empowered subject makes objects of less-powerful subjects—a perverse object of responsibility—rather than relating to other subjects as coherent others in their own terms.

Parenthetically, Wilber’s most explicit public comments on interventionary politics—his unfortunate post at the Ken Wilber Online website, “The War in Iraq” (2003b)—does nothing

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42 Wilber’s adaptation of tree-diagram Chomskian linguistics—surface structures and deep structures (p. 68)—should be contrasted against Deleuze and Guattari (1987) on the rhizome (pp. 3-25), which directly critiques Chomsky on this point.

43 The imperative here is to offer one’s volition upward to a more evolved, deeper organ, which then takes responsibility for one’s transformation and self-transcendence. By contrast, I follow Shantideva (1997) and Chagdud (2003) in proposing that one’s volition should be intentionally devoted in all directions toward the recognition of the needs of others.

44 This document is riddled with non sequiturs, ad hominems, unwarranted evidence, contradictory terminology, misattributions, and shrill rhetoric. Its claims are advanced exclusively by forceful
to contradict this analysis, although here Wilber works from different premises, specifically his muddled and contradictory iteration of Spiral Dynamics. Wilber assigns to a “second-tier” value system on which a utopian “World Federation” would be established, the task of preventing “any first-tier memes from dominating, attacking, or exploiting any other populations,” equating “memes” and “populations” (which are quantitatively and qualitatively different things) in the process. Parenthetically, according to Spiral Dynamics this imperative to prevent bullying and allow all subordinated voices to be heard would be read as a manifestation of the “green” vMeme, not the “yellow” one Wilber assumes it to be. Wilber then claims that all “orange or higher” political structures (where “orange” is ambiguously defined either as capitalism proper or as the value system of capitalism) anticipate this and are already functionally “second-tier” themselves. This means that the hegemonic order of the global north, which Wilber catalogues by name—“Germany, France, America, Britain, Japan”—integrated global capital, the “orange” value system, is already “yellow” or integral. This confirms the previous interpretation of Wilber’s holarchy in that structures claimed as relatively more evolved or “higher” are actually spiritualized expressions of contemporary global power dynamics, as of the second Bush administration—that Wilber’s metaphysics are in one sense a representation of contemporary social and political relations mapped onto subjective and objective space.

It also corresponds to another trend in Wilber’s writings: when he does endorse a coherent political position, it tends to be a neoliberal, pro-interventionist (or anti-anti-interventionist), even reactionary, position. Berlant (1997) offers a political context for the non sequitur expostulation against the “hypocrisy” of American protestors against the Vietnam war, inclusive declaration and emotive appeal (see sections The Claim of Evolutionary Idealism and Mechanics of Make-Believe). For this reason, I will refrain from critiquing it as if it were a serious work of scholarship, only as an artifact that confirms findings already established in Wilber (2000b). To give but one example: Wilber claims that Tony Blair cannot be accused of “defending his oil interests” as a rationale for his unquestioning support of Nixonian intervention in Iraq because the U.K. is a net exporter of petroleum—forgetting or ignoring the longstanding investment of British capital by profitable British firms in Iraq, beginning with the very creation of the Iraqi state by the British for the purpose of these oil rights under the British Mandate for Mesopotamia, after the division of the former Ottoman Empire by northern powers (Samson, 1975) that was disrupted by Saddam Hussein’s nationalization (but not socialization) of the oil industry. Wilber’s historical claims on Blair are thoroughly discredited by the 2002 Downing Street memos (Danner, 2006).

45 Wilber’s application of Spiral Dynamics replaces arguments and proposals for and against different values or methods which are qualitatively heterogenous with a color-coded, systematized rubric of value systems or “vMemes,” which are qualitatively homogenous. This move leads Wilber to equate all work in humanities disciplines as “green” or “boomeritis,” inclusive of rigorous analysis of the type Jurgen Habermas practices (to emphasize a Wilberian favorite) and the uncritical speculation on popular culture Wilber parodies as self-indulgent gabbing about unimportant things (Wilber, 2003a). If both are green, then both are “first-tier,” and therefore one is not more or less useful or valuable than the other by the logic of Wilber’s adaptation of the Spiral—clearly an untenable position.

46 It follows from this that Allende’s move away from “orange” patterns of domination, which according to Wilber are somehow “yellow” patterns of integration, toward local control and a flattened, democratized social space, could be interpreted as an instance of the domination of “blue” nationalism over international “orange” property claims, justifying an “orange” intervention to “curb” this project (see section The Endgame; Or, Limiting the Indeterminacy)—just as Bush’s actions serve to curb “red” terrorism, according to Wilber (2003b).
of bourgeois dilettantes who joined in for their own reasons, aired in Wilber (2003a, pp. 60-61) with no rebuttal):

The antiwar, antiracist, and feminist agitations of the sixties denounced the hollow promises of the political pseudopublic sphere; then, a reactionary response grew dominant, which claimed that, in valuing national criticism over patriotic identification, and difference over assimilation, sixties radicals had damaged and abandoned the core of U.S. society. (Berlant, 1997, p. 3)

Wilber’s sentiments, voiced by Fuentes (an instructor at the fictional Integral Center), identify him wholly with that reactionary response.

To return to holarchy, the practice of any regime may be critical, compassionate, competent, and conscious—it may be responsible—but it is not necessarily so (and even if it is irresponsible, it is still spiritualized for Wilber, it is still maybe-God). My retelling of Wilber’s holarchic story suggests some ways in which it may be abused by an irresponsible regime, insofar as it is an accurate, spiritualized representation of what Litfin (2003) accurately diagnoses as a problematic political order (Anderson, 2008). The evolutionary-idealist picture Wilber paints and Litfin evokes may be a valid one on theological grounds; it may be useful therapeutically in some contexts; it has a certain appeal aesthetically. It is not unproblematic, however, and its problems (particularly as regards social and political applications) are such that an altogether different theoretical approach from it (Anderson, 2008) is in my view a more efficient and plausible beginning than the alternative of reconsidering or revising the evolutionary-idealist position to account for those problems.

Worded differently, this analysis of Wilber’s ontology is only concerned with its practical application as social and political theory. I make no claims regarding its validity or veracity as a specific theology, however, a theology that claims to coincide with some trends in contemporary science. Wilberian metaphysics is not unique in this sense, either; the theology of Joseph Smith Jr., for instance, was consonant with certain emerging trends in the social sciences of his moment, such as Ethan Smith’s The View of the Hebrews (1823). I do not wish to dismiss belief in evolutionary idealism. Rather, my purpose here is to demonstrate the value of a rigorously postmetaphysical integral project, open to a spectrum of doctrines and metaphysics but not predicated on any one of them, for the purposes of social and political action (Anderson, 2008) relative to the problematic, divisive, and unjust social order implicit in this particular theology. Toward this end, I explicate a more conspicuous postmetaphysical project, Blake’s vision The

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47 In the diction of Wilber’s comments on Iraq, I want to propose that an authentically integral space is one in which no theological project is permitted to dominate any other one—and that an authentically integral theory will, by necessity, be nontheological, in order to accommodate all possible theologies (Anderson, 2008).

48 If all major spiritual traditions affirmed Spirit in the way Wilber does, as Litfin (2003) argues, then this critique of Wilber’s theology would be directed to all major spiritual traditions—it would, in effect, be an argument against theology as such. This is not the case. Since I reject the claim that they do, I also do not claim that this critique of Wilber’s theology has any necessary implication for any theology other than Wilber’s.
Four Zoas, that is explicitly informed by and articulated in the language of dissenting Protestant theology (see section Imagining a Postmetaphysical Macropolitics).

Conclusion to Metaphysical Macropolitics

In sum, when Litfin (2003) proposes to replace the current pathological story with a more comprehensive, meaningful, and constructive one, she effectively reproduces the old order in a bigger, more absolute context. The task remains to identify some means for introducing a legitimately new course of action. I find that an old source may have something new to offer for an integral theory of political action: Blake’s masterpiece, The Four Zoas, which proposes a wholly different view of political responsibility from Wilber’s evolutionary idealism, in which the multitude becomes-responsible for the totality as an act of goodwill to an other taken seriously as an equal, not as an imperialistic act of envelopment and disenfranchisement. The subaltern sings, slavery of all kinds is abolished, and ordinary beings find responsible, “virtuosic” ways to organize their own freedom in The Four Zoas.

Imagining a Postmetaphysical Macropolitics

“Just as philosophy begins with doubt, so also a life that may be called human begins with irony.”

Introduction to The Four Zoas

Before proceeding, a qualification: the question of Blake’s politics (or rather, the coherence of the political gestures identified with the author William Blake) represents a longstanding division in Blake scholarship. This can be summarized in a rough-and-ready way on one side by Damon’s (1965) compaction of the Blakean complexity to a Jungian personal metaphysics, historically favored by readers seeking to recover a private, transcendent mysticism from Blake’s writings (symptomatically from the static nationalism of Jerusalem the epic and “Jerusalem” the lyric) and on the other side by Erdman (1969) and on more explicitly normative grounds by Thompson (1993), recuperating Blake not as a God-and-country introspectivist but as a “prophet against Empire” aspiring to a public intervention. Neither position represents the totality of Blake’s oeuvre without serious qualification or outright contradiction, like the angels and devils mistaking their limited points of view with an absolute or complete narrative of right (though Blake typically sides with the “Satanic” position) in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. I find both approaches wanting and the enterprise of constructing a unified and unproblematic author-function unwarranted, counterproductive, and cultish (Foucault, 1977). I propose instead to read The Four Zoas not as the timeless expression of an Important Author’s good judgment

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49 This is Kierkegaard’s main claim in The Concept of Irony (1989), an important contribution to the development of Rorty’s concept of a postmetaphysical culture, a concept Wilber has consistently claimed as his own (Anderson, 2008). Arguing directly against an aspect of Clark’s (1991) analysis (in her comparative study of Blake and Kierkegaard), I find there are ways in which Blake can be understood to be concerned with questions of “community or human ‘solidarity’” (p. 109), but I agree with Clark that such a solidarity is not in the last instance premised in the traditional way on identity or adherence in The Four Zoas.
(necessarily eschewing at the same time any self-aggrandizing pretense to be, myself, a Respectable Expert on said Important Author), but as an artifact of a particular time and place when democratic alternatives to nascent capital were lived realities. Linebaugh & Rediker (2000, pp. 344-351) locate the text in a period of Blake’s career when he publicly identified and interacted with active republican and anti-slavery causes, calling for the freedom and enfranchisement of all (and not only the English, as his later work implies). It is not implausible to suggest that Blake’s most involved work of this period included in it a still-relevant critique of a social order predicated on impressments and slavery, and a vision for an alternative emerging from that critique. My claims on *The Four Zoas* are not intended to be last-word authoritative or to account for all of Blake’s writings—I do not seek to ventriloquize Blake or any other now-fetishized sage of the canon, or to recuperate an “integral” canon—but they are suggestive of a properly integral political vision itself largely unencumbered by the desire for authoritative final answers from singular Great Minds.

In contrast to Wilber’s idealism, Blake’s transformational project as presented in *The Four Zoas* is primarily temporal rather than spatial or structural. It proceeds in three discrete steps. First, a static, pathological hierarchy kept in place by make-believe and mimicry motivated by unchecked and irresponsible will-to-power is established, and the nature of that pathology is explicated psychologically and domestically; then, the poem introduces a surprise that disrupts this hierarchy and temporarily makes of it a smooth, organless state, after which a new set of values is introduced. This proves to be a bottom-up, rather than a top-down, transformation. Since this is not a conventional way to read *The Four Zoas*, each of these steps is recreated in detail below with references to the Wilberian gestures discussed above in section *Metaphysical Macropolitical Doctrines*.

**Time and Telling**

*The Four Zoas* is a paradox: a Big Book, an integral project, on the limitations of Big Books and a fully-elaborated all-quadrants, all-lines integral theory. The poem earnestly courts

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50 In this section, the concepts of mimicry and make-believe imply but do not develop a comparative study of cognate concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis (*Wiederholungszwang*), Gurdjieffian practice, Benjamin’s critical theory (among others) and Blake’s political and aesthetic vision. Such a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper but a fruitful point of departure for future work.

51 This contrasts Wilber’s (2000b) emphasis that increasing grade, depth, and complexity is a positive development, a symptom of spiritual growth for individuals and societies (p. 78).

52 For Wilber, transformation is how a holon acquires more levels, which “produces greater depth, and less span” than before (p. 68). I call such a process development in Anderson (2008). Transformation as I explicate it in Blake should be contrasted against Wilber’s view of transformation, rather than compared to it.

53 According to Wilkie & Johnson (1978), *The Four Zoas* is “one of the most encyclopedic works of the last three centuries, a deeply considered critique of public values” (vii).

54 While critics such as Bakhtin (1981) assume that individual epics aspire to a kind of unity, according to Quint (1993) the genre of the modern epic inclusive of *The Four Zoas* is discontinuous. This discontinuity proves to complicate Blake’s project, because the genre of the dissenting modern epic has nearly as long a history as the Virgilian epic does. Quint traces the history of two epic traditions apparently but not actually in dialogue with one another in the west: that of the “winners,” identifying their own interests with that of imperial power (*The Aeneid* and its successors), and that of the “losers,” which functions
comparison to *Paradise Lost* by its frequent and explicit allusions, showing a concern for being received in the context of epic and in contradistinction to Milton’s imperialistic theology (Evans, 1996). Many of the poem’s nonparodic features mark it most conclusively as such: it more-than-encyclopedic scope, its exoticism, and its unity of form, manifested by means of an elaborate and symmetrical ring composition. Ault (1987) has mapped in close detail the symmetrical and pseudo-symmetrical patterns of mirrorings, repetitions, and embeddings by which Blake structured the poem. According to Ault, each Night constitutes a ring composition, as does the entire poem; further, the first three Nights taken together mirror the last three taken together, constituting a point of contact with the wholeness/partnership condition of the holon as Wilber describes it. More interestingly, patterns of repetition (with difference), a familiar Kierkegaardian theme, give a feeling of mechanical, top-down inevitability to the events of the poem, against the current of which more responsible or virtuosic actions must swim. In this sense, an arbitrary hierarchy is reproduced as a set of relations across time as well as space.

Characters throughout *The Four Zoas* lament a lost golden world, an absolute past of pleasure and peace. According to Ahania, “liberty was justice & eternal science was mercy” (39.11) in this prelapsarian time. *Paradise Lost* is primarily concerned with this beginning of history as a theological matter, promising from the start a moment when “one greater Man/Restore us, and regain the blissful seat” (1.4-5) but never showing precisely how this promise can be fulfilled. That paradise is also lost for most of *The Four Zoas* is obvious in that something has intervened in the lifeworld of the poem’s characters, dividing them from each other and the fruits of their labors and intentions; much more unique (also in contrast to *Paradise Lost*) is Blake’s narration of the End of History, which brings about a return to this state of affairs by special means (see sections *One Way to Stop Pretending and Start Transforming the Whole (Damned) Thing and Kindness and/as Revolutionary Praxis*). If *Paradise Lost* promises to assert Providence through the grand narrative of Christendom, *The Four Zoas* is intended to provide an even more complete version of that teleology, including the intervention of a pathological social order and a redemptive end to its naturalized, repetitive patterns of use and abuse that characterize everyday life under that regime—in short, to show how Providence is asserted politically (a first intervention). This end leads to an instance of improbable logic: *Blake’s epic is still more absolute in its repudiation of absolutism than Milton’s presumptively encyclopedic epic* because it seems that much more complete, even as Blake disregards the singular metaphysics of God as exclusive character or monotonous voice. Paradoxically, in terms of determination and causality, *the text not needing to posit a personal God becomes more inclusive of the subaltern, of time,* satirically in relationship to both the politics and the structure of the Virgilian epic (The *Pharsalia* of Lucan, for example). Virgil founded the literary and political conventions of the written epic. According to Quint, “The *Aeneid* had, in fact, decisively transformed epic for posterity into both a genre that was committed to imitating and attempting to ‘overgo’ its earlier versions and a genre that was overtly political: Virgil’s epic is tied to a specific national history, to the idea of world domination, to a monarchial system” (p. 8). By contrast, “paths of resistance to epic triumphalism assume a common shape: in opposition to a linear teleology that disguises power as reason and universalizes imperial conquest as the imposition of unity upon the flow of history, the dissenting narrative becomes deliberately disconnected and aimless” (Quint, 1993, pp. 40-41), as if to show that history is not going anywhere in particular, regardless of what the empowered say in authorizing their own position.
and of possibilities for real transformation than the metaphysical one claiming to justify His existence and to describe the practical application of His Being.\(^{55}\)

Paradise Lost presents an exotic, mythopoetic world in its concern with space and time beyond mundane comprehension; presumably, none of Milton’s readers can really know the actual breakfast conversation of Adam and Eve. Similarly, The Four Zoas’ opening introduces the reader into a necessarily exotic world relative to mundane human existence: “Four Mighty Ones are in every Man […] The Universal Man” (3.4-6). This verse, heavily glossed with references to the Gospel of John, insists that the figures of the following action, the titular four Zoas—Urizen, Tharmas, Urthona, and Luvah—are actually present in the reader (assuming in the process that all readers are literally men, and that all readers will identify themselves with its model of the subject, the Universal Man), and in fact present an accurate map of the reader’s person and potential. Traditionally, this poetic and rhetorical technique is called psychomachia; it is not without significant precedent in English print culture (Anderson, 2003).

One means Blake employs to encourage his audience to identify with the psychomachia is to tie it to national identity, a strategy used for explicitly nationalistic, even paranoid, ends by Phineas Fletcher in The Purple Island (Anderson, 2003). The Purple Island topos works on the principle that what is true psychologically and physiologically for an individual consciousness stands without fail for religious and cosmological truth, and also holds for the body (and mind) politic. This is holistic in its nature. Blake adopts a similar allegoric logic in The Four Zoas. The Universal Man, Albion the Giant, is identified without equivocation as England early in the poem (an expedient nationalism crushed in the poem’s revolutionary finale), as evidenced by the names of his circulatory organs: “Groans ran along Tyburns brook and along the River of Oxford” (25.7). And as in The Purple Island, the peak of the political structure of the poem’s subjective space is found in the brain, “Where Urizen & all his Hosts hang their immortal lamps” (11.17). The world of the poem is further made exotic by the behavior of the landscape, which does not abide by conventional physics. It is sympathetic rather than static, changing in one instance from a space resplendent with flowers and “rivers of delight” as Los and Enitharmon pass through happily, into a series of “dismal vales” and “iron mountains” as they return racked with guilt (61-62). The irony of Blake moving Milton’s exotic into psychomachic space lies in the same assumption that all readers will recognize the elements of the action within themselves and their culture, allegorically,\(^{56}\) that which is most foreign to experience—a time before the beginning of time—becomes an aspect of that which is most near, the stuff of one’s body, being, and becoming, an intimation of nonduality (Anderson, 2008).

\(^{55}\) The Four Zoas relies on a different theory of determination from Paradise Lost and from Wilber and Litfin. The agent of transformation is not Spirit or God—it is a human recognition of error and a contrary resolve toward compassion-in-action among active subjects (a basic virtuosity). I do not claim Blake excludes his dissenting Protestant God from the poem or from politics; I do claim that the role of said Godhead in political theory differs from an idealistic position in this respect. The total vision of The Four Zoas is theological to the core if idiosyncratically so.

\(^{56}\) Buck-Morss (1991), working from premises in Walter Benjamin’s critical theory, examines this kind of allegoric thinking as a form of critical practice analogous to waking from a dream (with some relevance to the practice of lucid dreaming): one must recognize the dream as a dream before waking from it (or in it) and acting on it (or in it) meaningfully.
Mechanics of Make-Believe

Instead of asserting absolute authority, the Miltonic mandate to justify the ways of God to anyone, Blake relentlessly represents the mimetic consequences of that gesture of discursive and ideological power, describing an impenetrable, preposterous, turtles-in-all-directions field of subordination and domination, a great bureaucratic chain of bindings. This is the first state from which the poem’s transformative model begins, the problematic of the present. The problem is not a mythopoetic fall of man, but a perverse and divisive social experiment.

Initiating the action of the poem, Urizen the usurper establishes a certain pattern of behavior that is congenial to his own idea of empire, and the rest imitate him (or enact a Great Refusal of doing so) in ways suggesting both assent and dissent at once. The characters of the poem mimic Urizen’s self-fashioning because they are constituted to do so as Urizen’s subjects. His power and his means reproduce as others imitate his power and means. But no imitation is perfect; each instance represents a duplication with a difference, and that difference, when observed, makes the act of mimicry explicit (Bhabha, 1994). This bears an important relationship with Blake’s preoccupation with demonstration and doubt, and Blake’s parody of Urizenic denial of material conditions and affirmation of self-serving Cosmic-scale make-believe.57 The figure of Urizen, the specific form of his self-fashioning, embodies many forms of absolutism recognizable to an eighteenth-century audience—that of the monarch, the rationalist, and the epic poet—all conflated in the figure of the seemingly divine sage of the sun, as if each assertion of power represents a legitimately unlimited imperial stake. Blake is invoking a convention of epic established by Torquato Tasso, where “rationality” becomes “embodied by the teleological epic plot” (Quint, 1993, p. 38). The epic hero and the epic poem are made representatives of normative rationality; Urizen embodies this. Imitating Urizen, the others produce occasionally dissenting behaviors that show how Urizen’s are constituted by contrast with them.

Urizen behaves as one would expect a colonial power to behave, by now-familiar mimetic means, disrupted by transformational surprise.58 According to Bhabha (1994), “[t]he success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure”—a slave mimicking a master must remain a slave, the fact of which disrupts said mimicry—“so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (p. 86). The menace is the

57 Blake’s merciless parody of the political, authorial, and implicitly commercial uses of claiming to be God (or of God, or uniquely knowing God) does not foreclose the possibility that someone may in fact have been God, or be God, or become God—a possibility Blake’s theology in fact depends on. It also depends in every case on the assumption that for such a performance, there will be a ready set of followers.

58 In a related context, Ziporyn (2003) offers a suggestive recontextualization of alterity: Revolutionary desire is “the only true revolutionary ethics,” in that it is “the desire for the wholly other. This is the desire for everything without exception, including oneself, including the rules, including the parameters making the field of experience possible, to be otherwise” (Ziporyn, 2003, p. 410). This is the precise counterpoint to mimicry. As will be seen, Enitharmon’s diabolical abandonment of all known values in a moment of impiety, behaving with kindness and in a sense creativity rather than mimicry, is such a moment. It is a miracle. Every being is participating in this; for Ziporyn (2003), it is up to each holon to accomplish this, or to be led through “potentially disastrous” consequences in the form of a pathological regime (p. 416). In language that echoes Deleuze-Guattarian desiring-production: “every moment of experience is inescapably a revolution, setting up a new standard of value” (Ziporyn, 2003, p. 417).
threat to order, to the coherence of regime, presented with the assumption that any subordinate element could become the master fully and without qualification or accountability (see section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon). As such, “[m]imicry repeats rather than re-presents” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 88). And a knowing, parodic take on this repetition informs Blake’s rhetorical, poetic, and thematic strategies.\(^{59}\) Irony induces a practical skepticism, minimal doubt; this doubt discredits the mechanical kind of belief needed to maintain the absoluteness of the absolute, making space for virtuosic action. Blake pursues this line of thinking to its logical end, long before Richard Rorty began to propose the basis of a postmetaphysical culture in precisely this kind of humane irony (Anderson, 2008).

As a Sun King, Urizen’s self-promoting rhetoric conflates political and supernatural power: “I will walk forth thro those wide fields of endless Eternity/A God & not a Man a Conqueror in triumphant glory/And all the Sons of Everlasting shall bow down at my feet” (95.22-24). His bad-faith claim to be God authorizes the absolutism of his politics and by implicit fiat his role in that political structure, which manifests in the form of a maritime empire, under which “slaves in myriads in ship loads burden the hoarse sounding deep/Rattling with chains the Universal Empire groans” (95.29-30). This empire, in its literal universality, subsumes everything, and by this logic it can presumably reach any corner of any space and claim that space for itself because all of everything is always already part of itself. Blake’s knowing use of Virgilian epic conventions establishes Urizen’s character very efficiently. Urizen’s epithet, typically, is Prince of Light; that Blake bestows upon him a ridiculous number of additional epithets is telling of his skeptical and mocking attitude toward Urizen’s hyperbolic epicness and philosopher-sage acumen and Importance—of the pomposity of his claim to be God, king, and knower of everything at once. One such is “the great Work master” (24.5), which corresponds to Urizen’s behavior insofar as he masters the work of others while others do not affect his; he orders a bower built “for heavens darling in the grizly deep” (24.7), invoking Satan’s role as project manager of Pandemonium’s construction in Book One of Paradise Lost, where presumed or performed imperial power is mimetic of God’s putatively real power in heaven. After landing at the burning lake, Satan rises up giving commands, and those around him follow as if the performance had been scripted; banners rise from nothingness, trumpets sound, a war machine is prepared, and a cherub “forthwith from the glittering staff unfurled/Th’ imperial ensign” (1.525-570). Beelzebub complains that God may “over hell extend/His empire, and with iron scepter rule/Us here, as with those in heav’n” (2.326-329); Milton explains that the “sword of Michael,” having smitten them, induces in them “no less desire/To found this nether empire[…]In emulation opposite to heav’n” (2.294-298). The experience of political defeat subjectifies\(^{60}\) the

\(^{59}\) Blake exaggerates in Urizen the kind of hero Alexander Pope presents in his translation of the Iliad. Pope (1967) takes pains to represent Menelaus, the cuckolded King, as a dignified figure to be taken seriously; “his Character is compos’d of Qualities which give him no uneasy Superiority over others while he wants their Assistance, and mingled with such as make him amiable enough to obtain it” (p. 206). Pope does not elaborate or demonstrate Menelaus’ goodness; to assert it is enough. Pope recognizes that interpreting a monarch’s actions ironically, as he accuses Chapman of having done, as “a Character of Ridicule and Simplicity” (p. 206) is to introduce skepticism of an assumed absolute into a text predicated on the inviolability of such an assumption. Pope is not willing to doubt his assumption that kings inherently practice politics in good faith.

\(^{60}\) Foucault (1983) discusses the kinds of processes by which Urizen and his imitators produce their roles in terms of subjectivity constructed by means of power imbalances. In his late essay “The Subject and
defeated ones in such a way that they intensely desire to construct for themselves a political order both in opposition to and imitation of that which defeated them, a resentful recipe.  

Blake directly invokes this pattern in the behavior of the Zoas toward each other, each one imitating Urizen’s power through building projects and violence as they take turns being God and king. Urizen, the Prince of Light, is revealed to be a version of Milton’s Satan rather than Milton’s God, as he pretends to be (as Satan does). Curiously, Satan is himself a subaltern in that he is imitating (rather than being) God; Urizen, the parodied figure of the emperor, is a direct imitation of the most comprehensive loser the European imagination has produced, the endlessly resilient and resentful devil. Blake reminds the reader of this through juxtaposition of Urizen’s shape-shifting body and geographic location and his ideas about himself. Even when in the form of a dragon-tailed Satanic beast in the abyss, Urizen ironically keeps his epithets intact in the face of their falsehood: “the King of Light outstretched in fury/Lashes his tail in the wild deep his Eyelids like the Sun” (106.41-42). The mind of Urizen is, indeed, its own place. With this elaborate set of allusions, Blake suggests that one means by which empire is authorized may only be a performance of conventional make-believe gestures, and a blatantly incompetent one.  

Pointing out the potential unreality of a Weltanschauung assumed to be concrete is fundamentally an act of dissent by means of doubt, or skepticism. Urizen moves against the potential for dissent by effacing the power of skepticism. He assigns to the rhetoric of science certainty, and claims this science for himself; to this end “schools [are] Erected forming Instruments/To measure out the course of heaven” (28.20-21), which heavens are soon arbitrarily “squared by a line” (30.10), suggesting regimented bureaucracy and the inadequacy of phenomenal reality to reflect Urizen’s performed splendor, and a pedagogy that bends science to doctrine and ideology, reducing knowledge to story and spectacle (Debord, 1995). Urizen wants nothing in his performance to disturb the suspension of disbelief, not even the existence of material reality, as if observing the world of phenomena and drawing conclusions from it could undermine his project of absolute dominion. Blake parodies here the methods of absolutism by drawing it to its logical conclusion, and shows the twisting of scientific means and vocabulary to

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61 Nietzsche, among the first to explicitly analyze resentment as a condition of modernity, frames it much as Blake does implicitly, as an internal conflict corresponding to a concrete social situation:  

Certain human beings have such a great need to exercise their force and lust to rule that, lacking other objects, or because they have always failed elsewhere, they finally have recourse to tyrannizing certain parts of their own nature, as it were sections or stages of themselves (Nietzsche, 1992, p. 151).
accomplish the rhetorical ends of power, repeatedly invoking paradoxes illustrative of skepticism’s potential power over discourse. Blake asks, “Is not the wound of the sword Sweet & the broken bone delightful” (92.36). One must take it on faith alone that war wounds are pleasant, and contradict the personally verifiable experience of pain. Again, reason and the scientific method are excluded as legitimate means of knowing (see section The Claim of Evolutionary Idealism). The kind of faith that by necessity contradicts experience of everyday phenomena makes Urizen’s absolutism and the violence that follows from it possible. In this sense, Blake’s equation of rationalism, the epic genre, the tropes of the Important Canonical Writer, and religious hegemony is not only in response to Milton and the history of epic, but also contemporary religious expression.62

Urizen’s turn as an epic poet invokes tangentially Milton’s own biography—an old man pushed from a position of political power into an obscurity allowing him to write Very Important Books—but more importantly, the use to which absolute epic rhetoric can be put: maintaining empire and the status quo of the empowered class. Urizen is closely tied to the books he writes, as if the books signify his being, and his presence or brand-image guarantees the validity of the books. Urizen the travels with his books, constantly arranging them about himself like a pieces of a self-conscious costume (77.19, 78.13); he answers Orc’s questioning of him with the command, “Read my books explore my constellations” (79.20) and, hilariously, claims to be God again straightaway (79.23). Urizen assumes an overdrawn image of the vates, an icon: “Hair white as snow coverd him in flaky locks terrific/Overspreading his limbs. in pride he wanderd weeping/Clothed in aged venerableness” (73.28-30). His arms and legs covered over with his terrific hair, Urizen the icon becomes so hyperbolically overdrawn as to be useless for work; he is reduced to a legacy, a piece of rhetoric for the eyes, a preposterous spectacle of a man presenting himself to be Very Spiritual (or at least more spiritual than the others) in order to promote himself politically. Further, this costume seems intended to give some credibility needed to the bizarre and implausible claims he makes about his own knowledge. Urizen narrates in his “books of iron & brass” his reminiscences of “The enormous wonders of the Abysses” (70.3-4). Like Milton himself, Urizen claims knowledge of that which is beyond ordinary apprehension, and his books—like patterns of belief—seem supernaturally sturdy across expanses of time and space. Urizen dies and awakes from death during his descent into a

62 Rosso (1993) situates The Four Zoas in “a distinct tradition of Anglican apologetic poetry” that includes poems by Edward Young, William Cowper, James Thomson, and Alexander Pope (p. 48-49). When Blake’s project of illustrating Young’s Night Thoughts collapsed, “Blake salvaged the work by co-opting proofs from his Night Thoughts designs,” and directly “inserted his own text into the blank space reserved for Young’s poem” (p. 49). While he does seem to be sending up Night Thoughts specifically, Blake is more concerned with targeting the more robust epic tradition, as evidenced by his nearly obsessive parody and praise of Milton. Rosso puts this intertextuality in the context of eighteenth-century English religious history: “The liberal wing of the Anglican establishment consolidates its power between 1680 and 1720, when the concepts of mechanical science make their way into the common language of philosophers, preachers, literary journalists, and coffeehouse wits” and many poets (p. 51) working under the anxiety of Milton’s influence. As with Urizen and his followers, only the vocabulary and not the method of science is embraced. Ironically, scientific language, predicated on doubt and experiment, becomes a means of erasing doubt. By Newtonic theology, “The Creation becomes a model for a stable polity, as God is manifest not only through the laws, order, and harmony of nature, but, by analogy, through the law of right reason within” (Rosso, 1993, p. 52). The sound of Urizen’s name—voiced as “your reason”—suggests Blake’s view of this development.
Miltonic hell repeatedly, and as his body rots and falls away, “the books remaind still unconsumd” (71.35-38); according to Blake, “such a journey none but iron pens/Can write And adamantine leaves receive” (71.41-42). Blake compares the creation of these seemingly static and eternal documents with the act of government—Urizen often seats himself “in a dark rift” in order to “regulate his books” (72.6)—implying that the persistence of political forms is tied not only to the adamantine pretensions of epic conventions and positivist, metaphysical expostulation, but more importantly to implicit belief in the discourse of self-serving political figures such as Urizen who use the pretense of timelessness embedded in such gestures to maintain and enlarge their field of power.

In making of himself this spectacle of the Great Man of Great Books, Urizen is doing politics. Specifically, Urizen’s self-fashioning presents the intersubsumption not of knowledge and power as in the familiar Foucaultian formulation, but of power (“I am God”) guaranteed by threats and acts of violence integrated with a simulacrum of the production of knowledge (“read my books”)—a belief system in scientific drag, passing as reason, and promoting itself as more than merely authoritative but also profound, timeless, important and canonical by means of this performance. From here, a characteristic feature of Wilberian practices of knowledge production and dissemination can be marked if not at present analyzed in comparison to Urizen’s. Wilber’s claims about his person and his spiritual status, as in Wilber (2000a)—the veracity of which I will not contest or defend—serve to supplement or guarantee the validity of his claims to knowledge about Spirit, which predicates his claims about all other things, as in Wilber (2000b). The latter claims then give sense, context, and meaning to the former. Thus, Wilber’s oeuvre is in some ways predicated on the same deferred, circular logic of self-fashioning as Urizen’s.

Ironically, Urizen does not write until he is removed from power, as if his writing is intended to recover his position of actual dominance, but the patterns of his behavior continue as the other Zoas carry on their imitation of and of his self-fashioning. The content of Urizen’s books is strikingly explicit. Urizen reads from his book of brass on power and its means, explaining his use of discourse in maintaining his position of privilege. The excess of unintentional pathos in Urizen’s rhetoric further indicates his tendency toward hyperbole and exaggeration; his conscious use of contradiction seems strategic and Satanic (the mind making a heaven of hell) at once. Urizen’s matter-of-factness is revealing:

Compell the poor to live upon a Crust of bread by soft mild arts
Smile when they frown frown when they smile & when a man looks pale
With labour & abstinence say he looks healthy & happy
And when his children sicken let them die there are enough
Born even too many & our Earth will be overrun
Without these arts If you would make the poor live with temper
With pomp give every crust of bread you give with gracious cunning
Magnify small gifts reduce the man to want a gift & then give with pomp
Say he smiles if you hear him sigh If pale say he is ruddy
Preach temperance say he is overgorgd & drows with his wit

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63 This circularity can be represented schematically as follows: Writer claims X is true; writer claims Y is true. X is premised in part on Y, Y is premised in part on X, and both depend on and reify a certain rhetorical position of the writer as a coherent, homogenous figure of authority.
In strong drink tho you know that bread & water are all
He can afford Flatter his wife pity his children till we can
Reduce all to our will as spaniels are taught with art (80.9-21)

Urizen continually repeats himself, as if he is trying to convince someone—even himself—of the rightness of his violence and oppression, even if denying and obfuscating material conditions through personally-meaningful storymaking is necessary (one imagines his books repetitively cover largely the same material). The strategy he describes here, of rejecting verifiable Schein for the sake of a doctrine, a performed Sein, seems directed at creating subjects who only believe and do not doubt, and who are willing to work for the sake of the one in the role of the absolute; in Wilber’s patois, allowing the senior holon to organize their freedom on the promise of metaphysical development (see section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon). Urizen’s repetitiveness foregrounds the offensiveness of his program. It shows Urizen does not unintentionally, incidentally, or accidentally mistreat those over whom he has power; nor is it a momentary lapse in judgment; he does so again and again. This suggests that repetition is a strategy for making Urizen’s social policy normative, naturalized. Urizen constantly and repetitively discourses to a captive audience, his voice is omnipresent from “the temple of the Sun his books of iron & brass/And silver & gold he consecrated reading incessantly/To myriads of perturbed spirits thro the universe” (102.23-25). Not listening to this same dull round, disengaging from it, is not possible insofar as it is not yet imaginable. However, that Urizen’s captive audience is privately disturbed by his rhetoric implies that dissent is already present and, following this, that any seeming act of faith among Urizen’s subjects is also a motivated or interested performance of conviction

Micropolitics of Mimicry

Blake also presents some of the consequences of these broader sociopolitical patterns in the everyday, domestic, and private lives of the Zoas—giving readers an alternative context to the epic sweep of nation that proves useful to the integral project.

Recalling the holographic logic of the Zoas (see section Mechanics of Make-Believe), one sees that the patterns of behavior Urizen and the others repeat over and over are both subjective and objective—a psychological and sociopolitical map. Blake exploits Urizen’s monstrosity and performativity to illustrate the excesses of empire. Urizen establishes a pattern of violence as the other Zoas mimic his behavior; this process proves to be a means of subjectification and of revealing the limits of its own power. Benjamin (1986), developing a Weberian argument but also in some respects anticipating Agamben’s (1998) claims regarding sovereign power and “divine violence,” posits that legitimized states assume to themselves a monopoly on violence, which becomes the means of production and maintenance of law, of normalcy (p. 300). Following this and returning to Los, one can suggest that acts of violence performed by those opposed to the regime in power (bracketing the question of the “rightness” of oppositional violence) make explicit the rhetorical and performative nature of that assumption of monopoly;

This recalls the pedagogy Wilber (2003a) presents, in which students at the IC attend the same repetitive lectures again and again until the “second tier” occurs to them, such that the crowd knows all the arguments and becomes angry or joyful as if by a script or mechanical reproduction. Their stupidity constitutes the laugh-track to the novel’s vapid and inconsequential plot.
empire is not so absolute that it can prevent someone from harming another by his own volition, regardless of the norms generated by state violence. The Others, such as Blake’s hero Urthona/Los, can inflict cruelty on someone to assert their equal ability to be cruel—or, to reintroduce the political allegory of the bureaucratic relationship between Milton’s God and His creation, the ability to exercise arbitrary power, power for the sake of power, and play at being God. This is what it means to be the same but not quite the same (Bhabha, 1994).

Accordingly, in The Four Zoas, the initial exercise or claim of power is immediately followed by violence of a strikingly domestic and personal nature. After Luvah seizes Urizen’s horses, leading to Urizen’s claim of absolute political and religious power, Los (so often a heroic figure for Blake) reacts with unexpected violence against his partner and lover, Enitharmon: “Los smote her upon the Earth twas long ere she revivd” (11.3). This conjunction of pompous rhetoric and domestic violence is one way in which Blake illustrates both the unexpected and dangerous consequences of discursive and mimetic power (and later, how those consequences become a site of responsibility). When Urizen declares himself “God from Eternity to Eternity” (12.8), Los, the prophet against Urizen’s empire, sits resentfully “plotting Revenge” (12.9), and produces immediate, conscious mimicry of Urizen’s behavior: “If you are such Lo! I am also such” (12.19). Urizen’s own violence against Ahania comes after she gives him her vision of Luvah’s ascendance, in an attempt to alert him to this potential danger to his position: “his strong right hand came forth/To cast Ahania to the Earth he siezd her by the hair/And threw her from the steps of ice that froze around his throne” (43.2-4)—another arbitrary exercise of power, the mimetic precedent to Los’s act of violence against Enitharmon. Admiring without a second thought Urizen’s success in transforming Ahania into nonexistence, Tharmas imitates this act by giving his companion Enion the same treatment, even taking on in the process Urizen’s characteristic “voice of Thunder” (45.27). Los claims in Urizenic double-speak that “Our God is Urizen the King […] We have no other God but he” and that “Los remains God over all” (48.15-18) after bringing about Urizen’s fall. The awkward and unsatisfying position of Los, the artisan become King-for-a-day, is that his revenge on Urizen is precisely his becoming Urizen, from which Los begins to learn that this mimetic cycle of violence is counterproductive.

This lesson is reinforced immediately: Tharmas responds to Los’ rise with his own variation on a peculiar strategy; rather than harming Enion, “he rap’d bright Enitharmon” (49.4). The consequence of this disgusting act—Los’ dissolution into the Spectre of Urthona, emblematic of his alienation from himself and Enitharmon—proves Los’ identification with Enitharmon through his grief and despair, and his inability to be like Urizen, distinguishable from his female counterpart, as Tharmas is. Los, now proven not to be omnipotent God but only what he always was, a fallible man, cannot pretend to be Urizen for the sake of playing the Sun King role, but the opportunity to develop an alternative to the cycle of mimicry and violence around him, which remain intact, presents itself. According to Tharmas, “Los, thou art Urthona & Tharmas/Is God” (51.14-15). Los the prophet remains discontented regardless of the personality of the absolute, “Raging against Tharmas his God” (53.25) instead of Urizen. Los works for Tharmas now on Urizen’s terms, by Urizen’s means, and with the same tools, such as the “Ruind Furnaces,” as Urizen, in the process himself of torturing Enitharmon publicly (53.8) as if again to prove his identity as Los by his separateness from Enitharmon. Luvah, born as Orc, gets his turn at playing a rhetorically legitimized Sun King godhead by means of a bizarre parody of Christ’s birth: “The Enormous Demons woke & howld around the newborn king/Crying Luvah King of Love thou art
the king of rage & death” (58.21-22). Los binds him to a rock to the accompaniment of Enitharmon’s cries (60.28-30), jealous of Orc/Luvah’s supernatural claim to power, based on a story (as Blake suggests) that seems as arbitrary as Urizen’s patterned claim to be God and king. As it turns out, Luvah finally takes his turn at playing God under very different circumstances late in the poem (see section Kindness and/as Revolutionary Praxis), mitigating the implication that Christ’s story might be just another story, which is potentially offensive to Blake’s project.

These fallacious demonstrations and rhetorical disputes against demonstrable fact among the Zoas have a juvenile and arbitrary feel to them, up to the moment change begins to take hold. Upon gaining power Tharmas muses, “is this to be A God for rather would I be a Man/To Know sweet Science & to do with simple companions” (51.29-30). Despite his long involvement in mimicking Urizen, Tharmas candidly recognizes the misery of this roleplay as Los does, and longs for what proves to be a restoration of a lost golden age posited simply as that state prevailing in the absence of the present nationalistic, imperial, and capital-accumulative regime. Blake’s representation of political struggle (in public and private contexts) as a kind of mimetic roleplay shows the arbitrary and therefore alterable nature of claims and means to power.

One Way to Stop Pretending and Start Transforming the Whole (Damned) Thing

Finding means for ending such patterns, beginning with undermining the ridiculous claims that help hold them in place through means of knowledge other than pathos and blind trust of present authority, becomes a means for transforming unjust relations by ending the politics of privatized will-to-power. But those in control of these means recognize this possibility and move to foreclose it. Urizen structures the world of his intended subjects through a curse: “they may worship terrors & obey the violent” (68.26). The ones to be obeyed, even worshipped, are defined by their violence. Specifically, Urizen circumscribes himself, his own role and consciousness of it, as he makes his subjects literally into themselves. This works also by means of patterning.

Just as Milton’s Satan constructs hell as an imitation heaven, Urizen attempts to reconstruct the space of Albion’s members and faculties—the Universal Empire, after all, is reducible to one man by holographic logic—into a new, less divine space:

he began to dig form[ing] of gold silver & iron
And brass vast instruments to measure out the immense & fix
The whole into another world better suited to obey
His will where none should dare oppose his will himself being King
Of All & all futurity bound in his vast chain (73.16-20).

Urizen seeks to erase dissent by erasing all doubt, creating thereby mechanical, automatic, and perfect faith—a notion Milton’s God disavows—in a perverse Great Chain of Being. In Paradise Lost, God prefers obedience freely given. He could have constructed Adam in such a fashion that his obedience was assured, if it pleased Him to do so; “I made him just and right,” God explains, “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.98-99). Unlike Milton’s God, Urizen is not interested in obedience for its own sake; to him, faith and loyalty are useful to
achieve an end rather than inherently good virtues. In this way Urizen’s imitation of the command to piety parodies Urizen and his clamoring after power and performing in its costume, rather than the Miltonic Godhead, who is posited as power necessarily regardless of any relationships He may be involved in. In short, Urizen himself mimics the traditional Protestant God imperfectly, but this God is a silent referent in the world of the poem, given that Jehovah does not appear as a character in The Four Zoas. In the causal position God the Father occupies in Paradise Lost, The Four Zoas offers repeated instances of rhetoric, violence, and industry—social patterns as determinants. The reader is led to expect a break in the pattern not only because such patterns are explicitly mutable, but also because even Urizen seems to anticipate such a break.

But Urizen is not interested in anything breaking from patterns of his own (mimetic) making. The Work Master, he plans, organizes, and regulates building projects of great magnitude. The altar alone of Urizen’s hall represents the “labour of ten thousand Slaves” and the lives of “One thousand Men of wondrous power” (30.39-40). Work, the power to make another work for oneself, the product built, and the subjectivity of the worker are all conflated with and against each other in mimicry. Los and Tharmas each take turns undertaking large-scale construction and manufacturing projects in imitation of Urizen’s. Regardless of the personality in the role of the Sun King, the act of manufacturing manufactures the kind of consciousness that Urizen desires among his subjects:

We behold with wonder Enitharmons Looms & Los’s Forges
And the Spindles of Tirzah & Rahab and the Mills of Satan & Beelzeboul
In Golgonooza Los’s anvils stand & his Furnaces rage
Ten thousand demons labour at the forges Creating Continually
The times & spaces of Mortal Life the Sun the Moon the Stars
In periods of Pulsative furor beating into wedges & bars
Then drawing into wires the terrific Passions and Affections
Of Spectrous dead (113.1-8).

The experience of work under these conditions creates in the worker a sense of time and space, measuring the peristalsis and circulation of the body by the rhythms of the factory. This transformation of a consciousness into a machine by these means becomes a kind of death.65

65 Blake anticipates here and elsewhere much of Benjamin’s compelling argument in “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” Benjamin (1969) observes that the “struggling, oppressed class is itself the depository of historical knowledge” (p. 260), rather than the oratory singular, Urizenic figures. Blake demonstrates this in juxtaposing the physical transformation of the Zoas working under and for Urizen with Urizen’s rhetoric of denial and contradiction. Here, the workers experience time in a way Benjamin characterizes as “empty” and “homogenous.” For Benjamin, what is called progress is but a series of catastrophes, empty of any ameliorative progression—going nowhere. Empty, homogenous time can be opened into its own ceasing, at any moment. This “conception of the present as the ‘time of now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time,” or the force of redemption (pp. 262-63), is analogous to the everyday, prosaic apocalypse Los and Enitharmo bring about one day when they stop acting (and reacting) according to pattern, but instead establish a new one.
This is true also for the Zoas, starting from the poem’s beginning, where Blake explores subjectification also in the domestic context, in terms that are echoed later in the factory scenes. Tharmas asks Enion, “Why wild thou Examine every little fibre of my soul/Spreading them out before the Sun like Stalks of flax to dry” (4.29-30). Urizen, the Sun King, is present in every interaction; Tharmas feels exposed to Urizen’s sun-like sight by means of Enion’s eyes. Tharmas’ being is drawn out like the wedges and bars of the mill. Enion first dissects Tharmas, then weaves him together again: “in gnawing pain drawn out by her lovd fingers every nerve/She counted. every vein & lacteal threading them among/Her woof of terror” (5.16-18), domesticated subjectification. Enion reconstructs Tharmas’ being by following the patterns of Urizen’s architecture. In the jargon of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Enion first deterritorializes then reterritorializes Tharmas from his former state into paranoia. Blake’s narration of this act, including Tharmas’ agonized cries, reveals Blake’s disgust with this process and the regime behind it.

Blake’s ironic approach to absolute assertions can be understood as a kind of scientific doubt. Moments of materialism in place of rhetoric become moments of real productivity. Just as absolute certainty in the rightness of empire makes abuses such as slavery a ready means of upholding empire and slavery as right, the claim of absolute power introduces uncertainty into the rhetorical field; its logic is self-defeating. Declaring sovereignty without end implies the existence of ends. This claim exists because it is not a self-apparent fact; if so, the endlessness of sovereignty would not be claimed. For Blake, this lack of evidence produces doubt among those affected by the claim. Skepticism becomes a condition of dissent, and tied with irony, a means of dissent. Once Urizen has claimed absolute imperial domain, irony becomes effective because uncertainty (the opposite of absolute certainty) arises. According to Luvah, speaking from within Urizen’s work machine, “Urizen who was Faith & certainty is changd to Doubt” (27.15). Blake parodies Urizen’s reduction of phenomena to the controlling vocabulary of geometry, producing three sets of worlds with illogical lists of characteristics: some worlds “triangular right angled course maintain. others obtuse/Acute Scalene, in simple paths. but others move/In intricate ways biquadrate. Trapeziums Rhombs Rhomboids/Paralellograms” (33.31-35). A triangular course leads nowhere but back upon itself, and an angle cannot be both acute and obtuse at once. This suggests a kind of arbitrariness in the means by which Urizen sets out to conquer the material world, and to control the contingencies of demonstration and testimony. Los and Enitharm attempt to revive Orc (62-63) because of this uncertainty. Their failure to undo their actions and their ensuing resolve to productive and nonviolent action demonstrates the relationship Blake posits in epic and system-making between certainty and oppression in many forms, and develops the opposing relationship between uncertainty and responsibility or virtuosity. Doubt becomes an interpersonal virtue, a basis for relations of care for another.66 Immediately following this moment of domestic sorrow is a scene of mistaken certainty—Urizen, still calling himself King, reminisces over lost moments in the past when he could behave like himself, a king (63-65), not recognizing or admitting that the reason why he cannot do so is that another has taken his role. In spite of his presumed supernatural means of knowing, Urizen the vates consistently proves to be mistaken. Urizen “thought himself the Sole author/Of all his wandering Experiments” (80.51-66)

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66 Explicating the precise nature of alterity in Blake’s ethics in this poem (as distinct from the ethical and virtuosic aspects of his political understanding) is beyond the scope of this essay, but it can be pointed to in this post-revolutionary observation—“Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face” (113.25)—in comparison to the nonviolence of alterity proposed in Butler (2004).
81.1). This is not so, as Orc points out that he had taken some of Urizen’s “light,” and that much stood outside Urizen’s “bounds of Science in the Grey obscure” (80.39-42). As practical science depends on publicly verifiable and replicable results, it follows that it must be at odds with the cult of unitary and singular epic vision such as Urizen claims for himself.

While it is true that Urizen is not actually God, the period between the eternity of the past and that of the future is occupied with Urizenic patterns of domination and violence. While Urizen acts as though he were God between the eternities, he recognizes that his tenure is limited to that period of linear time. The daughters of Beulah write “the Eternal Promise” on everything they construct, “their tombs & pillars & on every Urn/These words If ye will believe your B[r]other shall rise again” (87.5-6). Here, as they work at building Urizenic structures, they efface them with an artifact of a different sort of faith from the kind Urizen relies upon. In this instance of effacement, Blake narrates active disbelief in the permanence of the status quo in order to invoke a transformation, and predicates productive practice on uncertainty rather than make-believe. As Hershock (2000) suggests, this virtuosity is an active, creative act, not an ascetic or transcendental one. It is a practice of becoming-responsible.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton signals the coming of the fall with a recognition that he must “change/ Those notes to tragic” (9.5-6). Milton’s poem ceases to be an epic at that moment. Blake reverses the fall into a Urizenic regime by introducing redemption into *The Four Zoas* in such a way that its epic features vanish. The Zoas stop playing at being God-men, making complete Blake’s exclusion of the Miltonic Godhead as a political agent in this poem, and of any legitimized sovereignty of any being over any other.

**Kindness and/as Revolutionary Praxis**

In contrast to Wilber’s evolutionary holism, in *The Four Zoas*, responsibility for meaningful transformation is taken up by the subordinated for the sake of the totality (inclusive of those who have, in the past, behaved irresponsibly), not offered from the “lower” to the “higher” by grace or bureaucracy.

A *domestic* and local transformation, initiated by Los and Enitharmon, utterly ruptures the top-down, hierarchic Urizenic pattern of imitated violence. Los and Enitharmon recognize the errors of their past actions and identifications, resolve to behave responsibly, and withdraw their children from warfare; the family cooperates in building and decorating the city Golgonooza (97-98) for their own use and enjoyment. This leads to a fantastic (and bizarre) inversion of the political and rhetorical order of the poem up to this moment. When Los refrains from harming

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67 This is consistent with Blake’s theology as expressed in his fragments and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which is critical of Milton’s representation of God as a Urizenic force: “All dieties reside in the human breast” (plate 11). It may be that the Zoas’ struggles with one another is a kind of allegory of God pulling Himself together in one being, the archetypal Albion the Giant. Because Blake wishes to recuperate Milton as an ally, he argues that Milton unconsciously sought to undermine his own God by identifying with Satan, the opposer of God’s works.

68 This sequence of actions corresponds to the beginning of mainstream Christian practice: one repents one’s mistakes, one carries forth with the resolve to sin no more. This is one way in which Blake’s explicit religious views penetrate into his political program.
Enitharmon and clamoring against Urizen, Luvah, or Tharmas for the right to claim absolute dominion over everything and everyone, enacting a Great Refusal, peace and productivity arise, and he finds that he must care for Urizen as one of his own children, and does: “Startled was Los he found his Enemy Urizen now/In his hands. he wonderd that he felt love & not hate/His whole soul loved him he beheld him an infant” (98.64-66). Los has become-responsible. Even though this moment barely lasts a complete verse paragraph, it suggests that the means of peace are available to the parties involved in this dispute within Albion’s body politic; the scene of domestic peace casts a deeply satiric light on the rest of the actions in the poem that have made such peace less possible for no reason comprehensible in the context of the poem’s radically unfamiliar space. Smooth, destratified social space—radical democracy—proves to be more integrative, and experientially favorable to (and formally more transparent than) a baroque hierarchy of the type Urizen imposes from the stage of the philosopher-sage.

The turn-taking among the Zoas for the role of God is not yet complete, however; the symmetry of the poem’s structure, ironically, demands that the fourth Zoa, Luvah/Orc, finally play the part of the Sun King. The changed conditions demonstrate, however, that the end is near. When “fierce Orc in wrath & fury rises into the heavens/A King of wrath & fury” (111.15-16)—Urizenic repetition ironically invoked—the pattern of local violence is definitively disrupted, in that “Urthona gave his strength/Into the youthful prophet for the Love of Enitharmon” (111.31-32). Los/Urthona’s effort and his motivation in this case is a sign of the transformation underway because, earlier, Los had prevented his son Orc’s ascendance, jealous of the story surrounding him that authorized his turn at playing God. Luvah as Orc, however, continues to imitate Urizen against Urizen, even as his behavior is infinitely softer. Instead of conscripting armies of laborers and working them often to death as Urizen had, Luvah begins his role as architect by building a simple home for himself and Vala at her suggestion (127.29-30), also reflecting the domestic, democratic revolution of kindness Los and Enitharmon had begun.

Blake unambiguously defines this transformation and that of Urizen in apocalyptic terms. The last Night is entitled “Night the Ninth Being The Last Judgment.” Blake asserts that his text is not only allusively and structurally apocalyptic but is literally of the same substance as the Biblical Apocalypse, declaring that “John saw these things Reveald in Heaven/On Patmos Isle” (115.4-5). Los decisively begins this event by seizing the “Sun” and demolishing “the heavens across from immense to immense” (117.8-9); the parallel to Urizen’s claim of being God from eternity to eternity is explicit. As Wilkie and Johnson (1978) show, Los advances the transformation further by destroying Urizen’s books (pp. 212-213). Symbolically Los’ striking at the sun does not obliterate phenomenal reality—the world of forms—as much as the totality of social strata, including the role of the Sun King, the field in which he operates, and the mechanisms holding him in place; “slaves are set at liberty” while “the thrones of Kings are shaken they have lost their robes and crowns” (117.15-23). The props and costumes by which these monarchs iconify themselves evaporate, as if performance as such has fallen away. Significantly, Urizen loses his status as an iconic vates, at this moment. The Giant Albion, the figure analogous in scale to the Wilberian superholon, awakes, and not understanding what is happening within him, laments that moment when “shall the Man of future times become as
days of old” (120.5). He cries out for Urizen, first by his epithets—“great opposer of change” and “dread form of certainty”—but Urizen does not respond (120.14-25), at which point Albion himself behaves like the Urizen of old, vowing to “seize” his “crown and scepter,” to “regulate all my members” (120.35). Urizen’s rejection of his own absolutism leads to an implicit transformation of the macrocosm, Albion. Urizen encourages Los to do what he has already done, to precipitate the apocalyptic transformation—“Rend down this fabric as a wall ruind & family extinct”—and renounces any regulation or control over anyone: “Urizen no longer curbs your rage” (121.25-26). Urizen ceases to play at being a Milton or a Leibnitz; his venerableness falls away with his hair and robes, “he shook his aged mantles off/Into the fires” (120.29-30), arising youthful. But the structural symmetry and kinetic (karmic) energy of the poem have not yet been exhausted, with the consequence that the end of history has not been completed. When Urizen becomes fully what Kierkegaard (1989) might call fully human after casting off his Milton costume, Ahania dies of excess joy (121.37), the opposite process of the earlier patterned violence, but giving the same end (and suggestive of a bawdy Shakespearean pun). This surprise, the transformation, is not a “symmetry break,” which is taken to be a leap or momentary discontinuity in an otherwise continuous evolution (Wilber, 2000b, pp. 50-51), where evolution is understood as a teleological—even divinely-sanctioned—process. By contrast, the Blake of The Four Zoas is a revolutionary, not an evolutionary integral thinker; he proposes a transformational, not developmental, model for action against a totality of contingent social and political formations.

Urizen finally declares with joy that “Times are Ended” (131.31), and with time slavery and empire have also ended, indicating that the posited absolute past has returned; “their ancient golden age renewd” itself (126.29). A very strange moment arises in response to this, when “an African Black from the little Earth of Sotha” sings a song (echoing Blake’s “Jerusalem”) of his own composition, recognizing a lost Paradise before him:

Aha Aha how came I here so soon in my sweet native land
How came I here Methinks I am as I was in my youth
When in my fathers house I sat & heard his chearing voice
Methinks I see his flocks & herds & feel my limbs renewd
And Lo my Brethren in their tents & their little ones around them (134.35-135.3)

How is it that the body of England can be a direct replication of an African village—specifically, a village in an Albion-like place (or being, since this is still psychomachia, still holographic in representation) that is suddenly and happily identified with part of Africa by an African native as his own? Conventionally, an element of the microcosm Sotha is understood as foreign to Albion’s green and pleasant land, but that he feels at home in it suggests a hospitable dissolution of the divisions and exploitations of empire, nationalism, and slavery, as if beyond the psychomachia conventional subjectivity falls away and minds literally run into one another, also implying absolute democracy and authentic communion of the African singer’s experience with that of Albion’s Zoas. Everywhere is home, anywhere is here—this presents a decentered logic approaching nonduality. Blake’s singer experiences with them the same change in being. After being ignored and remaining silent for the entirety of the poem’s action (Spivak, 1988), after this apocalyptic transformation, the subaltern sings.
The poem closes with this claim: “The war of swords departed now/The dark religions are departed & sweet Science reigns” (139.9-10). Direct apprehension of phenomena is used as a means of showing what emblems and ideas had been bent to do—“The tender maggot emblem of Immortality” (136.32)—to misrepresent reality while claiming to do the opposite, in short, to obfuscate and lie. Skepticism, science, reason, and irony properly applied rectify the real limitations, make-believe, and ideological work of idealism as epic or as Final Philosophy. After the revolution that is, literally, an act of love, violence and limits between minds have fallen away, suggesting that all vestiges of subjectification and mimetic performance have evaporated. The ending of The Four Zoas is actually an annihilation of empire, the total destruction (not reform) of the pathological regime. In contrast to the image of reterritorialized, domesticated Bibles of 19th century English missionaries in India (Bhabha, 1994, p. 92), after the revolution no trace of Urizen’s missionary activity or his repetitive literary output can be seen.

Albion the Giant has become a radical democratic Utopia, a Body without Organs. Blake concludes that once a certain kind of doubt is introduced, an ideal community can arise. Observations of it are possible, but no story can be told in or from this community, because time imagined as progress does not exist. By contrast, where Wilber promotes evolution of consciousness, Blake prescribes a radical intervention, working virtuosically with the discourses available to him—the mythmaking of vernacular Protestantism and epic poetry—by means of skepticism toward the claims and the knowledge-production of these discourses.

**Politics in Good Faith**

Blake presents a responsible transformational model in The Four Zoas. Becoming-responsible for present purposes has four characteristics: critical clarity, competence, consciousness, and compassion (Anderson, 2008). Blake considers each one in the course of The Four Zoas, by reversal: first rejecting a prevailing ideology and then proposing in its place a more productive strategy.

**Critical clarity.** Blake establishes a pathological pattern of subordination and abuse predicated on (and expressed as) aesthetic normativity and good-sense metaphysical doctrine, pushed to its sociopolitical conclusion: playing at being God through make-believe and violence, epistemic and physical. Then, Blake encourages a critical response of doubt, scientific skepticism, and Socratic irony (a postmetaphysical response), typified by Thar mas’s observation that playing make-believe is inherently unsatisfying. This intervention leads to a second one, that which transforms the totality.70

**Competence.** Urizen’s performance of capability (“read my books!”) in a costume that renders him incapable of doing practical work is contrasted against the domestic labors and artisanic craft of Urthona (Los and Enitharmon), who proves to be capable of making useful and beautiful things—and taking responsibility for the impersonal welfare of beings as if they are his own children (competence in critical action and competence in compassion).

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70 I explicate this doubled structure of first and second interventions in Anderson (2008).
Consciousness. Mimetic, mechanical, unconscious stupidity expressed as thinly costumed will-to-power (as in Urizen’s books) is counterposed by situationally aware, intelligent, and capable action (Urthona), as suggested by the capacity for taking competent action and quantifiable through Urthona’s in-the-moment creativity.

Compassion. Blake recontextualizes the brutal selfishness of Urizen and Los’s moments of violence against Enitharmon and others with Enitharmon’s impersonal, egalitarian kindness as well as Los’s taking responsibility for a vulnerable and childlike Urizen, by no means a configuration of his own will-to-power.

An Experiment in Radical Democracy

[A]ll our sympathy lies with the wanderers, the gypsies, and heretics, rather than with the totalitarian murderers who try to fix them in place, number them, control them, and finally exterminate them. We wander because no nation, no ideology, no culture, no religion, no philosophy holds our loyalty or pins us down in time and place. We are cut loose. We drift. (Wilson, 1993, p. 156)

Introduction

I have proposed that Marxist and post-Marxist theory may offer a useful methodology for integral praxis in some respects (Anderson, 2008). One acknowledged problem with this position: Marxist revolutions have, by and large, turned out badly by degrees. Popular Unity, under Salvador Allende,71 attempted to overcome this problem, broadly speaking as Buddhist social theorist Ken Jones (1989) diagnoses it:

Where it has fully established itself, revolutionary socialism’s intellectual elites have only been able to consolidate their power through an oppressive collectivism. These inert bureaucratic societies have no resemblance to what Marx envisaged, with their massive hierarchies of power, their harsh restriction on political and religious liberty, their

71 Uribe (1975) offers an incomparable and candid first-hand narrative of the events from the perspective of a well-placed and well-informed Chilean diplomat, neither a socialist nor a conservative but a member of the Christian left; the so-called “Church Report” (1975) gives an equally valuable account from the perspective of the CIA. Henfrey and Sørj (1977) present the street-view perspective of everyday Chileans during this period; Castro (1972) shows what kinds of specifically Marxist inquiry were developing among workers and students in Chile; Morris (1973) gives a historical and topical overview of the moment informed by the author’s experiences in Chile under Popular Unity; Cooper (2002) and Dorfman, Aguilera, and Fredes (2006) give a retrospective view from the bottom strata of the socius looking up, during and immediately after the Popular Unity period. Debray (1972) includes a series of interviews with Allende early in his presidency, affording some insight into his agenda; Cockraft (2000) anthologizes many of Allende’s speeches, addresses, and letters on various occasions and subjects. Sigmund (1993) and Haslam (2005) both offer mature, sober, and critical histories of the period and its aftermath, the former emphasizing internal Chilean politics and the latter more concerned with U.S. intervention. Moss (1974) in my view gives an irredeemably flawed reading of the historical evidence, but one that counterposes the others cited here.
persecution of dissidents, their insistence on ideological conformity, and the persistence of patriarchal patterns of life. (Jones, 1989, pp. 120)

Allende attempted to address each of these rather self-evident problems by instituting a Marxist revolution *democratically*, through the civil state, *predicating* this transformation on the enfranchisement and becoming-responsible of the socius rather than in opposition to the needs and interests of it. As Grandin (2007) summarizes this project,

Allende’s Popular Unity government rejected both Soviet-style suppression of civil liberties and American economic dominance, believing it could steer Chile down a peaceful road to socialism while maintaining political freedoms. Chile’s challenge, therefore, was not that it would be turned into another Castro-style dictatorship but that it wouldn’t. (Grandin, 2007, p. 60),

and the Nixon administration worried that this radical democratic model might spread first to western Europe, particularly Italy (Grandin, 2007, p. 60), where Autonomist Marxist praxis was developing along recognizably similar lines (Wright, 2002; Katsiaficas, 2006). This shows Wilber’s claim that the superholon evolves *toward* a regime latent within itself is valid in politics only so long as the “higher” holon is willing to enforce, by force, the imperative of that regime, to “organize the freedom” of its subordinate holons according to its own program. It also suggests that a bottom-up politics of becoming-responsible may be possible along lines suggested by Urthona’s project, rather than Urizen’s. Worded differently: To imagine putting a popular critical culture, mass virtuosity as distinct from post-Leninist vanguardism (pace Jones’ [1989] engaged Buddhist critique of Marxist institutional history) in charge of the totality is to imagine an integral society in place of the stratified, conflictual one that obtains under neoliberalism.

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72 Uribe (1975) confirms this: “The United States needs very much to prove that the Chilean model, in which a state attempts through democratic means to stand on its own outside the imperialist system, is not possible” (p. xi). The coup was as much about ideology and hegemony (“spreading democracy” in the interventionary patois of now-disgraced but still vocal American neoconservatism) as natural resources and labor.

73 Here, critical culture should be understood as a historically contingent set of means for mitigating *stupidity*, where stupidity is understood much as Lukacs (1967) understands reification, as unwittingly acting against one’s objective self interest by necessary involvement with a situation or structure one has no final control over, and where one’s real interests are defined as the immediate and ultimate benefit of every being with any investment in the situation at hand (Van Boxsel, 2003; Anderson 2008).

74 The present inquiry considers how a subordinated totality, a state or society, can begin considering how to viably democratize, destratify, and intentionally integrate itself with itself. This differs from the problem of reterritorializing the global totality analogous to the “World Federation” Wilber (2003b) proposes in his comments on Iraq. Relations among states will, of course, be contingent on resource control and allocation, and the terms of that control. This problem is much more difficult to conjecture on because the only known global order—the only total superholon this planet has known in the political-economic sense—is imperial capital, in one iteration or another. Marx, for instance, has precious little to say about global communism as an alternative. That said, while this relation is beyond the scope of this work, it is of primary importance for further development.
In Wilber’s diction, one might say that Chile in 1970 was integrated into a particular holarchy, subordinated to a superholon (global capital, enforced by the hegemony of American military power) that determined the scope and terms of its development, while that regime extracted useful natural resources from Chilean soil—copper ore, saltpeter, and human labor (see section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon). Capital had “organized the freedom” of this particular holon’s members in a particular (and predictable) way. Chilean society was stratified along class lines, expressed in a separation of those in relative control (or in alliance with those actually in control) from those in relative poverty, but also expressed in viable mass-political movements. Allende proposed instead that Chileans from all classes should take responsibility for their working conditions, the products of their labor, the redistribution of their land, their natural resources and the terms of their extraction and development, and for general welfare measures (particularly in mass education and health care) to help ensure a socius competent to take on this responsibility. This quite literally made the state both fragile and vulnerable—fragile in that Allende, concerned more with democratic rights than with the centralizing power behind his agenda, refused to subordinate and reorganize Chile’s military forces, which arguably alienated the military and state bureaucracies from his leadership—and vulnerable due to the disorder inherent in any transition toward a comprehensive reorganization. As it happened, everyday life circumstances, such as the price and availability of foodstuffs, fluctuated uncontrollably as the state sought to reintegrate a different regime for developing the terms of everyday life circumstances such as labor, health, and education (see section The Endgame; Or, Limiting the Indeterminacy for plausible causes of this disarray).

Specifically, Allende proposed to integrate the Chilean socius by democratizing Chilean institutions, beginning with a mitigation of the lack-of-control over one’s life habits and labor that characterized Chilean working life: in Allende’s words, “[o]ur aim is the attainment of social freedom through the exercise of political freedom, and this requires the establishment of economic equality as a basis” (as quoted in Debray, 1972, pp. 182-183), the social ownership of productive means, in traditional Marxist diction. Pursued a bit further, however, economic equality can also be expressed as work democracy, where all who labor toward the fulfillment of a given project have a hand in determining the course of the project and the conditions of executing it (Schweickart, 2002). As The Four Zoas suggests, full and impartial enfranchisement is a condition of compassionate politics. This is distinct from the undemocratic idealism of Wilber’s model (see section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon).

75 In this respect, the program that Allende led into power is analogous in its broad strokes and strategies to the Deleuze-Guattarian nomad project, insofar as Popular Unity swept a locus of power (the disenfranchised) into the legitimate State. As Wilson (1993) argues, Deleuze and Guattari based their work Nomadology in part on Ibn Khaldun’s thesis of nomadism as the nucleus of power (a ‘war machine’) against the State and by extension against any centralized or absolutized authority. They simply turn Ibn Khaldun on his head by arguing that the purpose of culture is not the glory of the State, as Ibn Khaldun says, but is rather to be found in the freedom and even the randomness of the nomad (as Ibn Khaldun at times seems to imply). Deleuze and Guattari, who may be called Nietzschean post-Marxist anarchists or ‘dada epistemologists’ (to quote Feyerabend), here find themselves in harmony with our Sufi historiographer (pp. 158-159).

76 P. Anderson (1980) summarizes this: “[m]orality without strategy, a humane socialism equipped only with an ethic against a hostile world, is doomed to needless tragedy: a nobility without force leads to disaster, as the names of Dubcek and Allende remind us” (p. 206). The “embrace” from above is, here, a vulnerability to risk, a precariousness.
Further, Allende proposed democratizing (destratifying) culture and its production as it is conventionally understood (“story” in Litfin’s terms) along these lines, by promoting an ambitious program of education for Chileans of all ages, classes, and geographic locales, so that all members of the social formation could have the tools, skills, and materials to do at least basic intellectual work, and by relocating cultural production from the global-hegemonic to the local-democratic.\footnote{This is, without a doubt, a risky social experiment, but insofar as it is an intentional one, those participating in it are at minimum no less prepared for its consequences than social experiments such as industrial capitalism that arose not from a plan or a dialectical process of consciousness and conditions but from causes and conditions internal to the European economy. As it happens, Chile had been home to a specifically integral experiment as well, Oscar Ichazo’s community of practice at Arica; the productive lifelong inquiry of Claudio Naranjo has its roots there.}

A new culture cannot be decreed. It will spring from the struggle for fraternity as opposed to individualism, for the appreciation rather than disdain for human labor, for national values rather than cultural colonization, and from the struggle of the popular masses for access to art, literature, and the communications media and the end of their commercialization (Allende, as quoted in Cockcraft, 2000, p. 273).

\textit{Pax Cultura}: this is a critical politics predicated on care for the well being of the totality and all its members, recalling Los and Enitharmon at their work, in contrast to the tiresome and self-imitating decrees of Urizen in his philosopher-sage costume demanding to be read and obeyed, but unwilling to teach, listen, or discuss.

Allende’s strategy for reterritorializing a bourgeois regime into a fully responsible democratic one shows his program to be creative, in fact conscious. Allende’s plan relied necessarily on a unified, organized, and totality-conscious polity to enact, as needed, constitutional reform. “If we put forward a bill and Congress rejects it,” Allende claimed, “we invoke the plebiscite” (Debray, 1972, p. 83)—which he counted on winning, so long as his proposals were in the interests of the subaltern majority and that majority voted its interests and was not misled or deluded. This is authentically Marxist theoretically (Marcuse, 1964; Lukacs, 1967), but innovative in praxis. Majority is not consensus; some, it should be understood, stand to lose a position of material and social privilege (that of acting the role of the senior holon) as a result of lifting those below up into cultural literacy and economic parity, while the totality (and thus everyone involved in it) benefits from dissolving its constitutive conflict between those that have and those that do not, the inherent disequilibrium in arbitrarily uneven development. Following Blake, insofar as Allende’s project is creative and totality-contextualized (competently working for the impersonal benefit of all), I consider it a conscious one.

That said, Allende and his party were arguably incompetent to the very difficult task they took responsibility for, or at least not adequately competent to it. Haslam (2005) interprets Allende’s actions as a kind of pataphysics,\footnote{See van Boxsell (2003, pp. 194-198) for a value-neutral examination of pataphysics as an intellectual practice.} managing multiple contingencies in several parties on an ad hoc basis while not adequately accounting for real resistance from outside and above, rather than implementing in a disciplined and coordinated way one theoretical and practical program—very
unlike the rigorously planned and executed coup that forced him to suicide before surrender (p. 233). According to Haslam, Allende was not an original or rigorous theorist,79 “no administrator and no economist;” the Soviets found the Chilean administration to exhibit “manifest […] incompetence” (p. 230). Further, Allende maintained—at least publicly—that the rule of law would protect his project from intervention from outside or above, a position that ultimately proved profoundly naive. Responding to the question of whether or not the Nixon administration would direct an intervention into Chile, military or otherwise, Allende responded:

I believe they will not do anything of this nature; firstly, because as I say, we have acted within the laws of Chile, within the Constitution. It is for this reason […] that I have maintained that victory through the polling-booths was the way to pre-empt any such policy, because this way their hands are tied.” (Allende, as quoted in Debray, 1972, p. 126)

In short, to transcribe his thinking into Wilber’s diction, Allende publicly argued that the superholon is incapable of “violating the laws” of its subordinate holons (see section Retelling the Epic of the Superholon), which history proved false in this case—whether he knew better privately remains an open question.80 For present purposes, this suggests that Allende’s radical democratic project may be sound in the abstract, but lacking in implementation and resources—and that reflecting on Popular Unity’s successes, failures, and contexts can yield some useful insights for future integral macropolitical projects as an act of cultural memory, of story-making in the form of history and virtuosity rather than make-believe (see section Praxis According to Evolutionary Idealism).

The Endgame; Or, Limiting the Indeterminacy

This anticipates a significant observation about Wilberian evolutionary idealism when applied to politics: the end of Popular Unity by the irresponsible intervention of the superholon on the justification of an inherent telos that might be God proves Wilber’s model problematic, having more in common with Urizenic will-to-power than with responsible development or transformation in the context of macropolitics, matters of public concern.

In response to Allende’s election (and upon the failure of an attempted coup to prevent him taking office), the American president Richard M. Nixon

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79 In fairness, however, it should be recognized that Allende knew what to do with extant theory; he had what I call a method (Anderson, 2008). Specifically, Allende was interested in using theory in a dialectical relation to practice, claiming that “basic works like State and Revolution contain key ideas, but they can’t be used as a Catechism” (Debray, 1972, p. 64); he was aware of Marxist theories of the imperialism of foreign capital such as Luxemburg (2000) (Debray, 1972, pp. 69-70), and as I have suggested, was capable of authentic innovation on the level of praxis and persistence over his long public life.

80 In this context, the relationship between law and power in Wilber’s holonography can be understood in terms Agamben (1998) develops for the state, law, and subject: law is produced through sovereign action, which is itself not bound by the law it enunciates; consequent to this capriciousness, there exist states of exception in which the law is defined such that it does not apply, and those placed under a state of exception have no legal or political identity apart from the enunciation of the sovereign: a position of absolute vulnerability not as a subject but as “bare life.”
instructed the CIA to ‘make the [Chilean] economy scream,’ and over the next three years, Washington spent millions of dollars to destabilize Chile and prod its military to act. It finally did on September 11, 1973, in a coup that brought Augusto Pinochet’s seventeen-year-long regime to power. (Grandin, 2007, p. 59),

just as the U.S.S.R. had brutally put down a nascent radical-democratic regime in Hungary in the fall of 1956 (Brown, 1988). I characterize this as an expression of will-to-power on the part of the superholon, seeking to “organize the freedom” of a wayward, “lower,” or “junior” holon on which it depended for resources—will-to-power because the superholon had benefited from the legitimately exploitative relation that had prevailed before Allende resumed power and was put at risk by his remaining in power, not because of a competent intention to be of benefit to the totality on the part of Richard Nixon (not only Nixon personally or primarily as a synecdoche for global capital). Interestingly, according to Haslam (2005), Nixon was motivated to act in Chile in part to avoid appearing weak internationally as his own incompetence and corruption in the chain of events conventionally referred to as Watergate was becoming exposed (p. 255). The coup that ended the Allende experiment and began nearly twenty years of state-sponsored terrorism in the South American cone was in part a vanity project of a resentful neurotic, but more broadly a gesture designed to reintegrate Chilean resource management into supply chains favorable to the accumulative or developmental regimes of international corporations. This is how “indeterminacy” is “limited.”

Here, Chilean history parts ways with Blake’s model as well, because the Cosmos did not sympathize with Popular Unity as it did in the Universal Man with Urthona. Allende’s actions did not invoke a Romantic apocalypse of spiritual renewal that allowed the subaltern to sing and re instituted a global Golden Age of “sweet science” that was sustainable in its time. Popular Unity represents an attempt to establish a regime of new values in the face of very strong resistance from outside and above, of responsibly made values; that the attempt failed is but more evidence on the nature of the transformative project and the risks of a fully engaged life:

Life is very strange. To live: to go forward into a new country, set foot blindly on unknown ground and keep on drawing back the curtain of time. We know that somewhere is the precipice over which we shall fall. When? Will the next step be our last? We can neither stop nor draw back. (Thomasson, 1980, p. 190)

Politics in Good Faith (Reprise)

Was Allende’s transformative project critical? Yes.

Was it compassionate? In that it was predicated on ameliorating the sufferings of others, yes.

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81 Allende’s advice to Chile on the day of the coup, seeing the coup coming, suggests this persistence and commitment in spite of personal difficulty and risk: “You must defend the right to construct, through your own effort, a dignified and better life” (as quoted in Cockcraft, 2000, p. 7). As it happened, Allende chose to construct for himself a dignified and pedagogic death (a “moral lesson” p. 10): a self-inflicted gunshot wound, from a carbine given as a gift by Fidel Castro on his state visit.
Was it competent or virtuosic? Arguably not as competent as it would have needed to be, given the pushes and pulls and other strains it had to resist.

Was it conscious? Insofar as creativity in response to a challenge is a measure of consciousness, then yes, revealing a remarkable departure from the clearly hopeless Stalinist model for socialist practice (bureaucratic capital), to legislate an intentional revolution. It certainly would have benefited from greater situational (class) awareness.

Returning to the problem Plato poses in *The Republic*, on justice and responsibility, one can argue that the intervention of global capital into the Chilean state on 11 September 1973 was an unjust act, as it ended an attempt to redress an injustice through instituting a hopelessly unjust regime, the Pinochet dictatorship. This is politics in bad faith (see section *Introduction - Definitions*). But insofar as it served to disengage the Chilean subholon from the superholon of global capital, Allende’s project can be seen as a counterintegral embrace and envelopment, to a follower of Wilber; further, the coup that restored that order by a “higher” power can also be seen as an integral gesture expressing increased depth and complexity, an evolutionary step forward (again to a follower of Wilber) (see section *Holarchy and Macropolitical Praxis*).

**Conclusion—Neither Stopping nor Drawing Back**

Where Litfin and Wilber present ontological and metaphysical models, representing reality and the transformations they allow that reality, *The Four Zoas* poses a transformational model for action through an imaginative space. Where Wilber (2000b) posits, “[t]he greater the depth of the holon, the greater its degree of consciousness” (p. 65), *The Four Zoas* inverts this; increasing depth, or stratification, is decreasing consciousness in the sense of increased reductivity, mimicry, determinism, and potential for irresponsibility in the expression of power, which is implicit in Wilber’s assertion that “the new and senior pattern or wholeness can to some degree limit the indeterminacy (organize the freedom) of its junior holons” (p. 60). Blake’s apocalyptic transformation also contrasts against Wilber’s position that social and personal transformations function in a top-down manner (co-evolution); in *The Four Zoas*, we see a subordinated holon (Enitharmon) transform the macroholon (Albion the Giant), bottom-up. The case of the Popular Unity period in Chile (1970-1973) shows how the dynamic is expressed under late capital—where subordinating regimes assume a kind of responsibility for those below, even if the terms of that responsibility are by any definition responsible—and how Wilber’s holonography simply flickers in theological development this self-same dynamic of politics in bad faith.

I argue instead for the persistent and intentional labor of instituting a just order through the transformative practice of becoming-responsible.

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http://www.uoregon.edu/~rbear/island/pintro.html


The Politics of Terrorism: 
Power, Legitimacy, and Violence

Richard A. Couto

Abstract: This paper examines and juxtaposes discourses about terrorism, violence, and political leadership. It presents generalizations about terrorism—a form of political violence by, for, and against the state—and politics and violence based on the theories of Max Weber and Hannah Arendt. The stark contrasts drawn from these theories include power as non-violent strength (Arendt) versus power as violence-dependent (Weber) and the struggle for legitimacy between different agents (states and individuals) as well as terrorism by, for, and against the state. This reframing of power leads to judging a lack of power where there is violence, and the presence of power where one observes non-violence. An examination of political and criminal violence leads to questions about deliberate and purposeful violence, indirect and structural violence that has political consequences, and their relationship to terrorism.

It expands the application of terrorism to include indirect structural violence by indicating its relationship to direct violence, not only in traditionally-viewed terrorist action but in the ignored terror of, for example, inner cities. Terrorism has many forms by many actors. To synthesize the results of these lines of reasoning leads to a conclusion with considerable implications for politics and for political leadership. The politics of terrorism suggest a central counter-terrorist approach: de-politicizing the violence of terrorists whenever possible and using the authority and power of the state to institutionalize it as criminal violence. This, in turn, also means politicizing other forms of violence, such as capital punishment, and their indirect and structural forms, such as the inner city.

Keywords: Arendt, criminalize, political leadership, political terrorism, political violence, politics, state violence, structural violence, terrorism, war on terror, Weber.

Introduction

This paper develops the thesis that through an understanding of power as authentic leadership by legitimate authority, and violence as a sign of a breakdown of power, leadership, and legitimacy, we may begin to create more integral political narratives. When such narratives inform political leadership, authentic leadership is more likely to formulate other choices to
violence and its attendant terror. There can be no question that terrorism and violence and the state’s reaction to them play an overwhelming role in politics today—in terms of who gets elected, on what platform, the over-arching global politics, and how that is driven currently by terrorism and the actions of the states and terrorists. While terrorists have gotten the attention of nation states around the globe, the emphasis on the psychology of terrorists obscures the political preconditions and precipitants—the indirect and direct political causes of terrorism and their political transformation—that are the focus of this paper. Thus, conceptions of terrorism, criminality, and violence, the nature of agents engaged in the politics of terror, how states react both internally and externally, all need to be examined. An examination of political and criminal violence leads to questions about deliberate and purposeful violence, indirect and structural violence that has political consequences, and their relationship to terrorism. It expands the application of terrorism to include indirect structural violence by indicating its relationship to direct violence, not only in traditionally-viewed terrorist action but in the ignored terrorism of, for example, inner cities. In so doing, this paper develops different realms of discourse about terrorism, violence, and political leadership to inform new political narratives and the development of political leadership.

The examination presents generalizations about terrorism—a form of political violence by, for, and against the state—and politics and violence. These generalizations are based on the theories of Max Weber and Hannah Arendt, and we begin the examination by juxtaposing their definitions and arguments to highlight fundamental contrasts developed throughout the paper. With those insights as a foundation for an analytical framework of political terrorism, the next part of the paper distinguishes deliberate and purposeful violence from unintended violence and political violence from the apolitical appearance of indirect (or structural) political violence. This offers a starting point for understanding political terrorism as a unique form of political violence. On that basis, in the next part we examine the scholarship on terrorism that will enable us to explain one aspect of political terrorism—the nature and role of political leadership within political terrorism. The final part is an examination of terrorism by, for, and against the state, including discussion of terrorism against the state as a reflection of terrorism by the state.

As an orientation to the interrelationships of concepts, arguments, and systems presented here, Figure 1 below supplies a mapping of the politics of terrorism elaborated in this paper.

**Legitimate Authority / Justified Violence**

**Weber**

Max Weber’s reflections on politics offer us a starting point to understand an analytical framework of political terrorism. In his profound essay, *Politics as a Vocation*, (1958), Weber explains that the general questions of politics as a vocation (political leadership) are not limited to the policies and questions of the day. In its broadest sense, politics comprises any independent leadership in action regardless of context. Thus we may have labor politics, family politics, and workplace politics. In its narrower terms, political leadership comprises the leadership, or attempts to influence the leadership, of a political association, a state (Weber, 1958, p. 77).
Weber defines the state by its distinctive means—physical force—not its purpose, which may be common to any number of other associations. The relationship of the state and violence is an “intimate” one, just as Tilly described, that defines the state for Weber as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (p. 78). The power of the state adheres to its right to permit groups and individuals to use physical force and to its claim as the sole source of the right to use violence. Politics, at root, “means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state.” Part of the power of the state comes from establishing the legitimacy of its power so that it does not have to use the violence and physical force upon which it rests. Weber combines these definitional elements in sociological and powerful terms. “The state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of a legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence” (p. 78).

At this point, in his essay, Weber examines the sources of legitimate authority, which are familiar to students of politics.
The eternal yesterday of tradition—traditional;
Extraordinary and personal gifts of grace—charismatic;
Legality premised on the validity of legal statute and functional competence premised on rationally created rules—legal (pp. 78-79).

One who is active in politics seeks legitimate authority through one of these avenues rather than justifying violence by invoking one or more of these forms of authority. The state’s use of violence is not terror when it appears as justified by legitimate authority; a contestable terrain. It appears more clearly as unjustified violence and terror as groups understand legitimate authority as cultural and social subordination or when it attempts to eliminate legitimate opposition.

Weber spends considerable space outlining the preeminent qualities of a leader with a vocation for politics, that is someone who seeks power as a means to serve other ends and not merely self-gratification—passion, a feeling of responsibility, and a sense of proportion (pp. 115-116). These qualities, like all human qualities, are held together in paradoxical if not contradictory fashion. Weber identifies the puzzle as “how can warm passion and a cool sense of proportion be forged together in one and the same soul” (p. 116). The passion that Weber has in mind is a “matter-of-factness” passionate devotion to a cause. The cause, however, tempers the passion with a sense of proportion, which comes with an ability to keep some distance from things and people related to the cause, that is, the ability to remain objective and responsible. Weber does not quite solve the puzzle he put forward but he does make clear that solving this puzzle requires that power remains a means to serving some cause but that the cause does not become an end itself and the end is certainly not the vanity of the powerful.

Taken alone, the emphasis on passion, ideals, and cause in politics could support extremism. In his own time, Weber was concerned with the extremism of pacifism and a Christian ethic expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. Weber checks the possibility of passion, ideals, and cause becoming extremism by balancing the ethos of politics as a cause with an ethos of politics as responsible compromise and proportionate action. He contrasts an ethic of absolute or ultimate ends with an ethic of responsibility. The decisive distinction between them is consideration of consequences of action. The ethic of ultimate ends focuses on intention while the ethic of responsibility focuses on the foreseeable consequences of one’s actions (pp. 119-20). “The believer in an ethic of ultimate ends feels “responsible” only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not squelched; for example, the flame of protesting against the injustice of the social order” (p. 121). Thus, suicide bombers may see their action as a means to protest injustice and to inspire others to similar protest with no attention to the real and human consequences of that action to others. The ethic of responsibility focuses on consequences. It examines all foreseeable consequences of an action and assumes responsibility for them. In balance then, the ethics of absolutes and responsibility require political leadership to cling to a cause—the purpose to which politics, power, and violence are a means—but to act responsibly—to examine foreseeable consequences, forego absolute and ultimate goals, and remain in touch with the consequences of violence—in pursuit of a cause.

The dilemma is not over for us or Weber, however. The nature of the state, a relationship of legitimate violence, may require pursuing good ends through “morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones” with evil consequences. Sadly, Weber observes, “From no ethics in the world
can it be concluded when and to what extent the ethically good purpose ‘justifies’ the ethically
dangerous means and ramifications” (p. 121). This brings Weber back to his premise that “the
decisive means for politics is violence” (p. 121) to which he adds that in the experience of the
irrationality of the world good consequences may come from evil means and evil consequences
from good means. “The world is governed by demons and … he who lets himself in for politics,
that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers” precisely because of this
irrationality of the world (p. 123). Later he adds, “He who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his
own and of others, should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks of
politics can only be solved by violence…” (p. 126).

After all of this, have we come full circle? Do we return to a position that the emphasis on
passion, ideals, and cause justifies extremism in political leadership, including the use of
terrorism? It seems that the ethic of ultimate ends trumps an ethic of responsibility as long as
political leaders are steadfast enough not to crumble in the face of a world too stupid and base for
what they have to offer. Clearly, Weber did not mean to provide a justification of terrorism or
pacifism. Mandela’s careful reasoning and distinctions, as we shall see below, also suggest that
there is indeed a path for politics without terrorism and violent protest of authority and violence
that he and others consider illegitimate.

Arendt

Hannah Arendt helps us to move beyond Weber to resolve the confusion of political terrorism
and to separate the state from legitimate violence. She approaches the issue of legitimate
authority and violence in a different manner. She is not concerned with the authority to claim a
monopoly over the legitimate use of the violence but with distinguishing legitimate authority
from violence. Arendt insists that the authority, strength, and power of the state rest upon its
legitimacy, which gives it the power to foster collective action among its citizens. State violence,
which may be justified, suggests that the state lacks sufficient legitimacy to gain citizen
compliance through non-coercive power. Legitimacy, it would seem, resides in the second and
third dimensions of power (Lukes, 1975) not in the first dimension of nonviolent and violent
coercion.

Arendt discusses a range of human relationships in the realm of public affairs—“power,”
“strength,” “force,” “authority,” and “violence” and uses the lack of clarity among them as a
measure of the paucity of political science at the time (Arendt, 1969, p. 43). Moving from the
most legitimate to the least—authority demands respect for and unquestioning recognition of the
right to ask compliance without coercion or persuasion. Strength is a property inherent in a
person or object and belonging to its character, separate from other things or persons. Its
hallmark is independence. It contributes to the respect and recognition of authority; for example,
the strength of the Constitution, a monarchy, or a particular person. Power is the human ability to
act in concert. Force is the energy released by social movements and other concerted efforts in
the environment of the state. Violence entails the reliance on implements of coercion, including
physical force, to acquire obedience or compliance and to deny the power of others to challenge
authority. It marks, actively or reactively, a recognition that some groups and individuals deny
the authority and hence legitimacy of the state. In such a circumstance, the greater the use of
violence against those who question its legitimacy, the more the government expresses its own
doubt about the effectiveness and efficiency of its legitimate forms of authority, strength, and power. Pushed to an extreme, this violence becomes state terror. “Terror is not the same as violence; it is rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control” (p. 55).

Arendt brings us to the central point of a theory of politics and political terrorism. Power may have legitimacy if rooted in authority but violence may have only justification. When a state resorts to violence against its own citizens, it admits that it no longer has the strength and power of legitimate authority to command the compliance without coercion. Justification of this violence may appeal to the need to assert legitimate authority that needs less justification of its forms of nonviolent coercion. Paradoxically, the less violence the state uses, the less justification it requires and the fewer challenges it constructs to its legitimacy. The state’s power and authority are enhanced by treating political violence and terrorism as criminal violence and using the ordinary means of coercion and the least violence possible.

When a group resorts to terror against its own citizens or another state, it admits it does not have power or strength to use other forms of violence, such as guerrilla or conventional warfare, to challenge the legitimacy of the state. Its violence challenges the state’s authority over a monopoly of justified or, in Weber’s terms legitimate, violence. It justifies its own violence, terrorism, in the illegitimate authority or actions of the state which may include a disproportionate use of violence, which is an unjustifyable scale of it. In other words, the state use of violence, like the use of political terrorism against it, should be tactical, not strategic, and designed to demonstrate its power as legitimate authority not violence.

Thus, the essential part of the political leadership of counter-terrorism is to conflict successfully over the political nature of the violence used against it; over the justification of counter-terrorist violence; and the legitimate authority of the state, and, by implication, the purpose of politics. By separating violence from other aspects of political leadership, Arendt reaches a radical formulation of the relationship of power and violence.

Power and violence are opposites: where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as non-violence; to speak about non-violent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it (p. 56).

As this examination of Weber and Arendt indicates, our challenge becomes being able to “read” this relationship between power and violence—direct violence and indirect structural violence—into real-life situations we confront at home and in the world, examples of which are discussed in the following sections as this paper’s examination continues.

**The Politics of Terrorism**

On the morning of September 11, 2001, my students and I were learning the unimaginable from a totally unfamiliar text. The policy and leadership class started shortly after the second plane hit the World Trade Center. I turned on the classroom television, and for 75 minutes, my
22 students and I alternately watched reports of the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Center and shared our ties with the people under attack and other background and personal information. News arrived of a crash into the Pentagon and of another airliner reportedly heading towards Washington, DC. Televised rumors flew around the globe, and our classroom, concerning car bombs at the state department. Who was behind this violence, we wondered. Fortunately, three out of four students could explain Al-Qaeda, its relationship with the Taliban, the nature of the Taliban, and their limited diplomatic recognition by other states.

We stared in disbelief as the South Tower collapsed. A student noted with reluctant recognition, “This is the defining event for my generation, just as the assassination of President Kennedy was for yours.” But how will it define this generation? Students and curricula face this important question. Clearly, we are at a crossroads for today’s generation of students. What markers do we give them for defining the nature of terrorism and for deciding what route to take in dealing with it?

**Political and Criminal Violence**

I began to formulate some answers to these and other, new questions several weeks later after reading a student’s journal about his community service. He described the inner-city middle school student he was tutoring and the different worlds they shared. The uncle of his young charge had been shot and killed the year before. My student reflected about parallel universes; one had violence-filled streets and one had child-centered, secure and safe neighborhoods. He lived in the latter and his student lived in the former. After September 11th, however, he and all of us knew that we live in one world with a shared vulnerability to terror and violence.

Will we make connections with the children of inner city Richmond and places like it? Will we wonder at and about the world of terror in which they and we live, just like my student’s student and my student? Will we reduce our newly discovered world of terror to individual extremists with psychological shortcomings, religious zeal, or misplaced national aspirations? Will we assume that terror grows from hatred of a people for their virtues, such as freedom and hard work, and jealousy of the fruits of their virtues, such as prosperity and strength? Will our search for security lead to a repression of civil liberties in this country and an imperialistic new world order abroad? Will we defend our democratic institutions with democratic processes and replicate the Marshall Plan to build nations with economic security and peaceful intentions?

Amid this host of questions, I had a solid starting point to analyze the terror that we now knew, firsthand: the root of terror is violence—actual or threatened, real or implied, physical and mental. In October 2002, random shootings in the Washington, D.C. area filled millions of Americans with terror. Fatal violence could enter the everyday chores of shopping, working, eating out, or pumping gas. We may also find forms of everyday and frequent violence, which approximate terror, outside of the attention-getting dramatic episodes. Juveniles detained by courts, for example, leave no doubt that the children of our inner cities are no strangers to violence. Detained juveniles in Richmond, Virginia, for example, recounted their direct experiences with homicide victims and the sound of gunfire in their neighborhoods at least twice monthly. The boys described a world in which being the target of gunfire is part of life’s uncertainty. Just as most people know that the next time they cross the street they may be hit by a
car, these boys believed that the next corner they turned might be their last. The girls’ stories described a world in which violence in the home occurred all too often. The detention center offered some of them the most security they had ever known. Americans, especially the children of our inner cities, know violence-related terror.

Statistics suggest that our inner-city children know more violence-related terror than areas of the world often cited as vortexes of terrorism. The annual number of homicide victims in Richmond in the 1990s, for example, exceeded the number of victims in all of Northern Ireland’s terror for every year since 1972. In 1998, the number of juvenile homicides alone in Richmond surpassed the number of total homicides in Belfast. James Gabarino (1999) terms the neighborhoods where these children live “war zones.” Poverty, unemployment, poor schools, low educational attainment, and fractured families have shockingly high rates of occurrence. Every year, the children living in war zone neighborhoods across our country experience violence in an up close and personal way when someone they know becomes a murder victim. The aggregate figure of inner-city murder victims in the United States exceeds the shocking toll of September 11th, annually.

Why is the carnage of September 11th terror and the carnage of our inner cities not? Because of the singular nature of that day and its many victims? Perhaps. But why then are the protracted incidents of violence with few victims in Northern Ireland acts of terror but the killings of inner city Richmond not? Clearly, there are similarities. They all entail violence, actual or threatened, real or implied, physical and mental. In all these cases, some people, without provocation, had their lives taken or faced life-threatening circumstances; for example, the child, sitting on her front steps, fatally wounded by a stray bullet. Still, we do not call such tragic occurrences terrorism. even though terrorism seems to involve violence towards people innocent of any direct provocation or of any direct responsibility for injury to the perpetrators of the violence. Why are victims of terror the workers of the World Trade Center and the people who lost their lives trying to rescue victims, but not the little girl on her front steps?

The answer may lie in the motives of the perpetrators of violence. Perpetrators of terrorism are deliberate in their use of violence against innocent victims. Unlike the young gunman of the inner city whose errant gunshot hits a young girl he does not know, terrorists intend to kill or injure people whom they do not know. Unlike the young gunman, again, the terrorists’ injurious and murderous act has a public purpose and not just a private or personal purpose. When the first plane hit the World Trade Center, for example, it was not clearly an act of terrorism. It could have been an accident or a deranged pilot intending a suicide/mass murder. Only when the second plane hit the World Trade Center was it immediately clear that these acts were purposeful as well as deliberate acts of violence although what purpose they served was not clear.

We need to distinguish among unseen, public, and political forms of deliberate acts of violence. Violence may be used deliberately for the purpose of robbery or within a family to punish or hurt a person for submission. Rape is another form of deliberate violence. The snipers of the Washington area also had a deliberate public purpose—to extort a fortune to get them to stop their killings. In contrast, the people of the World Trade Center were the victims of deliberate and purposeful violence by men with a political purpose.
Thus, the discussion of political terrorism must begin with the recognition that some forms of violence are deliberate and purposeful and others are not. Some deliberate and purposeful acts of violence are directly political and some are not—robbery and extortion, for example. Acts that may be terrorism in one context, presidential assassination attempts, become apolitical crimes of violence when they spring from a deranged mind—John W. Hinckley, Jr.’s attempt to take the life of President Ronald Reagan and the later attempt on Gerald Ford’s life by Charles Manson’s devotee Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme. Some forms of violence, such as U.S. “war zone” neighborhoods, may be political in an indirect deep sense of public morality and hidden dimensions of power. They are the logical consequences rather than the intentional and deliberate purpose of the state. Pierre Bourdieu refers to these forms as indirect and structural violence of the state (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 192).

This examination of political and criminal violence leads us to questions about deliberate and purposeful violence, indirect and structural violence that has political consequences, and their relationship to terrorism.

**Political Violence and Terrorism**

There are several forms of directly and explicitly political violence. When one state undertakes deliberate and purposeful political violence against another state we may call it war and a just act (Stern, 1998, pp. 17-19) even though its purpose, and certainly its consequence, may include terrifying a civilian population and its military and political leaders into submission; the much vaunted “shock and awe” strategy of the second U.S./Iraq war fits here. Within war some forms of violence are more legitimate than others (Carpenter, 2002). In general, for example, civilian populations are to be spared from military violence. However, since at least Sherman’s March through the South and certainly in the era of total militarization, achieving civilian protection has become more and more difficult as civilians become part of the infrastructure of the military. In the era of total war that marked most of the twentieth century, Saddam Hussein could find ample precedent for his attack on the Kurds in Northern Iraq during the Iran-Iraqi war and in the aftermath of his defeat against allied forces in the Gulf War. The expanded vulnerability of civilian populations in the war efforts of their governments may explain why the civilian casualties in Iraq, including increased infant mortality—an estimated 500,000 children—resulting from the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations, do not cross the political terror threshold.

Some forms of wartime political violence do cross over into terror, however. Rape was an instrument of terror in Serbia. The United States used nuclear weapons on two Japanese cities just as Germany bombed civilian populations of the United Kingdom in World War II, and the allied forces firebombed Dresden. How do we distinguish these acts of war from other acts of war and from other forms of political violence? How do we justify one and not the other since both take and risk the lives of noncombatants? It seems clear that the purpose of war is to determine who will set the conditions for the cessation of armed conflict, the resolution of the conflicting states’ aims and policies that provoked armed conflict, and the terms of the relationship of the warring parties after the war.
Distinguishing deliberate and purposeful violence from unintended violence and political violence from apolitical and indirect (or structural) political violence, offers us a starting point for understanding political terrorism as a unique form of political violence. Next, we examine the scholarship on terrorism that will enable us to explain one aspect of political terrorism—the nature and role of political leadership within political terrorism.

**Terrorism by, for, and against the State**

Whether conducted by or against the state, terrorism entails the intentional targeting of civilian populations (Laquerr in White, 2002, p. 75) with real or threatened violence (Jenkins in White, 2002, p. 8) to bring about a climate of fear, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of will to continue to resist demands placed upon the public (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 101). Political terrorism may be used by the state—Stalin’s purges of the 1930s (Moore, 2002, p. 65; Arendt, 2002, pp. 33-34) or against the state—the Irish Republican Army (Crenshaw, 2002). Paramilitary groups, such as the armed wings of the Unionist parties of Northern Ireland or the death squads of Central America, may also use violence for the state. Al-Qaeda represented a new form of terrorist group, an international terrorist group with the support of a state but not conducting violence directly for it. The Bush administration responded by including host countries as targets in a war on terrorism. We will deal with terrorism by and against the state primarily. Before taking up their distinction, we will explore what both forms of terrorism have in common.

Political terrorism, whether by or against the state, is inversely related to power. Ted Gurr explains terrorism as a tactic used by the weak to intimidate the strong and by the strong to intimidate the weak (Gurr in White, 2002, p. 205). Terrorism as a tactic against the state indicates a lack of the power to conflict with the state in “higher” levels of violence such as guerrilla or direct warfare. When a state resorts to tactics of terror against its own citizens, it undermines the power and legitimacy of its own civil and criminal processes or their waning power to enforce order without resort to violence. Stalin’s show trials, Saddam Hussein’s elimination of political opponents in and outside of the Baath Party, and his attacks on the Kurds illustrate a lack of legitimate authority to achieve a political purpose. Similarly, when vigilante groups or “death squads” undertake political terror for the state, that is to root out political opposition to the state, they too express the inadequacy of the power of the state, albeit frustration with the cumbersome nature of legitimate forms of authority, power, and coercion.

Gurr explains terrorism as a tactic but it may also be a strategy. Rather than an order of armed violence lower than guerilla and open warfare, terrorism may be a new level of protest, that is violent protest, to demonstrate the vulnerability of the state and its citizens and publicize a group’s or individual’s new or continued opposition to the state. State terrorism, unlike the terror of sub-state groups, may eliminate political opposition and not just express resistance to them. In either case, terrorism separated from power takes on the character of a strategy more than a tactic, becomes more clandestine, and requires less organization and leadership. As a strategy, terrorism risks losing sight of its political purpose, however, and losing sight of any strategy to achieve it.

Political terror is much more likely to be successful as a tactic in a larger strategy and when its consequences for strategic goals are thought out and apparent. Political terror, when adopted
as a strategy, suggests that the connection of means and ends are not well thought out or apparent (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 107). Political terror against the state may even bring on popularly supported repressive measures when the terror seems without purpose, a strategy not a tactic, or when the tactical goals lack significant support in the general population. The state may safely deal with the violence of strategic noninstrumental terrorism, especially by its own nationals, as criminal violence rather than political terror. Examples are the violence against clinics and individual providers of abortion services, the Symbionese Liberation Army, or Aum Shinrikyo’s release of sarin gas in the Tokyo subway. When the state escalates the nature of a criminal threat to a political threat by moving from nonviolent to violent coercion, for example the siege at the Weaver property at Ruby Ridge and the assault on David Koresh’s Branch Davidian sect, it justifies the use of strategic terror against the state in the minds of chiliastic and infeasible revolutionaries. Repressive measures by the state that exceed proportionality, such as the British repression of the Easter 1916 Rebellion in Dublin by artillery, the execution of IRA leaders, and the imprisonment of thousands of followers and its later use of Black and Tans forces, may permit tactical terrorists to increase their violence to guerilla warfare because of increased popular support and justification (White, 2002, pp. 84-85).

Terrorism, whether as a tactic or a strategy, entails a rational choice that may have a wide range of political goals: revolution, right and left; counter-revolution; nationalist; separatist; millenarian or reactionary; gaining or retaining political power; anarchy and totalitarianism; etc. (White, 2002, p. xviii). The connection of terror to a broader political goal may be well-thought out but tactically unsound or poorly conceived and a strategy in itself (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 107). However well developed its political goal may be, if it has little feasibility of being understood, shared, or achieved, then the tactical political value of terrorism decreases. However rational, terrorism is a “cultural performance with intense symbols and historical references” that intends a “culturally embedded, absorbing and transforming symbolic constructs of reality, morality, and truth” (Besteman, 2002, p. 2, 6). Victims of political terrorism have little intrinsic political value (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 99). Their death and injury are more important to express symbolically the danger to random and ordinary citizens (White, 2002, p. 21), the power of the terrorist group to inflict harm; the sophistication and cunning of their methods; and the revenge they seek to exact or purpose to achieve (White, 2002, p. 198). Beyond inflicting or threatening physical harm, the tactic of terrorism is a calculated rational choice of dramatic episodes to achieve particular political goals (Besteman, 2002, p. 2; Crenshaw, 2002, p. 100) by “the systematic inducement of fear and anxiety to control and direct a civilian population” (Crenshaw, 2002, pp. 100-101). The World Trade Center and its destruction was a symbol for the terrorists who attacked it and for subsequent U.S. counter-terrorism against them. Bob Woodward closes his panegyric on President Bush’s leadership in the Afghanistan war with a scene of 25 men from Special Forces units and CIA paramilitary teams in Afghanistan. They “dedicated” this spot with an American flag and a pile of rocks assembled as a tombstone over a piece of World Trade Center debris.

One of the men read a prayer. Then he said, “We consecrate this spot as an everlasting memorial to the brave Americans who died on September 11, so that all who would seek to do her harm will know that America will not stand by and watch terror prevail. We will export death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of our great nation.” (Woodward, 2002, pp. 351-352).
Political terrorism, especially as a tactic, whether by or against the state, draws from a deep well of preconditions (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 101; White, 2002) such as historical events and conditions, the interpretation of which legitimate political violence as counter-terrorism or revenge. The preconditions of political terrorism—hunger, poverty, illness, illiteracy, large-scale unemployment, cultural subversion—will have conflicting meaning and interpretations of their origins. For some, these preconditions represent indirect and structural forms of political violence of the state; for others, they represent direct forms; political violence by the state may take on direct and indirect forms (Besteman, 2002, pp. 303-304). Colonialism, for example, provides a form of indirect political violence that the state attempts to obscure behind justifications that assert superiority and inferiority of some groups (Orwell, 1936). When a group feels unjustly deprived by indirect, legal violence, elites within that group may act in violent and nonviolent ways to resist the laws and the states (Crenshaw, 2002, pp. 103-104).

Advocates of political violence against the state, at least in the case of colonialism, such as Frantz Fanon (1963) and Albert Memmi (1991), explained the colonized and the colonizer as reflections of the same violence. Explaining the difference between them explains the indirect and structural violence, of which Bourdieu speaks; the misery of the colonized is justified by some attribute of the colonized, for example cultural superiority or good intentions. Fanon and Memmi understand state violence to extend to the attribution of the conditions of stark inequality and privilege to the psychological nature and abilities of the different groups. They suggest that the psychological explanations of terrorism have political origins and are part of the resistance to the power of the privileged to oppress others. That power extends to the second and third dimensions of power and their capacity to shape the self-consciousness of the less powerful, the feasibility of change, and the efficacy of protest (Lukes, 1975; Scott, 1990). Fanon cites a World Health Organization scientist who, after examining Africans in the Center and East of Africa described them as “lobotomized Europeans” (Fanon, 1963, p. 302). Sartre took from Fanon’s writing insight into the violence of the colonizer, including rationalizations of the privilege of the European in their superiority over the colonized and the need of continued suppressive violence (Sartre in Fanon, 1963). In Fanon and Memmi, and others (Orwell, 1936), we find a political origin, in the precondition of oppressive violence, of some of the psychological generalizations of the terror of the powerless. As Sartre rhetorically argued, “You say they understand nothing but violence? Of course; first, the only violence is the settler’s, but soon they will make it their own; that is to say, the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go toward a mirror” (Sartre in Fanon, 1963, p. 17).

Often a spark ignites a round of political terrorism by the state. On October 23, 1989, a white couple was shot in the racially mixed area of Mission Hill in Boston. Carol Stuart, pregnant, died on the scene and her baby died several weeks later. Her husband Charles claimed a black man with a raspy voice shot them. His charge set off a police search that terrorized the black community. Charles Stuart later committed suicide when it became clear that he had shot his pregnant wife in the head in an attempt to collect insurance. He wounded himself, as part of a cover up, and had selected the location of the murder and the false description to play on the underlying racist assumptions of the Boston police and others according to the wounded husband (Kasiecki, 2000).
The spark that ignites terror may have very indirect ties to preconditions such as racism and sexism. A precipitating event may have roots in conflict for support among competing political groups or in the internal needs of a group for control, discipline, or morale building (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 108). The African National Congress, for example, had pressure to adopt some form of political violence because of the Pan African Congress. Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, in part, to demonstrate the harder line of his Lihkud Party towards the Palestinians than that of Ehud Barak and the Labour Party, then in power. His visit was both a matter of Israeli internal politics and a provocation of militant Palestinian groups (Mitchell, 2001, p. 5).

Terrorism against the State

Tactical and strategic terror against the state have correlates with the size of terrorist groups, the nature of their leadership, and the feasibility of their political goals. Ted Gurr points out most terrorism against the state comes from small, short-lived groups that do not pose a serious threat to the state (White, 2002, p. 33). Extreme terrorists who portray their crusades as a cataclysmic clash of civilizations and in some form of eschatological drama (White, 2002, pp. 49-50) are least likely to provide a convincing link between terrorism and some achievable political goal. Terrorism becomes more “legitimate” the stronger its leadership forges links to connect its political violence and broadly shared political goals such as nationalism, separatism, democratic participation, anti-colonialism, self-determination, or even theocracy (White, 2002, pp. 49-50). The possibility of a group’s successful political terrorism against the state hinges on the potential acceptance of its legitimacy and its claims that there are no alternatives to violence (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 114). A small terrorist group with little chance of bringing about a political or social change, such as the Weathermen of the 1960s, will more often use terror as a strategy. An inchoate goal for the strategy of terrorism reduces its adherents. This in turn reduces the need for organization and thus leadership; Ted Kaczynski, the “Unabomber” conducted a one-person campaign of political terror. In contrast, a larger group with hope in achieving broad political and social change, such as the Irish Republican Army under Michael Collins, is more likely to use political terror as a tactic (White, 2002, pp. 78ff).

The rational choice of terror against the state incorporates the weakness and intentions of terrorist leadership. It falls on a spectrum between disorders and riots on the one hand, and on the other guerilla war, low-level war, limited conventional warfare, and unlimited conventional warfare (White, 2002, p. 13). Its premeditation and symbolic nature separate terrorism from riots and its relatively low-level of violence separates it from forms of war (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 99). Small extremist terrorist groups may express leaderless resistance to some part of state policy, such as the conduct of legal abortions (White, 2002, p. 43). These terrorist groups require less organization (White, 2002, p. 43) because the strategy of terrorism more resembles violent disorder and riots. The strategy of terrorism, however, also indicates the relative weakness of a group and its incapacity to conduct violence by traditional military means. The state may ordinarily use this weakness to depoliticize the violence of small extremist groups and to portray it as criminal rather than political violence (White, 2002, pp. 269-271).

As a tactic, rather than a strategy, terrorism resembles more the conduct of warfare and thus requires more leadership and organization. It is likely to be a calculated choice and imply the inefficacy of legal redress and the unlikelihood of successful violent revolution (Crenshaw, 2002,
pp. 103-105). Michael Collins and the IRA provided a model for later terrorists by following state officials, police, and intelligence officers, to their homes and murdering them there. He thus sought to demonstrate the vulnerability of the state and its agents. Collins’s actions in the Irish Rebellion would inspire the later actions of Jewish terrorists—Irgun Zvai Leumi—to hasten the partition of Palestine (White, 2002, p. 100). As a tactic, terrorism seeks to build power so that its armed and violent resistance may move on to the next level of guerrilla warfare. Political terrorism against the state may gain power by an attrition that saps the will of the state to continue resisting the political and social changes sought. The success of the Ku Klux Klan from 1869 to 1876 in the American South (Couto, 1991, pp. 222-228) and the Irgun Zvai Leumi’s terrorism against the British in Palestine (White, 2002, p. 100) offer good examples of success by attrition. Its success as a strategy depends upon its ability to win adherents to the belief that there is no legal redress available (Moore, 2002, p. 63) and that the group’s terror is a temporary tactic until there is sufficient strength to wage guerrilla and then perhaps conventional warfare, and then to establish legitimate government. The success of terror as a strategy depends in great measure upon the use of violence by the state.

**Terrorism by the State**

Terrorism by the state indicates its own relative powerlessness, specifically the inadequacy of the state’s civil power to maintain order (White, 2002, p. 277) or the inadequacy of the civil power to curb violence that is waged against it without criminalizing and restricting some previously legal and permitted conduct. Legal and extralegal repression of a group by the state or its agents may inculcate terror—feelings of fear and vulnerability—and measure the preexisting indirect and structural violence of the state. The South African government’s laws banishing the ANC and increasing criminal acts for their seeming political intent, Sabotage Act (1962) and General Law Amendment Act (1963), illustrated the underlying violence for Africans and the international community (Johns & Davis, 2002, p. 91). Lynching, the war on drugs, and the police rampage in Roxbury all remind African-Americans and other racial minorities of preexisting indirect and structural violence of the state.

Too much state violence undermines a minimal framework of regularity and legality (Moore, 2002, p. 66). Even nonviolent actions of public officials that remind a group of its claims of the oppressive preconditions of violence may precipitate new terrorism against the state, as when Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount on September 28, 2001, sparked a renewed intifada (Mitchell, 2001).

One enabling condition of the terrorist violence against the state is its own practice of violence. The death penalty, for example, sanctions the taking of life. In the case of DC snipers, the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized that capital punishment struck the balance of justice. Capital punishment provides a legal justification for a cultural and social value of holding grudges and an underdeveloped sense of justice as retribution. Both of these factors provide an environment of the social acceptance of violence that may influence terrorists. Violence as an instrument of justified vengeance was also the choice made by Timothy McVeigh in the aftermath of United States’ government action against unlawful but nonviolent conditions at Waco, Texas and Ruby Ridge, Idaho. These latter actions still provide “ammo” for the “revolution” of “freedom fighters” (Revolution, 2007), a group that may range from libertarians to violent opponents of the
U.S. government. The state’s use of violence is endemic in the formation of nation states of the modern era. The state develops the capacity to use violence “on a larger scale, more effectively, more efficiently, with wider assent from their subject populations, and with readier collaboration from neighboring authorities” than other groups within the same territory (Tilly, 2002, p. 38). The greater its success in monopolizing violence, the more clandestine and apparently criminal, not political, will violence against it appear. The small and clandestine nature of terrorist groups enables them to function (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 103) but also limits their threat to the state (Gurr in White, 2002, p. 33).

These links of state actions, social acceptance of violence, and terrorism against the state have particular and ironic application at the present time. Al-Qaeda and the leadership of Osama bin Laden have direct links to the support that the United States government gave to the Mujahadin during their resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1970s (White, 2002, pp. 162-163). Similarly, the threat that Saddam Hussein posed to the United States and its allies had direct bearing on the support that he received from the British and United States governments during Iraq’s war with Iran (Pelletiere, Johnson, & Rosenberger, 1990). The deposition of Saddam Hussein’s regime did less to inspire terrorism against occupation forces than the inability of the provisional authority to provide security against criminal violence (Couto, 2003, pp. 22-24).

Other state action may stimulate or increase political terrorism. For example, if countermeasures of the state to forms of resistance, violent and nonviolent, exceed existing legal measures or appear disproportionate to the threat of violence against the state, they may serve as indirect or direct forms of state terrorism and engender sympathy and support for violent and nonviolent resistance. Unexpected and unusual violence by the state to quell protest and dissent may be a precipitating cause of terrorism against the state (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 105). The South African government’s excessive violent responses to demonstrations in Sharpsville and later in Soweto illustrate this possibility. The policies of the state greatly influence the growth in numbers and popular acceptance of terrorist organizations (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 114) and may help move them from terrorists to guerrilla forces.

The state may enable its own terrorism as well as terrorism against it. For example, the repression of legal avenues to address grievances of a large portion of the population permits state violence against a portion of it. As Barrington Moore points out in his assessment of the terrorism of the Soviet Union, “Whatever destroys the play of interest groups within the society and permits a single group to dominate inevitably destroys the only realistic guarantee that organized violence will not be used against dissenting persons or groups in the society” (Moore, 2002, p. 63). Moore uses Stalin’s purges and the forced collectivization of the farmlands of the kulaks to illustrate this point (Moore, 2002, p. 62).

States may embrace organized terror from a crusading spirit that comes from “the fanatical conviction in the justice and universal applicability of some ideal about the way life should be organized along with a lack of serious concern about the consequences of the methods used to pursue this ideal (Moore, 2002, p. 64). In practice this organized terror of the state represents the effort “to alter the structure of society at a rapid rate and from above through forceful administrative devices” (Moore, 2002, p. 64) Moore uses Stalin as an example and is generally
concerned with the question of terror and socialism (Moore, 2002). Pol Pot’s Cambodia suggests another form of state terror on behalf of socialism, albeit inchoate. Pinochet’s terror in Chile makes clear that state terror may be linked to capitalism as well as socialism. Mao Tse-tung used state apparatus from above to mobilize the masses below to renew revolutionary fervor. Saddam Hussein used violence to eliminate political opponents and the Baath Party to consolidate and maintain his power by terror. Ethnic cleansing in Rwanda, Serbia, and other nations suggest another purpose of organized state terror. Terror is a necessary counterpart to a cult of infallible leadership that prevents alternative appraisals of a situation (Moore, 2002, p. 66). We will have more to say on this later as we discuss the role of folly in political leadership. The excesses of crusading terrorism have far more devastating consequences when conducted as organized state terrorism compared with the efforts of fringe and clandestine groups opposed to the state.

**Terrorism against the State as a Reflection of Terrorism by the State**

Perhaps the clearest statement of terrorism against the state and as a reflection of the violence by the state comes from political leaders who embraced violence reluctantly and disavowed terrorism deliberately. In his April 20, 1964 trial, Nelson Mandela explained the role of violence in the African National Congress strategy of resistance and distinguished it from terrorism. He explained that a month after Sharpeville, the ANC formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation). At Sharpeville on March 21, 1960, the Pan African Congress organized a nonviolent demonstration against the passbooks that controlled the movement of Africans within their own country. Police fired into the crowd and killed 69 people. Mandela explained that this violent repression of nonviolent protest gave the ANC no choice but to respond to violence with violence. After decades of nonviolent protest of laws seen as unjust, the government had legislated against such protest defining them as a particular form of criminal activity with additional penalties, and then, at Sharpeville, “resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies.” “…Only then did we (ANC) decide to answer violence with violence” (Mandela, 1964; Johns & Davis, 1991, p. 117).

Mandela then painstakingly distinguished among forms of political violence, explained the strategy of political violence, and maintained that although ANC embraced violence as a political tactic, it disavowed terrorism.

Four forms of violence were possible. There is sabotage, there is guerrilla warfare, there is terrorism, and there is open revolution. We chose to adopt the first method and to exhaust it before taking any other decision.

In the light of our political background the choice was a logical one. Sabotage did not involve loss of life, and it offered the best hope for future race relations. Bitterness would be kept to a minimum and, if the policy bore fruit, democratic government could become a reality. This is what we felt at the time, and this is what we said in our Manifesto (Exhibit A, D):

"We of Umkhonto we Sizwe have always sought to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We hope, even at this late hour, that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realization of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We
hope that we will bring the Government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the Government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate state of civil war."

The initial plan was based on a careful analysis of the political and economic situation of our country. We believed that South Africa depended to a large extent on foreign capital and foreign trade. We felt that planned destruction of power plants, and interference with rail and telephone communications, would tend to scare away capital from the country, make it more difficult for goods from the industrial areas to reach the seaports on schedule, and would in the long run be a heavy drain on the economic life of the country, thus compelling the voters of the country to reconsider their position.

Attacks on the economic life lines of the country were to be linked with sabotage on Government buildings and other symbols of apartheid. These attacks would serve as a source of inspiration to our people. In addition, they would provide an outlet for those people who were urging the adoption of violent methods and would enable us to give concrete proof to our followers that we had adopted a stronger line and were fighting back against Government violence.

In addition, if mass action were successfully organized, and mass reprisals taken, we felt that sympathy for our cause would be roused in other countries, and that greater pressure would be brought to bear on the South African Government.

This then was the plan. Umkhonto was to perform sabotage, and strict instructions were given to its members right from the start, that on no account were they to injure or kill people in planning or carrying out operations. These instructions have been referred to in the evidence of 'Mr. X' and 'Mr. Z'. (Mandela, 1964, n.p.).

Oliver Tambo, Mandela’s law partner and leader of the exiled ANC, also clearly explained violence as a tactic of resistance while clearly distinguishing ANC’s policy of “controlled violence” from terrorism. Even in the 1980s, when the ANC encouraged intensified violence, it explained this policy as guerrilla warfare and maintained an emphasis on violence as sabotage, while admitting that the threat of death and injury to innocent people and agents of the state existed in any form of violence (Tambo, 1983). The ANC eventually, in 1988, repeated its disavowal of terrorism and the intentional targeting of civilians by more radical element of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Johns & Davis, 1991, p. 312).

The strategic outlook we project and encourage is one which focuses on mass struggle against the apartheid regime for the liberation of our people. There can be no question of agreements with anybody outside of this framework. As we said before, our activists, whether functioning at the legal or the illegal level - and we have to function at both these levels - adhere to our strategic concept of drawing the masses of the people into conscious, organised, and united action. Functioning at both these levels, it is their task to win into one common front of united action all organisations that are opposed to the apartheid system and are fighting for genuine national and social liberation (Johns & Davis, 1991, p. 240; Tambo, 1983).
Although regarded by many to be the epitome of an international standard for peace and reconciliation, Mandela’s use of violence raised the specter of terrorism for others. In Northern Ireland, for example, peace advocates, in the 1998 campaign on the referendum on the Good Friday Accord, sought a headliner to attract attention and supporters for a yes vote on the referendum. Campaign organizers considered Nelson Mandela for that role but decided against pursuing the invitation very far because of their efforts to win over moderate Protestant voters, middle-Unionists. That group’s largest fear was that the new political arrangements of the peace accord would release the terrorists of the IRA from prison and that they would come to power. For the middle-Unionists, Mandela had a paramilitary history and was now in power; exactly what they feared Sinn Fein leaders might do in Northern Ireland. The labyrinth of political violence and the state brings us back to the question of political leadership and the justification of political violence with which we began.

Conclusion

Through an understanding of power as authentic leadership by legitimate authority, and violence as a sign of a breakdown of power, leadership, and legitimacy, we begin to create narratives that formulate other choices to violence and its attendant terror. In addition to historical examples of political violence, our inner-city children also teach us how to end a spiral of terror and violence. That narrative begins with the insistence that there are other choices to violence and its attendant terror to gain what we want. They tell us that those who turn to violence think that “Once you got a gun, you’re on top of the world” (Couto & Stutts, 2000, p. 3). To this assessment, we make a counter call “…Out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in instant and perfect obedience. What can never grow out of it is power” (Arendt, 1969, p. 53).

The politics of terrorism suggest a central counter-terrorist approach: de-politicizing the violence of terrorists whenever possible and using the authority and power of the state to treat it as criminal violence. It also means politicizing the justifications of violence, such as capital punishment, and their indirect and structural forms, such as the inner city. The implications for political leadership could not be greater.

References


**Abstract:** I propose a reading of social, political and discursive change in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia which is inspired by an integral, above all developmental perspective. In view of explaining Russia’s current political trajectory, I make several arguments. First, I claim that Russian politics are still to a large extent determined by the effects of a threefold crisis of sense-making. Neither the collapse of the Soviet empire, nor the question of how to define democratic government nor the lack of a resilient national identity have so far been resolved and re-appropriated in a transformative manner. Second, I try to show how this affects various aspects and dimensions of Russian politics. Third, I engage in a brief overview of a number of adult development models, asking to what extent and how the characteristics of consciousness development, particular stage characteristics, and the general logics and dynamics of successful and unsuccessful development these models describe can be helpful to the analysis of Russian politics. Also, I discuss their compatibility and parallels with discourse theory and analysis as an increasingly popular methodology in Russian Studies. Of the developmental models reviewed, the theory of political development by Stephen Chilton and the self-protective action logic in Susanne Cook-Greuter’s model of self and identity development are particularly relevant for my purpose. On these grounds, it is argued that since Vladimir Putin’s taking office as Russian president and later prime-minister, politics and (official) political discourse have increasingly come to follow self-protective action logics as conceived by Susanne Cook-Greuter. This diagnosis, which could either be understood as a regression or as a realignment of internal and external dimensions of political development, can be explained as a reaction to Russia’s crisis of identity followed by a loss of internal stability and international influence connected to the dislocations mentioned above.

**Keywords:** Adult development theory, complexity, development, discourse analysis, discourse theory, dislocation, identity, levels of consciousness, Russia, self-protective stage, social science.

**Introduction: Whither Russia?**

Social scientists dealing with the process of regime transformation in post-Soviet Russia are increasingly struck by what in many respects looks like a move “backwards,” towards illiberalism and authoritarianism. Almost ten years after Vladimir Putin’s advent to power as Russian president and now prime minister, however strong and stable the regime might appear,
liberal democracy seems to be more unlikely than ever before in the whole period of post-Soviet transformation. Even though democracy, modernization, and the rule of law have constantly been part of the official political language in Russia during the past two decades, all of these terms currently have to be interpreted through specific discursive frames such as the discourses of Eurasianism or of “sovereign democracy,” claiming that Russia was a civilization of its own and either must not copy western ideas, standards, and institutions or could not afford this kind of “luxury.” Even though some observers still hope that president Medvedev could eventually “emancipate” the country from the most illiberal aspects of Putin’s heritage, it remains unclear for the time being in which direction Russia’s transformation is heading. So how can this political and cultural trajectory be explained? And how could we (that is both academic observers and political actors inside and outside Russia) possibly come up with constructive strategies to deal with these developments on a political level?

The following reflections are based on my almost 15 years of personal and academic preoccupation with political and cultural developments in Russia, during which I took a special interest in Russia’s way of relating to its Soviet past after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Born and socialized in Germany, my main focus of interest has always been the connection between Russia’s political development and her ways of dealing with the country’s non-democratic and totalitarian experiences of the 20th century. Having gained increasing familiarity with integral, and, in particular, developmental approaches during the past years, it seems a fascinating and challenging endeavour to combine the two research trajectories, which the following contribution attempts to do.

In this article, I claim that Russian politics are still to a significant extent determined by the after-effects of the largely non-digested, multi-dimensional crisis of sense-making (dislocation) connected to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, influencing many aspects of socioeconomic, political, and cultural life, and discussed in the first part of the article. Since the impacts of emotionally “undigested” experiences of dislocation\(^2\) tend to manifest themselves in largely unreflected, subconscious mechanisms (Mitscherlich, 1967; Schwan, 1997), a significant section of my article is devoted to reviewing theories of consciousness as a device for inquiring into the realm of these invisible, yet powerful spheres, in order to make visible at least some of their workings and logics. On these grounds, I would like to propose a theory about where Russian politics and society are in this regard and why. On the basis of structural models of adult development (such as those of Piaget, Neo-Piagetian approaches to the development of political culture, and in particular Susanne Cook-Greuter’s model of self-development), supporting meta-perspectives on social and cultural change, I would like to propose a more integral way of explaining social and political change in post-Soviet Russia.

Besides, I argue that developmental theories show multiple parallels to and compatibilities with well-established social science theories and methods, namely discourse theory and analysis, while at the same time transcending the overall outlook of the latter, discussed in the second part of the article. Affording interesting new perspectives on current developments in contemporary Russia, they could therefore enrich sociological and discourse analytical accounts of the deeper, structural levels and mechanisms of cultural and discursive change.

\(^2\) A term coined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their discourse theory (see below), meaning crisis of sense-making on a larger, collective (cultural) level.
Thus, my overall aim in this article is twofold: first, to summarize and review basic concepts and assumptions of some developmental approaches in order to discuss their value for political analysis of societies in transition in general and their parallels with and analytical “surplus value” for discourse theory and analysis, especially in the tradition of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in particular. Second, I propose an integrally informed account of political and cultural change in post-Soviet Russia on the basis of an adult developmental theory perspective, covered in the third part of the article.

**Dislocation and Politics in Transitional Russia**

At the beginning of post-Soviet Russian history was a fundamental, at least threefold dislocation (crisis of sense-making), the scope and implications of which probably still have not been fully grasped or integrated by a significant number of either the leading political actors or the majority of the Russian population.

The dislocation of the Bolshevik Soviet state ideology (1), a long and subtle process which began in the early 1960s, subsequently lead to a steady erosion of power of the Soviet model of leadership and rule (2) during the 1970s and 80s and culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union (3) in result of Gorbachev’s politics of Perestroika. A glance at post-Soviet Russia’s social and political trajectory during the past two decades shows that none of these three dimensions of what was probably the most important dislocation of the second half of the 20th century has so far been fully re-appropriated politically, culturally, and emotionally.

During the 1990s, the most decisive experience for the majority of the population was that of chaos and lack of leadership in the realm of political organization, and of social and economic degradation, in result of which ideas like democracy, freedom, and market economy were strongly delegitimized. This made it easier for political actors to declare these ideas to be western inventions, foreign and hostile to Russia.

Now, during the past ten years, the country has rather experienced what looks like a move back towards Soviet habits and patterns of political thought and action in many regards. While ideology, for example, has indeed been officially banned from state politics by Russia’s 1993 constitution, the government under Putin has made increasing efforts to regain control over public and cultural realms through control of the media, campaigns against critical literature, and attempts to regain hegemony over the construction of historical truth (Mommsen & Nußberger, 2007). This includes a revaluation of Stalinism and mourning the end of the Soviet Union. In this context, it is not surprising that a balanced, unemotional national debate about how to evaluate and which lessons to learn from the Soviet experience has so far been difficult. At heart, only with regard to the collapse of the Union has the political class begun to engage in an open, nationwide debate about which consequences should be drawn from it. This debate, however, is mostly characterized by geopolitical logics of strategic influence and interest rather than by engaging in a more thorough and outright inventory of the situation. On these grounds, it seems that official political Russia is making only the very first steps of a long and probably difficult process of re-appropriating the dislocative experience connected to the end of the Soviet era.
Dislocations as Chances for Political Transformation, Development and Cultural Growth

By re-appropriation, I mean the socio-political and psychologico-cultural process of de-identifying with a *subjective* or *intersubjective* experience through gradually turning it into an *object* of perception and reflection. Developmental researchers in the tradition of Robert Kegan (1982/1991) have described this psychological process as taking a critical distance towards what was taken for granted before, so that it gradually becomes visible as a separate object which the (collective) subject can relate to, reflect about or learn from. Growth, according to Kegan, always includes a process of de-identification, differentiation, and of unhinging out of a former embeddedness, which he calls decentering (losing an old centre of the self) – and of a subsequent recentering around a new system of (inter-) subjective balance. According to Kegan, “development is defined by creating objects (a process of differentiation) and relating to them (a process of integration),” so that on each new level, the projected ambivalence diminishes and we concede to the world a bit more identity of its own. With each new level, the individual thus perceives the world a little more as an entity that is different from and independent of him or her self (Kegan, 1982/1991, pp. 55, 95, 112, 140).

For our topic here, this means that only if such a critical, objectifying distance has been established, can experiences be reflexively re-appropriated, their invisible power be dissolved, and they themselves eventually be integrated on a higher level of learning, development, and being. If, in contrast, a distance of de-identification, differentiation, and objectivation is not taken, the experience in question is likely to continue to exercise power over the (inter-) subjective perception of self and identity; in other words, the memory and the logics of reasoning and interpretation connected to it continue to determine thinking and action as the only available construction of the real (see Wilber, 2006). It is therefore plausible that the deeper a traumatic or the more radical a dislocative experience, the more time, psychic energy, and strength it takes to go through the process of transformation, de-identification, and critical re-appropriation.\(^3\) Transformation is thus conceived here as a substantive *vertical* development in the sense of a qualitative learning and growth process, making critical and constructive use of experiences by transcending and including them into broader, more complex, more differentiated and thus more adequate new solutions, worldviews, orders of reasoning and conceptions of one’s own self as opposed to mere *(horizontal)* “change.”\(^4\) Understood in this way, the empirically observed solutions/worldviews/orders of reasoning and self-conceptions can be analyzed qualitatively, focusing on their degree of complexity, and on evidence of their re-appropriating and integrating past experiences. This analysis can make use of the categories provided by adult development theories as proposed in the next part of this paper.

\(^3\) See Schwan (1997) and Markus Wehner (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung’s former correspondent in Moscow) who wrote that Russia was “a country without memory. To confront the past could reduce the certitude to be on the right track. German Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung appears as a masochistic act, foreign to the Russians. Their past is too cruel and too close“ (Markus Wehner: Hauptsache frei. Russland feiert, egal was, warum und wie, aber am liebsten im Mai, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 4.5.2002).

\(^4\) See Kegan 1982/1991, pp. 118 and 121. This is in line with Stephen Chilton’s discussion of the term development (Chilton 1988a), see below.
Political Culture

Developmental complexity, however, is not merely a relevant category for analyzing public discourse and culture but can also be applied to other factors of political analysis like economic and institutional change or the behaviour of political elites. While an integral approach is bound to take into account all of these dimensions at an equal rate, analyzing political culture appears to be a particularly pertinent strategy in contexts of instability and transition. Since culture is where peoples’ understanding of their behaviour becomes visible, the cultural system in some sense “mediates the micro-macro relationship” of individual systems of belief and action on the one hand, and the social system on the other. Because changes in the cultural system (as part of the internal realm in Wilber’s terms) are for the most part closely related with factors from the external realm, the study of political change, according to Chilton, must start with the cultural system (Chilton, 1988b, pp. 141ff., 154).

Political Culture as Mediator of Micro and Macro: An Example from Russia

As an example illustrating both the complexity of public reasoning and its interdependence with political, cultural, and institutional change (in other words, interior and exterior structural variables and conditions of political development) let me briefly refer to a previous study on Russia’s dealing with its Soviet past (Fein, 2007). Through a discourse analysis (in the tradition of Foucault and Laclau/Mouffe) of the so-called CPSU-trial between Yeltsin and the former communist party at Russia’s Constitutional Court in 1992, I could demonstrate that the discursive struggle for hegemony about the Soviet past had important consequences not only for the re-definition of Russia’s discursive regime on a more general level, but also for the development of attitudes, political behaviour, and for the working of political institutions in the following years. In a nutshell, my analysis brought forward two interesting and connected insights, first with regard to structural developmental complexity, and second, with regard to the relation between interior and exterior determinants of political development. As to the first aspect, it was most stunning that although Yeltsin’s team had all the archival evidence to prove that the CPSU systematically violated both the constitution and its own law, the discourse voiced by the communist camp still “won the game” – and that this was due less to legal and judicial arguments, but more to a discourse based on a specific type of moral and even emotional reasoning. Their arguments involved putting goals above means, ideological conformism above individual freedom and legal responsibility, faith in communist dogma above the requirement of critically questioning alleged “truths” in the face of a contradicting reality.  

5 The term “discourse” is understood here as a “differential ensemble of signifying sequences” giving meaning to our speech acts, thoughts and actions, while this meaning is constantly renegotiated (see Torfing, 1999, pp. 84-85). However, discourses try to stabilize meaning and signifying orders at least temporarily and thus, to establish an intersubjectively binding order of knowledge within a social whole (see Keller, 2004, p. 7).

6 To name only some of their successful discursive strategies, the communists presented themselves as “victims of history” who were not to be blamed for the outcomes of communist rule because, firstly, the communist idea itself was humanistic (“we always wanted the best”), thus claiming that the violent excesses of Soviet history were only unintended side-effects. Goals, in other words, were placed above means. Secondly, they argued that the so-called “simple communists” could not be held responsible for the deeds of the Party leadership, since the former had nothing but a very general idea of what the latter
kind of reasoning as a legally valid option, the Court de facto rehabilitated – and thereby made hegemonic – the cognitive patterns, values, and attitudes of a rather egocentric, partly conformist, partly self-protective discourse.

The political aftermath of this ambivalent “founding myth” of post-Soviet Russia made clear that this had far-reaching impacts. Besides showing the difficulties that official Russia had to come to terms with, with regard to its Soviet past, this outcome also affected fundamental political issues, such as the dominant conception of democracy/political rule and national identity (see discussion below) and thus the overall direction of reform. For with a largely self-referential, self-protective discourse based on an attitude of victimization coming out as the de facto winner of the discursive struggle, more developed discursive positions were marginalized and lost legitimacy. On the level of political identity, this created a serious problem for the official “Democratic Russia,” since even though its leadership still preached democratic change, it had lost an important source for legitimating this change. With the communist past and its vague, “user-defined” notions of justice and democracy rehabilitated, why should the country need any other kind of democratization at all? So, even without gaining complete political hegemony itself, the partly conformist, partly self-protective discourse voiced in the context of the trial in 1992, along with its system of metaphors, images, and cognitive frames, successfully prevented more self-reflexive, that is, more complex (more differentiated and integrative) and as such, more developed and more “mature” political and psychological logics, practices and positions (such as taking responsibility for one’s history, coming to terms with past experiences and traumas and discussing possibilities of reconciliation and reparation) from defining the horizon of meaning. And of course, this immediately affected the functioning of politics on a larger scale.

The second aspect of my analysis therefore concerns the impacts of the discursive hegemony sanctioned by the Court on political correctness, political behaviour, and institutional logics until today. In sum, the “paralysis” of official political discourse on Soviet history between past and future (“like a lift stuck between two floors”) increasingly came to paralyze political development altogether. Since there was no consensus among the leading actors and elites about the value of the democratic institutions introduced by Russia’s first elected president, and thus, about the rules of the political game, formal institutions came to be devaluated in favour of unofficial and extra-constitutional practices of organization and policy making (Shevtsova, 1999, 2003).

This finding is in line with Chilton’s (1988a, p. 110) account of political development, holding social development to be dependent on “a nation’s widespread recognition of its own culture’s ambiguities and contradictions,” and cognitive development to “occur only when the reasoner finds and resolves ambiguities and contradictions within her own cognitive structure.” In contrast, the majority of Russia’s elite either did not perceive an ambiguity at all or lacked the inner strength and/or potential to overcome self-protective logics and frameworks of reasoning through more complex and integrative ones. From a developmental perspective, this evidence can be conceived either as a way of defending a particular system of meaning and action against a more complex reality (Kegan, 1982/1991, p. 225), or as a regression to a less complex and was doing. Thirdly, the communists asked the Court to recognize the “positive sides of history,” thereby demanding, again, to be freed from responsibility.
therefore less demanding level of political existence. This evaluation depends on how the situation in the Soviet Union is assessed. Anyway, the system that came out of the 1992 compromise can be described as a mixture of stage 2 and stage 3 arrangements as described in Chilton’s work further below (Table 2), namely patron-client-relations, clientelism, barter, or “blat.” Similar mechanisms have in fact been identified as widespread phenomena by political analysts of both Soviet and post-Soviet Russia (Pleines, 1998, 2005; Ledeneva, 1999, 2000; Lehmburch, 2005; Schröder, 1998; Volkov 2005).

In a more general sense, my example therefore shows that institutions can function only according to the level of developmental complexity of cognitive structures and habits available to the subjects who sustain them. Even if there are proponents of more complex practices and rationalities within the respective society, yet outside of the institutions in question, the latter are likely to adopt their functioning to the dominant level of development. My study thus confirms Chilton’s statement that “unless the institution’s structure is preserved by people at the appropriate stage, the institution will regress to less developed forms” (Chilton 1988a, p. 88). The following section outlines several adult development theories that appear particularly valuable for analyzing political and cultural transition in general and for discourse analysis in particular.

**Adult Development Theories for Discourse and Political Analysis**

> Nations, as well as individuals, can be categorized according to their level of existence.
> 
> — Clare Graves, 1974

Quite obviously, the assumption of levels of development has interesting consequences not only for psychological theorizing but also for cultural and political analysis and for policy making in general. With regard to my example above, even psychological lay people would probably agree that self-reflexive efforts to confront past crimes and traumas constitute a more complex, more differentiated and thus more developed way of dealing with a criminal and traumatizing past than trying to whitewash, repress, or relativize it, for example by setting it off against the “positive sides of history” or by denying or avoiding questions of responsibility. The theory of developmental complexity underlying this claim is inspired by decades of developmental psychological research and can draw on a wide range of well-established, field-tested empirical knowledge, both from developmental psychology of the individual, such as of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Kegan, Abraham Maslow, Jane Loevinger, Susanne Cook-Greuter, and from pioneers of developmental approaches to (political) culture such as Jean Gebser, Clare Graves, Jürgen Habermas, Shawn Rosenberg, Stephen Chilton and Dana Ward. Their findings are supported also by more traditional research of cultural change such as that of Ronald Inglehart (1977) or Paul H. Ray and Ruth Anderson (2000).

While most of the developmental researchers have focused on a specific aspect or dimension of development, such as cognition, morals, self-identity, values, and needs, due to different interests and assumptions concerning the importance and relationship between these dimensions, they seem to indicate more or less stable and inherently consistent structures of development.
Furthermore, at least Kohlberg’s model has been tested in different cultures with empirical research supporting an intercultural validity of its levels or stages.7

Developmental Approaches and Analysis of Post-Soviet Russian Politics

Being unable to do justice to the variety of research that has already been done in the field, I shall limit myself in this article to a brief review of some of those approaches that appear most fundamental to my own research.

Piagetian developmental psychology of individual cognition

Most fundamental per se, and as a source for many of the more recent developmental approaches is Jean Piaget’s model of the development of cognition which he called a “genetic epistemology” (Piaget, 1970). The model concerned “with both the formation and the meaning of knowledge” (Piaget, 1970, pp. 12-13) distinguishes four major levels (sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete-operational and formal-operational), characterized by a successive decrease of egocentrism and, in turn, by a more developed capacity of abstraction and of integrating more perspectives into one’s outlook on the world as development proceeds. Originally stemming from Piaget’s observation of children’s cognitive development, his findings have proved to be valid and applicable to adults as well. Empirical evidence shows again and again that the fourth stage, classically identified with the cognition of the “mature adult human being,” is not reached by a significant number of average adults during their lifetime.

Piaget’s genetic epistemology is a basic reference in the field, since the general structure and “quality of reasoning exist independently of the object of thought” (Rosenberg, 1988a, p. 89); in other words, because cognition is at the basis of all other dimensions of consciousness development and, in result, of that of more practically relevant interaction capacities such as moral thinking, self-identity, values and reasoning.

Perspectives on social and cultural development

Early concepts of cultural development using categories of hierarchical complexity (see Commons & Richards, 1984) include those of Jean Gebser, Clare Graves, and Jürgen Habermas. Jean Gebser in his master work Ursprung und Gegenwart (1949) has given a phenomenological account of “traces of unfolding consciousness in culture,” identifying five subsequent structures of consciousness, each of which continues to operate in the context of the next higher one as development proceeds. Clare Graves (1970, 1974), inspired by his colleague Abraham Maslow at Union College in Schenectady (N.Y.), theorized that in interaction of internal neuronal systems with external conditions humans develop new bio-psycho-social coping systems to solve their changing existential problems. He believed these evolving coping systems (“levels of existence”) and their underlying motivations to manifest as (mostly subconscious) value systems at the individual, societal, and species levels.8

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Jürgen Habermas (e.g., 1976, 1981, 1983) is famous for his reading of social and cultural history as a process of increasing emancipation from preconventional/archaic and conventional/traditional to more rational structures of thinking and acting in the course of social and cultural modernization and “enlightenment.” Habermas draws, amongst others, on the developmental psychologies of Piaget and Kohlberg and on evolutionary accounts of social organisation and of the history of law. All of these sources can only be mentioned here without a more thorough discussion. An overview of their models and stages is given later in Table 4.

**Neo-Piagetian approaches to reasoning, cognition, and political development**

Despite his unquestioned merits, Piaget has also been criticized for underestimating the role of social environments in the individual’s construction of meaning (Rosenberg 1988a, p. 89). As a consequence, Neo-Piagetian researchers such as Shawn W. Rosenberg, Dana Ward and Stephen Chilton have focused on both the social and political implications of Piaget’s levels of cognition and on the role of what Robert Kegan (1982/1991) has called the “embedding cultures” of each level of development. Rosenberg is mainly cited for his model of reasoning structures, especially designed for analysing political reasoning. As such, the three stages identified by him when analyzing political discourse are of particular interest here.

### Table 1. Rosenberg’s Levels of Political Reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Name</th>
<th>General Stage Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systematic</td>
<td>Context-aware, search for systematic relationships between phenomena; able to reflect subjective and objective conditions of phenomena and their relationships; high ability of abstract classification and theory-building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Causal thinking, search for unidirectional causal explanations; understanding is based on concrete experiences rather than on reflection; able to build abstract categories based on experiences, limited ability to make generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequential</td>
<td>Concrete, proximate perception and understanding; absence of abstract thinking; able to perceive and describe sequences of events without grasping general patterns, causes or interrelations between them</td>
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*Note: Compiled on the basis of Rosenberg (1988a).*

8 Listed from more complex to less complex stages.

The empirical case studies exploring ways of political reasoning as conducted by Rosenberg and others on the basis of this typology confirm the importance of structural differences in thinking and argumentation independently of a particular content (Rosenberg 1988a; Winterstein, 2005).9

8 Practitioners drawing on Graves like Don Beck and Christopher Cowan hold Graves’ cultural stage model to be applicable to conflict resolution in communities, cities, movements, ethnicities, entire countries, as well as defined populations and cultural regions. See: http://ja-jp.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=123355875206.

9 For analyzing political reasoning, the integrative complexity model also has to be mentioned. Developed in the 1960s, it has been applied extensively in empirical studies on political psychology, focusing on the cognitive integration of competing perspectives. Influenced by Piaget, it is not grounded in a normative...
Scott Karl Winterstein, a pupil of Rosenberg, has distinguished four structural levels of discourse in his dissertation (Winterstein, 2005) based on Rosenberg’s and other typologies. His model is primarily oriented towards analyzing oral interpersonal face-to-face communications though (which he basically does through simulation experiments) and is therefore more difficult to use for political analysis.

One of the most elaborated Neo-Piagetian theories of political development was proposed by Stephen Chilton (Chilton 1988a, 1988b, 1991 and Rosenberg, Ward, & Chilton, 1988). Motivated by the experience of the USA’s failure to “import” their model of democracy to Vietnam, Chilton engages in a thorough and systematic discussion of concepts and dynamics of political development including a criticism of those proposed by mainstream political science. He argues that the term “development” makes no sense without a normative notion of “higher” stages of development as psychologically being better integrated, philosophically more moral, and therefore also morally “better.” “To say that one form of society is better than another is to say that if its members recognize the difference, they will try to create the better and not the worse” (Chilton 1988a, p. 12, 14).

Chilton has come up with what he calls a “speculative classification of social forms” (Table 2) in which he associates ideal-typical social institutions with each stage of Kohlberg’s moral and interpersonal development scale. He argues, first, that politics is always connected to moral reasoning and evaluation and that therefore “any theory of political development must contain a psychological theory of moral reasoning (Chilton 1988b, p. 159). Because according to Chilton, “the criteria for the goodness of a political culture are the same as those for the goodness of an individual’s moral reasoning... we can fairly say that for a political culture to be more developed is in fact for it to be better” (Chilton 1988b, p. 157). Second, Chilton claims that the social institutions brought forward by each stage of development are content-independent universal structures, and that therefore “different cultures can develop along different developmental paths – of different content, that is, but not of different structure” (Chilton 1988a, p. 104; emphasis added). His classification, referred to earlier, will be helpful in the analysis of Russian politics.

Finally, Chilton’s and his colleagues’ considerations about the dynamics of and the relation between social and political development processes are of great interest to my own analysis. Chilton insists that “a society” must neither be regarded as an organism which develops as a whole nor its development be conceived simply “in proportion to the average level of its members’ development” (Chilton 1988b, p. 128). Rather, he stresses the importance of subcultures as “cultural analogues of cognitive developmental decalages” and as a sign of ongoing transition (Chilton 1988a, p. 93). He therefore also focuses on the potential differences between the average level of development and the level from which a society is ruled. Based on an analysis of social interaction as the basis of both individual moral and of political culture development, he urges for a subtle consideration of the specific of individual and cultural developmental dynamics.
Table 2. Chilton’s “Speculative Classification of Social Forms”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kohlberg's Descriptive Stage Title</th>
<th>Interpersonal Relations/Forms of Influence</th>
<th>Associated Social Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Universal ethical principles (second-order Golden Rule)</td>
<td>Satyagraha; agape; undistorted communicative action; mutual care</td>
<td>(none currently known)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Prior rights and social contract or utility</td>
<td>Mutual respect; rational debate, fair competition, and scientific testing</td>
<td>Democracies protecting civil rights and liberties; due process; capitalist market economies; “normal science”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Social system and conscience maintenance (“law and order”)</td>
<td>Mutual support of moral system</td>
<td>Modern army; bureaucracy; fascism; tyranny of majority rule; absolutism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships and conformity (the concrete Golden Rule)</td>
<td>Friendship; compadrazgo; romantic or courtly love</td>
<td>Medieval towns; social patronage or client system; late-medieval aristocracy; estates (Staende); dualistic Staendestaat; corporatism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Individual instrumental purpose and exchange (“what’s in it for me?”)</td>
<td>Barter and trading; deterrence by revenge; bribery; corve labor; prebend; curses; feudal fealty and vassalage</td>
<td>Early feudal system; exchange patronage systems; tax farming; hostages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Punishment and obedience (“Might makes right”)</td>
<td>Domination; physical compulsion; threats; seizure by force; extortion</td>
<td>Pecking order; slavery; prison and other total institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even if cultures in some regards appear more flexible in their development due to the dynamics of their social and cultural composition and subcultural decalages,

Stage skipping is not possible when a culture first develops to a specific stage. Just as each cognitive stage must build on the one before, each new level of culture must grow out of the one immediately previous. No matter what the cognitive levels of the individuals are in the society, they would appear to need time to work out the practical social problems of one level of development before proceeding to the next.

One can imagine, however, that stage skipping would be possible in certain other circumstances. If a culture were conquered by a two-stage-lower culture and were shortly thereafter freed, the first culture would be able to spring back to its original stage. The longer the second culture’s domination lasted, however, the less likely such a return would be: children would increasingly orient to the new culture and would be unsure how to relate in the old culture; and the changes accumulating with the new regime would make the exact restoration of the old regime ever less appropriate. (Chilton 1988a, p. 97)

The following considerations are immediately applicable to Russian and Soviet history. Even if, according to Chilton, societies, for example after a revolutionary or foreign take-over, they
…cannot go back(wards) and pretend that (previous upward; EF) changes have not taken place … political cultures can regress if the average adult moral reasoning stage declines, because then fewer higher-stage people are there to support the previous high levels and more lower-stage people fail to understand it. (Chilton 1988a, pp. 95, 97)

This relationship is further elaborated by Rosenberg who adds that extreme inequalities of power have the same effect on adult’s ability to role-play. That is, if socialized in the context of subordination, particularly when that subordination includes little peer interaction, adults will exhibit little ability to role-play, with all consequences, including unilateral respect for authority. Environmental opportunities for role-playing are very much dependent upon power relations. (…) The greater the disparities of power and the fewer the available roles in a society, the fewer the incentives and the more difficult it becomes to step outside one’s own particular position. (Rosenberg, 1988a, p. 170)

At the same time, high levels of morality would be necessary to challenge authority.

Since the primary purpose of this article is to apply these and other selected insights of adult development theory to the analysis of Russian politics, a more detailed and systematic literature review regarding this issue has to be postponed for another article.

**Kegan’s Subject-Object Logics and the Epistemological Self**

While some characteristics may differ between individual and collective/political development, the basic subject-object mechanism of differentiation (decentering) and integration (recentering on a higher level) as described by Kegan is the same in both cases. 10 As the previous section has already made clear, neo-Piagetian approaches for the most part do not limit themselves to cognition properly speaking, but build their theorizing on cross-relations between cognition and other dimensions of development, above all moral reasoning and the development of self and/or identity. The later is important to be included as a widespread element of post-Soviet political discourse in Russia.

While Piaget insisted that “there are not two processes of development, one cognitive and one affective; there are not two separate psychic functions, and not two forms of objects: all objects are cognitive and affective at the same time” (as quoted in Kegan 1982/1991, p. 120), Kegan remarks that Piaget did not fully measure up to this claim in his own work. Kegan has therefore put the main focus of his own research on the development of the ego or (epistemological) self as “that who speaks and/or acts,” holding that “every step/every stage can be viewed as the result of a single, fundamental process of development” (Kegan, 1982/1991, p. 106). This has immediate relevance to our understanding of processes of dislocation and transition in the course of which not only complex reasoning but also self-images and identities are often severely shattered. A fine summary of Kegan’s stage model is given by Jordan (2000).

10 The most abstract model of development is the general stage model (Editor’s note: General stage model was an earlier name; it is now titled the model of hierarchic complexity) by Michael L. Commons and Francis A. Richards (1984) which is also increasingly being applied to political analysis (Commons & Goodheart, 2007; Ross, 2007; Ross & Commons, 2008).
For our purpose, Kegan furthermore provides a powerful support of the interrelatedness of inner psychic and interpersonal reconstructions in that he stresses the crucial role of “embedding cultures” for development – and failing development. Similar to Chilton, he strongly pleads in favour of viewing personal psychological and socio-political development jointly. He calls separating them “a result of theories the basic concepts of which are too narrowly framed” (Kegan, 1982/1991, pp. 134, 283).

Susanne Cook-Greuter’s action logics

Finally, my account of Russian politics draws heavily on Susanne Cook-Greuter’s concept of action logics, an advancement and differentiation of Jane Loevinger’s model of self development (Table 3). Cook-Greuter’s central interest is in ego or self-development or in “how human beings respond to life” (Cook-Greuter, 1990, p. 79). Similar to Kegan, she views self-development as composed of several strongly interrelated components (operative/behavioural, affective, and cognitive): “Each stage emerges from a synthesis of doing, being, and thinking” (Cook-Greuter, 1990, pp. 80, 85). Similar to Kegan, Rosenberg, Chilton and Ward, she sees the human individual as an essentially social being dependent on a “human context,” since both meaning-making and meaning-maintenance are possible only within a socio-cultural community (Cook-Greuter, 1990, p. 81).

As self and identity are largely communicated through language Cook-Greuter measures both of them by an elaborated sentence completion test (SCT) in which, as a matter of fact, the social context can sometimes induce individuals to respond lower than their usual level with regard to issues which put them into emotional stress or in order to avoid uncomfortable answers. This problem can be avoided by discourse analytical uses, that is, by applying Cook-Greuter’s stage model and scaling method to text and interview material.

Table 3. Cook-Greuter’s Action Logics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage #</th>
<th>Stage names</th>
<th>Description of stage characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Unitary (Ironist)</td>
<td>Aware of ego formation, self as construct/in transformation; different paradigms compared; beginning ego transcendence; self in flux; transpersonal self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>Construct-aware (Alchemist)</td>
<td>System of sub-personalities: coherent self-identity, permanent core elf across time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Autonomous (Strategist)</td>
<td>Different selves at different times, several sub-personalities, relativity of self-sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Individualistic (Individualist)</td>
<td>Self as system of roles; clusters of traits with past and future; prototype personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conscientious (Achiever)</td>
<td>Clusters of attributes, simple traits; beginning introspection; separate personhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Self-conscious (Expert/technician)</td>
<td>Several external features; simple roles; rudimentary internal states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conformist/rule-oriented (Diplomat)</td>
<td>Single external feature; beginning comparisons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Toward Development of Politics and the Political

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage #</th>
<th>Stage names</th>
<th>Description of stage characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Self-protective (Opportunist)</td>
<td>Basis dichotomies; single, concrete feature; minimal self description*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>Rudimentary self-labelling (physical), crude dichotomies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Symbiotic</td>
<td>Confused, confounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Pre-social</td>
<td>Autistic, undifferentiated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from: Cook-Greuter (1990, p. 104; 2007).

* The self-protective stage is described in more detail below.

Readers who are primarily interested in my reading of Russian politics can skip the following section and jump immediately to the third part of the article.

Parallels with Discourse Theory and Other Methodological Considerations

In his review of four developmental frameworks and their value for geopolitical analysis, Thomas Jordan has provided a comparative discussion of the main methodological approaches used in the field (Jordan, 2000, section 4). As geopolitical research follows similar trajectories to my own, I refer to Jordan’s overview here. As the most important methodologies to inquire into structures of development in the social and political sciences, he specifies the following.

1. Interviews, either as rather open (but then highly skill-dependant) subject-object interviews (used by Kegan and associates) or as more standardized “Kohlberg-type interviews” where the participant is asked to reason about a particular moral dilemma; Jordan was also experimenting with subject-object interviews via e-mail.
2. Sentence completion tests (SCT, used by Loevinger, Cook-Greuter and others).
3. Simulations in real life contexts (used by Winterstein) or controlled experiments.
4. Text analysis, applicable to both published texts like newspaper articles, official statements, declarations etc. And to transcribed speech and interview material (used by Rosenberg, Chilton and the integrative complexity research).

In line with Jordan, I hold a mixed approach (both in theoretical and methodological regard) to be most adequate to analyzing Russian politics. While interviews and SCT, as compared to text analysis, are very sophisticated and focused instruments allowing rather deep insights into reasoning logics, due to the possibility of probing (SCTs are therefore often combined with interviews), they also have disadvantages. Just like simulations, both are by definition limited to populations agreeing either to respond to interview questions or to fill out the SCT form. Text analysis, in contrast, has the advantage of operating independently of the consent of the subjects of research, and thereby avoids selective results and situationally determined fake behaviour. Especially in simulations, participants sometimes also either have difficulties to play roles they are not identified with or tend to avoid uneasy issues. Another advantage of analyzing existing textual material is the possibility to include high-level decision makers who would otherwise not be available for clinical interviewing (Jordan, 2000). The last point seems particularly important in view of analyzing Russian politics.
Among the strategies of text analysis, discourse analysis has an explicit interest in identifying structures of reasoning. And among discourse theoretical perspectives, those inspired by Foucault’s theory of power appear particularly adequate for social and political analysis because of their interest in the social implications of hegemonic constructions and definitions of truth. Therefore, I will now look at how discourse theory and analysis can profitably be connected with or adapted to theories of development.

In view of parallels between discourse and developmental theory, four aspects appear relevant: first, the open character of both discursive change and development; second, the relation between structures and content of reasoning; third, the conception of multiple levels of development or discourses competing for hegemony within the same society; and fourth, the role of crisis of sense-making as central triggers of change.

The Open Character of Change and/or Development

What many of the developmental approaches in the tradition of Piaget have in common is their notion of human consciousness “as an open, constantly evolving system” of unfolding complexity, “a system which proceeds by quantum jumps from one (more or less; EF) steady state system to the next through a hierarchy of ordered systems.” As articulated here by Clare Graves, “the psychology of the mature human being is an emergent, oscillating, spiralling process marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behaviour systems to newer, higher-order systems as man’s existential problems change” (Graves, 1974, p. 72).

Here, we have a first parallel to discourse theory. Similar to adult development theorists who reject the idea of an end of development called the “mature human being,” discourse theory as understood by post-structuralist and Foucauldian theorists like Laclau and Mouffe also incorporates the idea of discourse as an “open, constantly evolving system.” The posit that humans have an “ever emergent” personality able to go through potentially infinite processes of learning thus coincides with the discourse theoretical assumption that discourses are able to, and actually do, permanently adopt their capacities of problem solving and symbolic sense-making to the respective problems and challenges by gradually integrating new information and novel ideas.

A difference, however, is that developmentalists conceive of the levels they found in their empirical data as vertical stages of growing complexity, instead of as horizontal types of mere pluralist difference. Since on each new level, the individual is able to take a wider, more complex perspective than on the previous level (see my use of the term re-appropriation below), later cognitive/identity/values frames include earlier ones, whereas on earlier, less complex stages, the options of the more complex levels are not available. This also implies that while “at any given level, an individual exhibits the behaviour and values characteristic of people at that level, a person who is centralized at a lower level cannot even understand people who are at a higher level”

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(Chilton, 1988a, p. 82), whereas this is not true the other way round. This, I claim, could be an interesting research trajectory to be included in the analysis of discursive power struggles.

**The Relation between Structures and Content of Reasoning**

While discourse theory in the tradition of Foucault, as a constructivist perspective, similar to developmental theories focuses on the theoretical conditions, social mechanisms, and structural characteristics of discursive struggles and change, it has so far not provided—and not tried to provide—a framework for describing or explaining the (potential) evolution of empirical discourses in a qualitative way; that is, of increasing or decreasing structural complexity. One reason for this may be that post-structuralist discourse theory as a product of postmodern, constructivist anti-essentialism (often implicitly) implies a certain relativism, and therefore tends to operate mainly on the *horizontal* level. This is true both for its interest in substantive and in structural phenomena. In other words, it observes empirical discourses, compares and analyzes their content and interior structures, as well as the strategies put forward by them in their struggle for hegemony over other discourses. As a formal, anti-essentialist theory however, discourse theory does not assume or look for qualitative hierarchies and distinguishing factors other than that of successfully or not successfully gaining discursive hegemony.

At this point, adult development perspectives offer additional insights by distinguishing more or less complex forms and patterns of reasoning related to consciousness (cognitive, moral, identity, etc.) and cultural development. Their interest being in formal, structural characteristics (*how* does the person think or argue? *How* do they do what they do? *How* do they believe that which they do believe) rather than in substantive positions (which values does someone have, what does the person think/feel/need or do?), instruments for analyzing structural logics and dispositions focus on vertical and horizontal aspects at the same time.

For discourse analysis, this means that the same discursive position can be asserted by people at different levels of reasoning and argumentation – with very different results. It also means that you can talk about the same topic both from various (*horizontal*) discursive positions and from different (*vertical*) levels of perception, reasoning, and argumentation. For example, going to war can be justified by either pre-conventional reasoning (arguing that this might benefit one’s own economic or security interests) or by post-conventional reasoning (arguing that one had to defend certain general principles such as protecting human rights). At the same time, the universal

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12 Chilton more specifically argues that because reasoners are “to some degree susceptible to guidance by +1 reasoners,” it is adequate for political leaders to “reason up to two stages above many of their followers. They must reason no more than one stage above the attentive public” which, in turn, “must reason no more than one stage above the inattentive public, if its members wish to remain opinion leaders” (Chilton, 1988a, p. 82).

13 The only exception I can see is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with its pretension to be critical of power structures in an emancipatory sense. CDA claims that its own emancipatory perspective is a “better,” “more truthful” or more adequate strategy to picture and eventually change social and political reality than that of the discourses it analyses. Similar hierarchical assumptions are sometimes inherent also in other discourse analytical research agendas, implicitly holding post-materialistic attitudes to be more “advanced” or desirable than materialistic ones, for example. In a developmental research design as proposed here, in contrast, these distinctions are explicitly spelled out and put into the centre of research.
principle of human rights can also be used as a post-conventional argument against going to war (since killing people is a clear violation of their rights).

Multiple Levels of Development or Discourses Competing within the Same Society

Similar to developmental perspectives where multiple levels of development are likely to be found within the same social or cultural realm (see Chilton below), in Laclau/Mouffe’s conception of discourse, the social is a realm of undecidability, which is never fully closed. This is why discourses always compete for defining the “empty spaces of meaning” through “decidable hegemonic articulations” (Torfing, 1999, p. 103). So in both concepts, discursive (and other) forms of competition over meaning-making are perceived as being at the heart of most conflicts for political and discursive hegemony.14

Since “an individual, a company or a whole society can positively react only to those laws and ethical rules, steering principles, motivational impulses and educational schemes which are consistent with their actual level of existence” (Beck & Cowan, 1996/2007, p. 31), this also helps to explain why and how certain discourses become hegemonic in a given context by defining the “dominant horizon of social orientation and action” (Torfing, 1999, p. 101) while others, however rational, intelligent, reasonable, or progressive they might appear from the outside, fail in that particular social or cultural context.15 One of the most interesting questions therefore is: How are consciousness development and discursive change motivated and triggered and how do they occur?

The Role of Crisis of Sense-Making as Trigger of Change

Further strong and important parallels and compatibilities between human development and discourse theories, especially in the tradition of Laclau and Mouffe, concern their analysis of successful, that is, transformative or integrative development and of regressions, even though discourse theory, for the most part, does not theorize this distinction. Developmental theorists—at least the normative approaches presented here—agree that every individual starts his or her developmental journey at “level one”16 and can then either move on upwards step by step to more complex, more differentiated levels, or stay where they are. The unfolding of new stages in line with their respective frames and systems of meaning and reasoning normally happens as a slow and steady process of learning, due to changed impulses, experiences and context factors. In an ideal scenario, the capacities of cognition, perception, reasoning, and problem solving grow with the complexity of problems, challenges, and circumstances, provided appropriate embedding cultures are in place. Successful development can then be perceived as a dynamic, spiral-like broadening of horizons, encouraged by individual experiences and social impulses.

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14 In contrast, for example, to Huntington’s thesis of whole cultures competing with one another, it stresses the coexistence of various levels of existence, thought and action within each culture.
15 Considered that collectivities can change the dominant mode or level of their discourse quite easily if their social and cultural composition – or that of their leadership – changes, it becomes clear that discourses, even though they have a certain dynamic of their own, are not fully independent of the consciousness of their bearers.
16 In Piaget’s terms: sensorimotor, in Kegan: first order consciousness, with Cook-Greuter: pre-social/symbiotic etc.
As argued earlier by Chilton, the process of development is similar on the social and cultural levels, at least when cultures first acquire a particular level. In less ideal cases, however, things might as well go wrong, especially at the borderlines (turning points) to each next higher level. If, for some reason, aspects of the previous level are not fully integrated into the next more complex level, the person might develop pathologies at that particular turning point. Here again, theorists of political development have come up with similar scenarios on the collective, cultural level. If social development happens through internal or external crisis or shocks, instead of steady evolution, the society in question might not be able to integrate the extent of new complexity through regular differentiation. In this case, it is likely to follow the opposed scenario of decreasing complexity by stepping back to less complex, but in turn more familiar and thus psychologically more secure levels of subsistence in search for easy answers and emotional reassurance. Such regressions therefore often include the identification of scapegoats and the rejection of responsibility.

Similar to developmental psychology, Laclau and Mouffe (2000) hold crisis of sense-making (dislocations) to be the central triggers of social and discursive change, rendering necessary new (in developmental terms), more complex discourses in order to cognitively organize and symbolically frame the problems or events which the old dominant discourses were not able to integrate any more. An example would be the (partial) dislocation of the neo-liberal growth model in result of the oil crisis in the 1970s, followed by a more radical questioning of the limits of growth and a growing interest in ecological issues, or the discursive struggle leading to a delegitimization and eventual end to apartheid in South Africa. Laclau and Mouffe even consider dislocations to be inherent parts (or at least possibilities) of any discourse, since in an essentially contingent social realm, they argue, discursive identities are never fully closed (Laclau, 1990).

Thus, both cognitive frames and discourses are likely to change with the social circumstances, experiences, and challenges they are confronted with. However, compared to Laclau and Mouffe’s rather formal theory of discursive change which does not systematically deal with the question of complexity, sophistication, and sustainability of discursive sense-making strategies, adult development theories put an additional focus on the direction of change on a vertical axis of complexity. This appears to be particularly relevant for analyzing the situation in contexts of transition like that in Russia. In sum, developmental psychology perspectives either go beyond or provide a theoretical grounding for what at least part of discourse analysis is already doing. They thus help to explain that the more complex the challenges, the more complex the cognitive frames, coping mechanisms, and sense-making-strategies have to be in order to internally cope with, to discursively frame and to externally solve the respective problems satisfactorily – and this means: sustainably.

If, in contrast, the (ideal) trajectory of differentiation and integration is not taken for some reason, both individuals and (their) discourses seek to solve their new problems either with the strategies currently available to them or by (often panic-stricken) resorting to previous, less complex and thus, less demanding strategies in order to avoid chaos, dis-integration, or loss of identity. My claim is that this is roughly what is happening in post-Soviet Russia.
Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia Viewed from an Integral, Developmental Perspective

From a perspective of adult development theory, politics and political discourse in Russia can be analyzed not only horizontally, that is, as different ideological positions competing for discursive and political hegemony, but also vertically, as different cognitive, self or value structures competing for cultural hegemony in a broader sense. In this respect, I agree with Jordan’s strategy to assume various dimensions of consciousness as equally relevant basic units of analysis rather than limiting the analysis to one single model and/or method (Jordan, 2000, p. 29). In any of these dimensions and research trajectories, an integral analysis focussing on developmental dynamics would try to answer at least the following questions:

− Which developmental stage (of cognition, self, identity, reasoning or action) do particular utterances, arguments or practices operate on? Which of the typical structural logics and patterns frame discursive utterances and political positions?
− On which level of developmental complexity is the dominant mode of discourse and political action located? And what level is the respective collective ruled on?
− What do the interaction processes between discourses look like?
− What use is made of dislocations? Are they consciously used for upward developments or do they rather result in downward regressions? Do discourses rather tend to gain or to lose developmental complexity?

The following section is guided by these questions, making reference to the categories offered by the approaches introduced in the second part of this article. On this basis, I will discuss to what extent the three non-digested aspects of dislocation mentioned above (collapse of the Soviet state, ideology, and system of political power) are still influential with regard to the three central corresponding issues on the social and political agenda of post-Soviet Russia: international status, national identity, and political power/democratic rule. In any of these issues, the transformation of politics and political discourse can be conceived as a function of how and to what extent the experiences of Soviet times have been re-appropriated: in other words, integrated into individual and cultural sense-making. And in any of them, such re-appropriation has so far been very limited. Rather, I claim that self-protective logics of reasoning and action have come to function as a strategy to avoid a more differentiated confrontation with the after-effects of these dislocations and with the Soviet past in general, at least during the past ten years.

In view of explaining political development and change in post-Soviet Russia, a preliminary account of developmental dynamics in the Soviet Union is indispensable. Together with the character and consequences of post-Soviet transition, it can help to explain why Russian politics “took refuge” in a self-protective logic of sense-making. Making solid claims about empirical cognitive, cultural, self/identity and value structures and their dynamics in Soviet and post-Soviet politics and society would require a larger research project17 which is why the following considerations should be regarded primarily as intuitive, integrally informed “educated guesses.”

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17 Even though the levels identified by adult development research across cultures and time can be considered as solid and reliable analytical categories, their unfailing identification in a concrete data set requires a high amount of schooling and experience. For a critical discussion of models, metrics and measurement in developmental psychology research see Stein and Heikkinen (2009).
A Developmental Reading of Social and Cultural Dynamics in Soviet and Post-Soviet History and Society

The Soviet regime, even though it made appeal to modern, universalist values such as social and political justice, equality, and solidarity, and drew its legitimacy to a large extent from these values—which is why, by the way, it was admired as a moral ideal by an impressive number of western intellectuals—was organized quite hierarchically. Ideally speaking, it was an absolutistic regime ruled by truth and dogma (See Table 2). While striving to overcome traditional Russia’s Orthodox culture, it replaced it with a new tradition, communist orthodoxy. So even though the Bolshevik leaders were promoting universalist values and huge modernization projects, the brutality with which they cracked down on opponents to their new and often-changing orthodoxy clearly indicates that they were not operating on the basis of world-centric values themselves (see Table 4), but as an ideological dictatorship, or, in the case of Stalinism, simply a dictatorship of pure personal power. In the categories of Chilton, it would thus have to be located roughly between levels 2 and 4.

In fact, the question if or to what extent the Soviet regime can be explained as a specific example of modernity and/or modernization has been an object of ongoing debate among scholars of Soviet history. On the one hand, the “modernist group” (Stephen Kotkin and others) holds that the Bolshevik project was a typical outcome of modernist thought and the Soviet experience thus an alternative, independent type of modernity. On the other hand, the “neo-traditionalist group” around Sheila Fitzpatrick does not deny that the Soviet Union in its way was modern, but [rather stresses] the “archaizing” phenomena that were also a part of Stalinism: petitioning, patron-client networks, the ubiquity of other kinds of personal ties like blat, ascribed status categories, “court” politics in the Kremlin, the mystification of power and its projection through display, and so on. (Fox, 2006, pp. 535-536)

Similarly, Jörg Baberowski in his brilliant inaugural lecture explains the origins and character of violence in Stalinism by the Georgian clan culture which, as it were, was the embedding culture within which Stalin was socialized, and which in the Gebser/Graves/Habermas-scale (see Table 4, on p. 114 as Appendix) would comply with the archaic or magic levels.

So in this regard, the Bolshevik modernization project, even though it did change in character during the second half of Soviet history, clearly remained a selective one in that it did not allow for “enlightened criticism” and basic freedoms in the realm of political culture and consciousness. Stefan Plaggenborg (2006) in his recent study on Soviet modernity has traced back this important choice in early Bolshevik history to the controversy between Lenin and

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19 According to Fox (2006, p. 36), Shmuel N. Eisenstadt’s concept of multiple modernities “has not yet been explicitly ebraced by proponents of Russian/Soviet modernity” though.
Bogdanov.  

He sees this conflict as an indicator of the “status of modernity of Lenin’s thinking, mental habitus,” and his categories of argumentation, even though he does not explicitly use categories of hierarchical complexity to support this (Plaggenborg, 2006, pp. 49-51). In result of Lenin’s radical position gaining hegemony, the Soviet leadership fought any thinking that was more complex or more critical than what their own orthodoxy allowed, just as it fought the traditional Orthodox culture itself, instead of overcoming traditional value structures through integrating them into more differentiated ones.

Later, when the CPSU’s monopoly of truth began to gradually lose its legitimacy in the 1970s and 80s, this was due, on the one hand, to the regime’s inability to meet its own claims vis-à-vis its population. Instead of social and political justice, the country had experienced extended periods of arbitrary terror and repressions, instead of equality and solidarity, a deep social cleavage between the political elite and ordinary citizens, and relative backwardness in many fields instead of the promised high standard of living. At the same time, the cultural and political models of modern western civilizations which then had already begun to transcend modernity with post-modern values and cultural practices (Inglehart, 1977, 2003; Ray & Anderson, 2000) were increasingly perceived as economically and politically superior and therefore as attractive alternatives. Yet, from a developmental perspective, the crucial problem is that modern (i.e., individualistic, rational, multiplistic) and postmodern (i.e., reflexive, relativistic, pluralist, and post-materialistic) value structures cannot be adopted like an ideology, but have to develop in a process of transcending and integrating all previous, less complex levels of thinking, existence, and motivation. As integral perspectives stress, “in order for higher levels of civilization to be maintained, the enduring contributions of the earlier stages must be in place and functioning” (McIntosh, 2007, p. 47). In Russia, however, with traditional Orthodox culture largely destroyed and communist orthodoxy experienced as a forced, illegitimate, and (at least in some respects) less complex substitute, there was hardly any basis left from which a more integrative and thus more sustainable modern value-structure could emerge on a broader social basis. If to infer from the scarce data on Soviet consciousness, culture, and society, the average attitude towards politics in the Soviet Union was most probably either conformist or self-protective (in Cook-Greuter’s terms), and thus below a “conscientious” traditionalism, whereas Cook-Greuter’s “individualistic,” “autonomous,” or higher levels of development were presumably very rare in the average population. This, in any case, might be one reason why liberal reformers had a difficult time after 1991.

For the first few years of the Yeltsin era, there was indeed a certain consensus with regard to “modern” or even postmodern values like peaceful conflict resolution, banning state ideologies, and promoting individual rights and freedoms, which is why there was hope that Russia might take the path of liberal and democratic transformation. However, these values did not seem to be

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20 Aleksandr Bogdanov was a thoughtful and, in today’s terms post-modern or even integral philosopher interested in the conditions and dynamics of human knowledge and awareness. He rejected the possibility of objective and timeless truth and pleaded in favour of transcending the dualism of spirit and matter through what he called an “empiriomonizm”, i.e., socially organized complexes of experience. See Plaggenborg (2006, chapter 2) and Plaggenborg and Soboleva (2008).

21 Also: “Countries, governments, and cultures must move through each of the stages of development sequentially. Each stage must be achieved, and failure to recognize this may be a major contributing factor to the rise of terrorism and crime in a society” (Commons & Goodheart, 2007, p. 91).
rooted firmly enough to prevent strong contrarious, lower level mental habits and continuities from regaining power over the formal liberal and democratic institutions introduced by the first Russian president (see my example presented in the first part of this article). Without a sufficiently broad basis of higher level, for example conscientious or individualist consciousness supporting them, it is no surprise that at least part of Russia’s social and political institutions were eventually re-adapted to the (less complex) centre of gravity of public consciousness and political discourse. Concerning present-day Russia, social scientists and politicians therefore almost in unison speak of a return to previous modes and habits of rule (Mommsen, 2006; Shevtsova, 2003), even though many of them continue to have difficulties categorizing them conceptually.22

If we take the late Soviet Union to have been a weak stage 4 absolutistic regime (with all the limits of this diagnosis, due to pressure from above, eroding legitimacy etc.), a developmental perspective would probably find elements of regression in post-Soviet politics. An alternative interpretation would be to assume simply a realignment of consciousness, habitual political practices and institutions on the next lower, more familiar and thus more secure level. What makes such an analysis tricky however, is that important elements of modernity and post-modernity are indeed part of everyday life in today’s Russia have even been radicalized (for example in the form of the Manchester capitalism of the 1990s or the cosmopolitan lifestyles of large parts of Russia’s upper class). In this respect, I would claim that a developmental perspective could highlight that notwithstanding both persistent efforts to modernize the country in order to prepare it for the challenges of a globalized world and a social elite that has caught up with and even overtaken the average western citizen in a material sense, modern and postmodern values and logics have neither become the dominant structures of public reasoning nor of political action on a larger scale. Sustainable post-conventional action logics, for example, would also include post-materialist and other post-conventional values, such as critical self-reflection, putting higher weight on good relationships and inner growth as compared to material goods, increasing feelings of empathy, tolerance, and respect for other cultures, social and political minorities and even the rights and dignity of political opponents (see Table 4). The basically materialistic, hedonistic lifestyle of a privileged elite lacking a visible notion of civic virtues, common welfare, and social and political justice can at best be classified as a rather selective and superficial, and therefore non-sustainable, “unhealthy” modernism, if not simply egocentric opportunism. Moreover, their dealing of rights and liberties against stability and prosperity may rather be explained by self-protective logics which seem to be the driving mechanism behind many social and political dynamics in Putinist (and Medvedevian) Russia.23 Before illustrating this in more detail, let us take a closer look at Cook-Greuter’s stage description.

The Self-Protective Action Logic by Cook-Greuter

Susanne Cook-Greuter (2007, pp. 9-11) describes the self-protective stage as follows.

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22 Margarethe Wiest reviews the debate about if Russia should be called an authoritarian regime, see: http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-09-08-wiest-de.html.

23 This is not to say that more complex action logics are completely absent. In contrast, Russia’s old human rights movement, for example, as well as its constantly being ignored by the government, shows an important subcultural decalage.
Self-protective people see the world only from the perspective of their own needs and wants. They are as yet incapable of insight into themselves or others in a psychological sense. This is why they are generally wary of others’ intentions and assume the worst. Everything to them is a war of wills, and life a zero-sum game. Their ‘I win, you lose’ mentality inevitably causes friction and hurt feelings wherever they go, especially with others at more conventional stages. In turn, others experience self-protective people often as manipulative and exploitative, because in their perspective, the only way one can get what one wants is by controlling others and protecting oneself.

Self-protective adults are careful to maintain their essentially fragile selves which are not yet ‘separate adult selves,’ but synonymous with one’s will, ideas, wishes. Therefore, this stage also has only a rudimentary notion of others as separate people or of conscious social interaction. ‘If I understand what others are after, I can better manipulate them to get what I want,’ so they think. Conversely, they assume that if others knew what you wanted, they would have power over you. Consequently, they need to resist the will of others, to test their limits and to assert their own control. Moreover, self-respect is experienced in relation to the amount of control one can achieve in opposition to others. The self may be felt as having two sides, an inner real self, and an outer self or ‘a false face’ in order to protect oneself.

Self-protective individuals often think they are the odd person out. They feel isolated, but do not know how to relate to others differently. ‘It’s always me against the rest.’ This creates a self-perpetuating dynamic of very low trust and hyper-vigilance. This is why persons at this level often ‘get into trouble.’ Trouble happens inadvertently when you cross a boundary. Self-protective folks try to look out for trouble and then to avoid its consequences. Rather, when they lose a test of will, or overstep a boundary, they see the cause as outside themselves, getting frustrated and tending to show free-flowing anger and hostility. Others are to blame, never oneself.

Self-protective people do not understand subtle human interactions that are not based on power. Their relationships with others are volatile. Friendships blow up easily. Feelings are externalized and projected outward. We see little expression or reflection on their own emotions both because of a lack of insight as well as for self-protection. Showing weakness of any kind is dangerous. “The more others know about me, the more they can take advantage of me.” Their own anger towards the world is projected outward, and others are experienced as angry all the time. For self-protective persons, the world therefore is a hostile, dangerous place where cleverness and grabbing opportunities are necessary for survival. Hence, self-protective people also have an expedient morality. Rules are recognized, but only followed for immediate advantage or to avoid punishment. Actions are only bad, if one is caught and punished. When caught, they are shameless and show little remorse. They do not feel responsible for failure or trouble they cause because they do not yet understand the connection between action and consequences, that is, linear causality. Blaming others for one’s shortcomings is a way to protect oneself. Self-protective people are also called opportunistic because of their self-serving attitude as well
as for their nose for opportunities and their energy to go after what they want without
reflection or delay. (Cook-Greuter, 2007, pp. 9-11) 24

The political impacts and functioning of this action logic shall now be illustrated with respect
to the three fields of dislocation mentioned above.

The Foreign Politics of Strength and International Status

While the Yeltsin era had been largely characterized by a lack—or loss—of cultural identity,
due to the numerous forced political and symbolic compromises with the old elites mentioned
earlier and to unconvincing attempts to restore the country’s internal stability and position in
world politics, international status has been a major field of activity—and of success—of
President Putin as compared to his predecessor. With the loss of the Soviet empire continuing to
be a deep wound within post-Soviet political consciousness, the re-strengthening of Russia’s
status as a great power and global player has been one of the most important foundations of
Putin’s popularity in the Russian public. 25 It is perceived as giving Russians back the national
pride and respect they deserve and had been lacking so bitterly throughout the 1990s. This
restoration of Russia’s power and status was based, first, on the country’s largely successful
economic development during the past years, and second, on a foreign policy discourse
increasingly returning to a power-based geo- and “realpolitik,” that is, a thinking in spheres of
geopolitical, economic, and cultural influence, necessarily competing with the spheres of
influence of others. 26

While the European Union’s agreements with former Soviet republics, for example, are
perceived as attempts to enlarge Europe’s influence, and therefore constructed as a threat to
Russia’s position and interests, Russia’s foreign policy actively tries to maintain and enlarge its
own sphere of influence, particularly in the former republics of the Soviet Union. This so-called
“near abroad” is considered as a zone of “privileged interest” where Russia claims a legitimate
right to exercise power and control. 27 While those of the neighbouring former Soviet republics
which have meanwhile become members of the European Union therefore view Russian foreign
politics with great suspicion, urging for more “proportional answers” by the EU, 28 some of those
who have simply become independent states have even come to experience hot conflicts with the
“New Russia” due to this self-image.

24 Quotes drawn and compiled from Cook-Greuter (2007, pp. 9-11).
25 See for example the survey data published regularly in the online-digest „Russland-Analysen“ by the
Forschungsstelle Osteuropa (Bremen; URL: http://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de). It remains to be
seen to what extent the government’s poor performance during the current financial crisis downgrades
this rating.
26 Svedish foreign minister Carl Bildt recently called this „old concepts of power, domination and spheres
of influence“, with power and influence conceived as the power to impose one’s will and/or ideas onto
others. „Wir brauchen eine Ost-Partnerschaft“, interview with Carl Bildt in: F.A.Z., 1.9.2008. Even more
concisely, Condoleezza Rice speaks of a „19th century Russia“ exercising pressure onto free nations.
28 See „Sikorski droht Russland. Für ‚proportionale Antwort’ auf nächste Grenzverletzung“, F.A.Z.,
Viewed from a developmental perspective, Russia’s foreign politics under Putin and Medvedev, as compared to Soviet foreign politics, have changed mainly in that they are not ideological any more, for example in their definition of enemies and adversaries. However, the question arises, in which direction their logic of political action has moved on a vertical scale.

Martin Müller has recently published a discourse analytical account of Russian foreign policy discourse as observed at MGIMO, Moscow’s elite State Institute of International Relations. Using Laclau/Mouffe’s methodology, Müller finds that to be a “respected and influential, independent actor in world politics (with) a prospering economy, and (playing) a leading role in the post-Soviet states” is the main driving force of Russia’s geopolitical identity – or quest for identity. For he argues that the quest for national grandeur is caused by a “constitutive lack (or blockage) of identity” caused by fear of a potential weak Russia (Müller, 2009, p. 218).

Since in this attempt to strengthen Russia’s own position of power and control dramatic gestures, alleged threats, conspiracy theories, images of the enemy, and even the use of illegitimate violence continue to be important means, as if in compensation for the geopolitical power lost with the Soviet empire, I argue that the logic behind this reasoning and behaviour is a self-protective, compensatory one.

This also becomes visible in a certain tendency to make others responsible for problems and conflicts while escaping debates about Russia’s own shortcomings and mistakes (for example in the Georgian conflict or, until most recently, with regard to Katyn). So indeed, Russia’s foreign politics seems to perceive and construct the world solely through the lens of Russian needs and wishes instead of taking more complex perspectives, accepting own weaknesses or showing empathy. Moreover, a less self-defensive attitude towards the countries of Russia’s “near abroad” would imply a more self-critical attitude, the preparation to admit past mistakes and trespasses and to eventually come to terms with them, in other words to critically re-appropriate and emotionally integrate the collapse of the Soviet Union and its imperial relation towards neighbouring states. According to Cook-Greuter however, due to hurt feelings of security or to unconfronted angst and trauma, the self-protective identity is usually too weak to allow a similar, more differentiated behaviour. Consequently, these issues would necessarily have to be addressed in order to allow for upward development.

**Domestic Politics and Political Rule**

In domestic politics, President Yeltsin’s rule was equally characterized by a rather weak performance. His inability to implement a large part of his own reform agenda was due both to multiple arrangements with the opposition and to his personal instability and increasing alcoholism. In this respect, Putin also set powerful contrary landmarks, beginning with his image of a strong, healthy, and sexy sportsman. During his years in office as president and now prime minister, a largely power-based logic of behaviour and political interaction has equally been

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implemented vis-à-vis internal critics and competitors who tend to be perceived as inherently hostile and to be made responsible for all kinds of problems. Since 2000, the domestic regime has increasingly taken the shape of an authoritarian and personalized rule of power again. Born of self-protective opportunism, it consequently regards liberal and democratic rights and practices—the meaning of which it does not seem to understand—as unnecessary and even dangerous to its own survival. Within a self-protective world perception, and reasoning, the gradual cutting back or even complete abolishment of many of the (allowedly badly functioning) liberal institutions introduced under Yeltsin, in order to stabilize the (Putinist) state and the power of its leaders, for example by restricting public criticism of the government or by curtailing the chances for political opposition, appears as a logical strategy.

To what extent was the Soviet experience re-appropriated in this field? While Yeltsin’s efforts to build up a democratic Russia were driven, at least in the beginning, by his explicit wish to overcome and transcend Soviet political legacies of centralist power by more sophisticated, more liberal, and more complex modes of rule (the success of which truly is another story) the current connotations of the term “democracy” (such as “sovereign democracy” and “vertical of power”) rather point in the opposite direction on the developmental scale (Mommsen, 2006; Schulze, 2007). Putin himself has not only started his first presidential term with calling the collapse of the Soviet Union “the greatest tragedy of the 20th century.”31 He has also repeatedly voiced that extensive liberal rights were a luxury Russia could not afford.32

In fact, threats to social and political stability indeed constitute a social bugaboo after the experience of the chronic instability of the Yeltsin era. This is a reason why Putin’s strategy of stabilizing the status quo is not only supported by a majority of the population and elites (see Rjabov, 2004), but also thought necessary by some external observers. To them, the fact that there is a more or less stable political order apparently is more important than the fact that this order is not based on a social consensus about how to define democratic government.

However, dealing rights and freedoms against (the promise of) stability and prosperity is a clear indicator of either self-protective or conformist logics dominating political and social dynamics. So, here again, what we observe (subject to more thorough study) seems to be either inertia or regression, to some extent reiterating Soviet logics and legacies (bread and stability versus politically “good conduct”), rather than a vertical transformation based on a critical re-appropriation of past habits of political rule and social interaction.

National Identity and Self-Image

Finally, the quest for national identity touches the heart of the problem of dislocation and national trauma. Since in former times, Russian identity had either been closely linked with the Soviet project or, before that, based on Orthodox culture plus Russia’s status of an imperial power, the end of the Soviet Union has often been made responsible for Russia’s complete loss of identity (de Keghel, 2006). Despite multiple efforts undertaken by the government, no clear positive vision of a new national identity emerged during most of the Yeltsin era. The (however

31 See, for example, http://www.owep.de/2006_1_wehner.php.

selective) reconstruction of certain elements of pre-Soviet history (eventually compatible with a more modern path of development) can also be regarded as an indication of Russia’s search for “good traditions” which could compensate for the loss of a “mature” traditional consciousness (McIntosh, 2007) and allow for constructing positive continuities.

In the field of symbolic politics, Putin, in turn, has tried to establish a “Soviet-post-Soviet mixed identity,” combining, for example, the tsarist flag with the music of the Soviet national anthem which was given a new, more neutral patriotic wording (de Keghel, 2006, 2008). The eclectic mixture of Soviet, pre-, and post-Soviet symbols is apparently welcomed by a majority of the population, but persistently rejected by the tiny group of liberal democrats and former dissidents who are being increasingly marginalized by the regime. Anyhow, Putin’s Soviet-post-Soviet mixed identity is itself rather a self-protective than an integrative, transformative project, since it is not based on an open confrontation with Soviet history and some form of public political coming to terms with the past. On the contrary, Putin’s eclecticist identity politics apparently serve as a strategy to protect the collective self from the challenge of losing face in a more thorough, more differentiated and thus more demanding process of a self-critical national re-appropriation of the past. It is therefore not surprising that national identity has been an ongoing, ever-present issue of debate since the collapse of the Soviet Union. With Soviet ideology dislocated but many of the cognitive and political logics of Soviet times “alive and kicking” (above all conformism and self-protection), how could a new, post-Soviet identity possibly develop, and what could it look like?

In the last resort, no substantial new identity (going beyond the rather airy images of power and national strength) is likely to emerge unless a number of uncomfortable questions and memories are addressed, and re-appropriated by society as a whole in a transformative way: that is, through facing the multi-dimensional political, structural, cultural, and emotional legacies of Soviet rule. This probably would have to include first and foremost questions of guilt and responsibility towards Russia’s own citizens and neighbouring states (see Schwan, 1997), as well as of (at least symbolic) compensation of the traumas suffered by millions of Russian and other victims of the Soviet regime. Given the huge dimension of this task, the present tendencies to dissociate and repress “that which prevents the closure of one’s identity” (in Laclau & Mouffe’s terms) through what could be called a regression of the average mode of discourse to a strikingly low level is well understandable. However, as we saw earlier, “societies cannot go back and pretend that changes have not taken place” (Chilton 1988a, p. 95). Breaking out of the self-chosen prison of regression would therefore require an integrative transformation, transcending the currently dominant self-protective, self-defensive logics by wider horizons and deeper (self-) understanding – and, to achieve this, more political courage and the right kind of support.

According to Cook-Greuter, the appropriate way to support self-protective individuals would be to give them respect and, at the same time, to set clear boundaries (including immediate sanctions for trespassing). This would encourage them to let go of their fear for their self-identity and to move forward to observe general rules – the main challenge of the next higher stage in her model. For those concerned, this would mean to connect their self-image and identity no longer

33 Remember Markus Wehner’s comment, the Soviet past was „too horrible and too close“ to be dealt with in the „German way“ (footnote 2).
to winning power games and playing ego theatre, but to being a “good member of…” the international community, for example. Moreover, applied uses of adult development theory not only provide strategies to encourage and assist upward development. Adult development theory might also allow insights into why western politics continue to have difficulties with implementing a similar strategy towards Russia. To discuss these political implications in more depth, however, goes beyond both the pretensions and the limits of this article.  

Conclusion and Future Prospects: 
An Integral Theory about Where Russia Is, and Why

In this article, I have discussed current cultural and political developments in post-Soviet Russia from an angle of several adult developmental theory perspectives. Starting with the observation that even though democratic institutions are in place, they seem to function according to non-democratic logics, I have made several arguments. I claim that Russian politics are still to a large extent determined by the effects of a crisis of sense-making connected to the collapse of the Soviet empire, the question of how to define democratic government, and the lack of a resilient national identity. Neither of these dislocations has so far been resolved and re-appropriated in a transformative manner. To substantiate this argument, I have presented categories and analytical frameworks from various models of adult development, describing general characteristics of consciousness development, particular stage characteristics, and general dynamics and logics of successful and unsuccessful cultural and political development. Of these sources, the developmental logic as described by Stephen Chilton and the self-protective action logic conceived by Susanne Cook-Greuter are particularly relevant to the analysis of Russian politics. I have then also raised some methodological questions which a more systematic empirical study would have to consider. I discussed possible connections of developmental approaches with discourse theory and analysis, a research perspective which is increasingly used in Russian studies. In the last section, I have given a brief account of developmental dynamics in the Soviet Union, followed by a more detailed outline of how self-protective logics are at work and functioning in various areas of Russian politics.

In a nutshell, I suggest that the “regression” of the dominant action logic of Russian politics to a self-protective level is, on the one hand, a reaction to Russia’s failure to reach and materialize a mature and “healthy” traditionalism (Chilton’s stage 4) in the Soviet Union (which wanted to achieve socialist modernity not by transcending but by destroying pre-Soviet traditions). On the other hand, self-protection is also a strategy of the current regime to avoid critical self-reflection, putting into question dear habits and privileges, and taking over responsibility for past mistakes and crimes committed in the name of the Soviet regime. Unfortunately, this also means avoiding a more thorough, that is, more than just technological, and a more integrative cultural and political transformation. Now, if this diagnosis ultimately is to be explained as a regression or as a realignment of politics and the underlying patterns of consciousness development depends on how we assess the situation in the Soviet Union. If we regard the latter as a (“reduced”) stage 4 culture, it would be a regression, if we regard it as a stage 2/3 culture with a stage 4 façade, we would have a mere realignment of inner and outer phenomena.

34 For more ideas on this, see Commons & Goodheart (2007), Ross & Commons (2008), and Müller (2009).
While the regime currently in place seems to enjoy the support of large sections of the population, preferring stability and prosperity to liberty and democracy, the question still arises what all those interested in Russia eventually moving upward on the scale of development could do to encourage and support this. Besides accepting where Russia stands in a developmental perspective and why, the most promising strategy for external partners would be to give Russia much honest respect where it deserves it, and to clearly point out limits of tolerance where it threatens to trespass them. The fact that most western actors, for the time being, fall short of consequently implementing this simple strategy probably has to do with their own developmental trajectories.

References


### Table 4: Stages of cultural and value development and some of their basic political implications*

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<td>integral</td>
<td>global world citizen, existential</td>
<td>systemic, cognitive</td>
<td>accepting existence</td>
<td>existential self-worth</td>
<td>encouraging growth and development of cultures and individuals on any level</td>
<td>fostering human rights and peaceful conflict resolution globally</td>
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<td>cosmocentric, knowledge, inclusion, being, growth &amp; creativity</td>
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<td>relativistic</td>
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<td>Community love affiliation</td>
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<td>pluralistic, personalistic, post-materialistic, universalistic, harmony with all humans</td>
<td>fostering liberal values in politics and economy wherever possible</td>
<td>loses importance and national basis</td>
<td>becomes more substantial: means to establish/guarantee justice and equality</td>
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<td>personalistic</td>
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<td>mental</td>
<td>modern, rational, reflexive</td>
<td>multiplistic materialistic</td>
<td>scientism materialism</td>
<td>independence adequacy competence</td>
<td>fostering liberal values in politics and economy wherever possible</td>
<td>trans-national cooperation, community of values, constitutional patriotism</td>
<td>formal: rule of law and of (the majority of) the people</td>
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<td>materialistic, scientific, rational, world-centric (understanding systemic mechanisms)</td>
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<td>mythic</td>
<td>conventional, traditional, imperiaStic developed high cultures</td>
<td>saintly absolutistic sociocentric</td>
<td>sacrifice salvation</td>
<td>order meaning security</td>
<td>often imperialistic (based on culture or ideology)</td>
<td>holy community of origin/language/ culture etc., lead by wise leader(s)</td>
<td>dictatorship/rule of truth and dogma</td>
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<td>magic</td>
<td>early conventions, early state, archaic high cultures</td>
<td>egocentric magic-animistic</td>
<td>exploitation power</td>
<td>(psychological) survival</td>
<td>sometimes imperialistic (based on culture)</td>
<td>clan-based</td>
<td>what family or clan hold it to be</td>
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<td>ethnocentric, interest-based</td>
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<td>archaic</td>
<td>pre-conventional morals</td>
<td>autistic</td>
<td>safety</td>
<td>assurance</td>
<td>Egocentric</td>
<td>national interest ~ soil &amp; power</td>
<td>unnecessary, dictatorship of strong &amp; powerful leader</td>
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Note: The stages of the three theorists on the left of the table are not interchangeable! Alignments are due to graphic imperfection!
* The categories in the four columns on the right are my own interpretation of some political implications of the most central levels of development.
The Superbubble behind “The Great Moderation:”
How the Brandt Report Foresaw Today’s
Global Economic Crisis

James Bernard Quilligan

Abstract: The Brandt Commission Report, published in 1980, broke ground in vital areas. It was the first international body to develop such concepts as interdependence, globalization, sustainable development, and alternative sources of development financing. It grappled with the difficult problem of global monetary imbalances, not in a vacuum, but rather, situated in the Commission’s stance that reforms in poverty, aid, debt, armaments expenditures, environment, technology, trade, and finance will not effectively meet their goals until they are supported by a totally-restructured monetary system. Virtually all sustainable development initiatives since then have missed that need for restructuring.

The Brandt Report warrants this first treatment of a full political economic framing because the world continues to operate with those structural imbalances and faces a global economic crisis. Nations with current account deficits are required by the rules of the marketplace and international institutions to adjust their fiscal balances by paying off their loans. Yet nations with current account surpluses are not under similar obligation because there is no adjustment mechanism for recycling their trade surpluses and currency reserves. Compelling examples of this disequilibrium today are the current account imbalances between the surplus nations of China and other Asian states on the one hand, and deficit nations like the United States and United Kingdom on the other. A mitigating factor is the use of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency, which allows the US to avoid adjusting its deficits on a timely basis. A major global financial adjustment is needed to eliminate the financial and monetary superbubble that has been forming as a result of these deep contradictions in the international system. The Brandt Report anticipated that unless these global imbalances were corrected through coordinated international action, there would be a series of sovereign debt crises, resulting in an emergency monetary realignment. Brandt also demonstrated that any international stimulus program to merge the development needs of the global South, the underused capacity of the global North, and the needs of the entire world for a low-carbon environment, must be directly linked to the restructuring of the international monetary regime, including a new global currency and reserve system.

A return to the principles and analyses spelled out in the Brandt Report is needed now to reform the global economic infrastructure. Brandt’s call for an international monetary conference to address these issues is even more pressing and salient today than it was 30 years ago.

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Keywords: Balance of payments adjustment, Brandt Commission, current account imbalances, dollar crisis, exchange rates, global Keynesianism, global monetary conference, global monetary system, Great Moderation, new Bretton Woods system, reserve system, superbubble, sustainable development, Willy Brandt.

Introduction

I intend for this article to contribute in two ways to this special issue’s theme, “toward development of politics and the political.” On this 30th anniversary of the Brandt Commission’s seminal report, I have attempted to give its systemic insights the full political economic framing they have not been given before. In so doing, I aim to elevate the import of Brandt’s contribution to the level often attributed to John Maynard Keynes’ original—but rejected—proposals at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference for a reciprocal international economic adjustment process. I show how the Brandt Commission’s arguments for a new global monetary system have not only stood the test of time, but also how its predictions have been validated by national and international events in the ensuing decades. For the same reasons stressed in the Brandt Report, my selected focus is on international monetary policy and its relation to the current global economic crisis.

In particular, I establish how Brandt foresaw the structural existence and global implications of a burgeoning superbubble—recently given this name by George Soros—which continues to generate ever-larger global economic imbalances. I contend that during the 1982-2007 period of economic growth with low inflation—which Ben Bernanke has called “The Great Moderation”—Western society was lulled into a kind of complacency by free market ideology that obscured this underlying global disequilibrium. Eliminating the superbubble inherent in the global financial and monetary system starts with recognizing its origins, relationships, and impacts. My discussion traces these themes and weaves them and other meta relationships together through the lens of the Brandt Report.

Such recognitions relate to the second contribution of this article. The Brandt Commission’s systemic analyses and recommendations are as central to restructuring “the political” in economic and monetary policy terms as they are to integrating sustainable development into the global economic system. That integration will be essential in reconfiguring the politics of sustainability, climate change, economic growth, and global wealth disparity to meet the immense challenges of world society in the decades ahead. Thus, in Brandt we have a compendium of received wisdom long ignored yet still vital. I suggest that a return to the principles and analyses spelled out in the report is needed now to address the contradictions which are deeply embedded in the global economic infrastructure. As Brandt demonstrated, efforts to reform economic development will fail if they do not begin at the foundational level of the international monetary system. The structural flaws inherent in the Bretton Woods scheme since the 1940s have introduced incessant dysfunctions into the global political economy, which are reproduced at national and local levels. I show that this complex of interrelationships can be

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2 Editor’s note: In formatting this article, we employed a hybrid of the journal’s traditional use of APA style and the author’s style to accommodate the nature of the material. We used footnoted citations and did not use block quotes.
transformed only by addressing the assumptions, principles, and mechanisms behind the current operating system.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the problem of global economic imbalances and to establish linkages among its various elements, this article is organized into four major parts. The first part provides a general introduction to the Brandt Commission Report, including some of its tangible impacts to date and perennial challenges that remain unaddressed. The remainder follows a chronological trajectory. The second part summarizes the history of international development since 1944, along with critiques of structural inadequacies and explanations of the major monetary and financial influences on the praxis of international development. This includes the shortcomings of modern economic theories and the failure of central banks, policymakers, and analysts to generate realistic proposals that address the structural errors in the Bretton Woods institutions—and how the mandates of these decision makers keep the international monetary system in a state of perpetual disequilibrium. The work of the Brandt Commission and its monetary proposals are set in this historical context.

The third part focuses on present world conditions in three main areas: the exchange rate regime, balance of payments adjustments, and the reserve system. These monetary components, which are at the heart of today’s global economic crisis, are integrated with the Brandt Report’s analytical perspective, policy suggestions, and predictions. The final part takes a look ahead, with emphasis on the aforementioned superbubble, the US dollar crisis, and the vulnerability of the dollar’s status as a global reserve currency. It closes by iterating the Brandt Commission’s call for an international monetary conference and identifies key questions surrounding this world-changing event.

The article integrates historical conditions and the Brandt insights with the present crisis in the international economy and shows how they are all of one piece. It indicates why the challenges that Brandt tackled three decades ago remain the same challenges we face today, particularly if we are to create a new global economic system and avoid a systemic collapse and long period of global stagnation and depression. I’ve tried to show that these economic circumstances are also deeply political, since international discussions for restructuring the global economic system will require significant changes in the global political balance of power. Taken as a whole, the article is an argument for facing into and developing our political capacities at all scales to deploy recommendations like those that the Brandt Commission Report supplied thirty years ago. I also emphasize that these structural changes become only more painful the longer we postpone them.

The Brandt Commission Report

International policy on economic development reached a new threshold three decades ago. Willy Brandt, the former West German Chancellor, began planning an Independent Commission on International Development Issues in January 1977. Humankind, Brandt observed, “already faces basic problems which cannot be solved purely at the national or even regional levels, such as security and peace, development goals, the monetary system, protection of the
environment, energy, and the control of space and ocean resources. The international community has begun to tackle these problems but, to date, very inadequately."³

Brandt’s panel—comprised of twenty-two international political and economic leaders—deliberated on these global issues for the next three years. In January 1980, they issued a report, *North-South: A Program for Survival*. Its comprehensive strategy for restructuring the global economy, including an emergency program to end poverty in developing nations, was hailed by many international agencies, governments, business leaders and civil society groups across the world. The Brandt Report quickly became the best-selling book on international development in history.⁴

Many of the facts and statistics in the Brandt Report are outdated and of little interest now. Global markets have also grown much more sophisticated since the time of its publication. Yet the broad problems of the global economy have changed little in the intervening years and the strategic objectives and principles which were formulated by Brandt’s commission are still highly relevant. The Brandt Report pinpointed “not merely one, but several crises: the crisis of relentless inflation and increasing energy costs, the crisis of dwindling energy availability, the crisis resulting from mounting financial requirements, and the crisis posed by constraints on world trade and on the growth of export earnings to meet increased debt service commitments. Taken together, they threaten the whole structure of our political, industrial and financial institutions, unless we move urgently and adequately to deal with the basic causes” ... “to ensure a sustainable biological environment, and sustainable prosperity based on equitably shared resources.”⁵

As a publicist and adviser to the Brandt Commission during that period, I traveled across the world, consulting with many heads of state, legislators, business leaders, and civil society and media representatives. In 2000, some associates and I created a website aimed at updating the Brandt Report for the opening years of the 21st century.⁶ Looking back from the perspective of the Millennium, it was clear that all of the basic problems that the Brandt Commission had initially addressed—food, aid, environment, energy, trade, finance and monetary reform, as well as global negotiations to find solutions to these issues—were still unresolved and had become only more urgent with the passage of time. This is not to minimize the subsequent advances in many of the areas of international development that the Brandt Report had first proposed. Some of these later milestones include:

³ Brandt Commission (1980, p. 267)
⁴ Due to popular demand, an addendum to the report, *Common Crisis: North-South Cooperation for World Recovery*, was published in 1983.
⁵ Brandt Commission (1980, p. 239, p. 124)
⁶ Brandt 21 Forum (2000)
- Brundtland Commission (1987), which refined the concept of sustainable development;
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), which launched a broad coalition of environmental and development groups;
- Commission on Global Governance (1995), which advanced the concept of a new multilateralism to support the objectives of sustainable development;
- Millennium Development Goals (2000), which set measurable, internationally affirmed objectives for sustainable development;
- Earth Charter (2000), which elaborated the principles and rights necessary for the transition to a global civilization based on sustainable development.

These initiatives and others have furthered our understanding and led to important policy reforms. Yet they have not been nearly enough. Many brilliant programs and projects have been launched, only to be compromised or co-opted by the commercial and strategic interests of businesses and nation-states. Rather than integrate sustainable development into the very structure of the system, policy makers and activists have sought to graft sustainable development onto the present economic system through public-private partnerships and capital incentives. Now that global pollution and climate change have escalated, and the gap between the global rich and poor continues to widen, it’s become clear that sustainable development as it has been practiced will not create the transformation that is needed. Vital as they are, the various reforms of the past three decades have diverted attention away from the deeper systemic problems of the international economy.

The Brandt Report introduced the maxim that reforms in poverty, aid, debt, armaments expenditures, environment, technology, trade, and finance will not effectively meet their goals until they are supported by a totally restructured monetary system. This is the key point that virtually all of the sustainable development initiatives since the Brandt Report have missed. Simply put, sustainable development is a necessary condition for transforming world society—but not a sufficient condition. We cannot expect sustainable development to generate a new economy on its own: the price signals of the marketplace will not create sustainable development at the depth and scale that are needed. It will require new incentives emerging from purposeful institutional change to create a multilateral economic system with sustainable development at its core.

Now, on the thirtieth anniversary of its publication, I wish to underscore some of the major policy areas in which the Brandt Report still has something vital to say—proposals which have been largely forgotten but may yet have relevance to our present generation of politicians, economists, and global citizens. History would not be served if the significance of the Brandt Report were ignored, particularly since many of today’s familiar trends and potential solutions had their origins in this book. It is not widely recognized, for example, that the Brandt Commission was the first international body to introduce the concepts of interdependence, globalization, sustainable development, and alternative sources of development financing in its report and supporting documents. Indeed, there are many dimensions of the Brandt Report that were ahead of their time—yet none as prescient as its proposals for restructuring the international monetary system.
The publication of the Brandt Report occurred at a crucial moment in the history of Western political economy. It was issued just after the political failure of Keynesian demand-side economics and just before the start of the Thatcher-Reagan supply-side era. Frankly, it must be said that in spite of its considerable international popularity, the Brandt Report had little impact on this turn of events. Indeed, its demand-side proposals were the very opposite of the supply-side policies which were soon to become mainstream thinking. Nor did the Brandt Commission anticipate the lengthy period of asset appreciation with modest inflation from 1982-2007, which Ben Bernanke has called “The Great Moderation.”

While the Brandt Commission did not know how long it would take, it was convinced that a continued economic emphasis on national production—rather than the stimulation of global effective demand—would lead to major structural distortions, disequilibrium, and crisis in the global economy. Brandt and his colleagues clearly recognized that without fundamental restructuring, sooner or later the global economy would have to reckon with what financier George Soros has recently called a superbubble—the ever-enlarging monetary asymmetry that underlies individual financial bubbles, like the subprime mortgage bubble that burst in 2007.

Anticipating that the structural flaws in the international monetary system would ultimately lead to irreconcilable global economic imbalances in aid, trade, finance, and monetary exchange, Brandt’s team warned that “the problem of managing the international imbalances of payments is increasing the threat of grave crises in international finance. We have serious doubts as to whether the existing world machinery can cope with these imbalances and the management of world liquidity and debt.” If nothing were done to correct these imbalances, Brandt predicted, a protracted series of financial shocks would result in a major public debt crisis, engulfing all nations. Indeed, the world has experienced the severe fallout from a series of credit-driven recessions over the past forty years, although the expected global fiscal debt crisis is only now beginning.

Unfortunately, few politicians, bankers, or commentators seem prepared to look deeply into the structural causes of these breakdowns. We have been unwilling to see the origins and buildup of the superbubble in the series of modifications to the global economic structure that have

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7 Translated into twenty different languages, the Brandt Report sold over a million copies around the world. But the political momentum behind supply-side economics was also very strong and the proposals of the Brandt Commission failed to capture the interest of Western policymakers.

8 Bernanke (2004)

9 Soros (2008). Soros contends that the superbubble started with the policies of financial deregulation and private investment in credit that were developed during the early Reagan-Thatcher era. My view is that the superbubble phenomenon was already well under way by that time. I suggest that the superbubble had its origins in the policies of monetary deregulation beginning in the early 1970s. The changes in economic policy that took place in the early 1980s merely gave political cover to—and greatly accelerated—the process of credit expansion and the development of asset bubbles which were unleashed when the US took the world off the gold standard in 1971. Many analysts have not explored the real implications of this connection: that the financial deregulation of the 1980s was the direct result of the monetary deregulation of the 1970s.

10 Brandt Commission (1983, p. 2)

11 The term “recession” is usually defined as a period in which there is a general decline in global GDP for two or more quarters.

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occurred over the past four decades. This includes the deregulation of the monetary system (1970s), the financial system (1980s), the trade system (1990s), and the philanthropic/foreign aid system (2000s).

The monetary deregulation of 1971 (which launched this cascade of changes in international economic policy) was triggered by a foreign call on US gold but also had its roots in the rationalization that markets self-correct.12 Given this underlying allegiance to laissez-faire ideology, a genuine appraisal of the world’s mounting imbalances has been obscured by the blind spot of “efficient markets” and “rational expectations” theory, leaving us unable to predict dangerous bubbles. Most people have been persuaded that money is just another commodity in the marketplace, its value determined by the prices of goods and services—which is why we tacitly support the policy commitments of the central banks to ensuring price stability and keeping inflation under control. This conviction has left policymakers and the public in denial about the familiar pattern of debt addiction and consumer spending that has resulted from their governments’ deficit spending and central banks’ oversupply of credit for the stabilization of financial markets—the very conditions which continue to inflate the superbubble.

Although modern society has learned to accept its boom-bust cycles as a fact of life, sooner or later we must face up to the essential problem that causes the economic system to create and recreate these financial crises. It’s time we recognize the entrenched pattern that has played out during every recession since the beginning of the era of international monetary deregulation.13

- Easy credit generates demand that pushes up the value of new financial products
- The distribution of these products is greatly expanded and generates high yields
- Greater numbers of people purchase these financial products
- The financial products are traded at inflated values
- Mispricing creates massive imbalances in trading between producers and investors
- A financial asset bubble builds
- The bubble bursts, resulting in heavy losses for investors, private banks, and financial institutions which have been over-leveraged
- Government treasuries or central banks rescue the affected private banks and financial institutions through fiscal or monetary bailouts (or both)
- A new round of financial speculation begins, since the private sector knows that the public sector will protect it from the downside risks of bad investment decisions through fiscal bailouts by taxpayers

12 Policy makers in the Richard Nixon White House, including Director of the Office of Management and Budget, George Schultz, decided to take the US and the world off the gold standard in 1971 partly out of economic necessity (as described below in “Bretton Woods I: 1944-1971”) and partly out of a deep ideological conviction in free market policies. The philosophical constructs behind the decision to deregulate the monetary system had their roots not only in the economic theories of Friedrich von Hayek and his followers, but also in the schools of behaviorism, logical positivism, linguistic determinism, and ultimately, post-modernism. A full treatment of the ideological underpinnings of the global deregulatory policies which were initiated in 1971 is beyond the scope of this discussion.

13 This general pattern applies to any speculative bubble in history. Unlike earlier examples, however, most of the asset bubbles that have developed since 1971 have not been in commodities, but in financial assets.
- interest rate cuts for savers\textsuperscript{14}
- benefits for unemployed workers
- Moral hazard—the asymmetric incentives of public sector guarantees for the private sector—results in the development of a new generation of financial products with a higher degree of opaqueness and leverage
- This encourages greater credit expansion and risk taking
- A new asset bubble is created over the ensuing years

If this pattern sounds familiar, it should. We have already suffered through a number of these cyclic recessions (including 1973-75, 1980-82, 1990-93, 1997-98, 2001-02 and 2007-09), each one becoming a little larger and more damaging. The monetary superbubble which has been amassing behind these individual recessions cannot be measured in terms of price inflation—which has been the primary focus of central banks during the era of deregulation, despite the obvious structural imbalances arising from easy credit, low interest rates and rising asset prices. Predicting speculative bubbles is not like predicting earthquakes, although this seems to be the philosophy adopted by central banks and policy makers: not much can be done until the destructive aftermath. By keeping the rate of consumer-price inflation low and stable, while ignoring asset inflation, central banks have studiously avoided pricking bubbles. Instead, they prefer to clean up the damage after bubbles burst through interest rate adjustments.\textsuperscript{15}

While an array of critics across the world has observed that our recurring economic crises are caused by deep distortions in the Bretton Woods system, few realistic proposals have been put forward that would end the relentless surge of free-flowing credit and debt-financed consumption that results in asset bubbles, crashes, and economic pain. Current economic policies are still generating enormous trade imbalances, uneven growth, and misaligned exchange rates, while proposals to reduce these asymmetries through higher wages and purchasing power are seldom considered. If central banks continue to pursue an expansionary monetary policy and inflate the money supply, the likely result will be another huge asset bubble in the bond market and a public debt crisis, leading to depression and mass deflationary conditions.\textsuperscript{16} In the meantime, global leaders do not appear to be discussing international coordination for deep structural changes in the monetary system, even though the superbubble that is now forming in the global equity and bond markets has clear monetary implications.

How did it come to this? And what can be done? The Brandt Report, which foresaw the superbubble of a long-term government debt crisis, offers many clues and lessons. Before analyzing present conditions and future possibilities, the monetary proposals of the Brandt Report should first be set in their historical context.

\textsuperscript{14} Interest rate cuts draw savers out of safer investments and into higher-yield investments.
\textsuperscript{15} This was the policy of the Federal Reserve Board under the chairmanship of Alan Greenspan (1987-2006) and has been adopted by many other central banks. The idea that the central bank would come to the rescue of vulnerable private banks and financial institutions (by lowering interest rates and pumping liquidity back into the market) became known as the “Greenspan Put.” Instead of creating stability, these practices contributed to further speculation and continued to inflate the financial and monetary superbubble.
\textsuperscript{16} At the government’s discretion, such deflationary conditions may be countered with hyperinflationary policies.
Historical Background

Bretton Woods I: 1944-1971

After the Second World War, many colonial nations achieved independence from their ruling countries. While this political liberation may have been genuine, economic freedom was another matter. These newly “developing” states still found themselves reliant on the world’s rich nations for economic assistance.

Meeting in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in 1944, the United States, the United Kingdom and forty-two other nations launched a multilateral system that promised to meet the needs of the world’s poor nations for economic development. The post-war economic system consisted of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for crisis lending, the World Bank for development aid, and the International Trade Organization to negotiate and arbitrate the rules of international commerce and trade.17 Along with the United Nations, which was established to create a new dimension of political security and peace in the post-war era, the Bretton Woods institutions were designed to create a new level of economic security across the world. For the first time in history, there would be an institutional framework for recycling international aid and credit in an orderly and stable way. Foreign assistance and loans would flow from rich nations to poor nations, and trade surplus and trade deficit nations would adjust their payments balances for mutual benefit. This new access to aid and credit, along with free competition, open trade, and private investment in the international marketplace, would be enough to lift the world’s poor nations out of poverty and guarantee economic prosperity for all.

These expectations were soon disappointed. In spite of the world’s new economic order, ex-colonial nations remained impoverished and marginalized, stuck with massive unemployment, low wages, and diminished purchasing power. The Cold War between the Soviet bloc and the West also created a complexity of barriers to international trade and financial flows. Still, the Bretton Woods economy had mixed success from the late 1940s through the early 1970s. Employment, economic growth, and living standards—especially for the industrialized countries of the North—improved at a rate unprecedented in history and in a climate of relative economic stability. Much of that achievement was due to the orderly and stable relationships between the different currencies of the international monetary system. The global economy was anchored by a system of sound money, supported by the US dollar serving as the dominant global reserve currency and the IMF facilitating the exchange rates between nations. Foreign central banks were allowed to redeem excess dollars at the fixed conversion rate of $35 per ounce of gold, which encouraged the expansion of world trade and the predictability and security of financial investment. For its member states, this new economic system proved a welcome relief from the massive monetary instability resulting from the breakdown of the international gold standard between the First and Second World Wars. After the social pain and suffering caused by those political conflicts and the Great Depression, the liberalization of the international economy toward redistributing global credit and alleviating poverty was widely regarded as a major breakthrough.

17 In 1947, the International Trade Organization was replaced by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which itself was superseded in 1995 by the World Trade Organization (WTO).
Yet there was a flaw deeply built into the Bretton Woods framework from its inception, a fault which was obscured during most of the 1950s and 60s by the unrivaled strength of the United States as the world’s economic engine and currency guarantor-of-last-resort.\textsuperscript{18} This structural error, which continues to plague the international monetary system today, is that \textit{deficit nations are forced by the marketplace and the international institutions to adjust their fiscal balances},\textsuperscript{19} while \textit{surplus nations have no real incentives to make reciprocal fiscal adjustments for the benefit of deficit nations or for the monetary system as a whole.}\textsuperscript{20} These discrepancies have led to fractious differences among governments over the anticipated impact of interest rates on loans and investments. For nations in deficit, debts must be paid on a timely basis; but for nations in surplus, financial assets can accumulate without time constraint or requirement of redistribution.

The weaknesses of this asymmetrical structure came into focus in the late 1960s when the United States began inflating its money supply to accommodate growing fiscal strains. To fund its “War on Poverty” and the Vietnam War, the US borrowed from abroad. This forced other lending nations (many of which had little interest in the domestic spending of the US or didn’t approve of America’s foreign wars) to absorb some of the inflationary thrust of US expenditures through their own fixed-exchange rates with the dollar. Disagreements emerged between the United States and several member states in the Bretton Woods system, particularly with France, West Germany, and Switzerland.

Investors and multinational corporations, seeking to avoid losses through significant swings in exchange rates, embarked on a huge dollar selloff. As foreign holdings of US dollars increased, US gold reserves dwindled, and the anticipation of a dollar devaluation increased the private demand for gold across the world. Countries with balance of payments surpluses questioned the capacity of the United States, with its rapidly growing balance of payments deficit, to honor its obligation to convert dollars into gold. In these shifting circumstances, markets and central banks demanded to know where they stood. Was their money stable? Was the US dollar creditworthy? Was the Bretton Woods agreement coming to an end? With pressures mounting on the international monetary system, President Richard Nixon suspended the convertibility of the dollar into gold on August 15, 1971. By closing the gold window, the international system lost its monetary anchor and exchange rates were left to float. The international monetary system had been deregulated and a very different and uncertain era was beginning.

\textsuperscript{18} Eichengreen and Flandreu (2008). These authors would add that the underlying reason that the dollar dominated foreign exchange reserves in the post-war era was because the United States had liquid financial markets and no capital controls.

\textsuperscript{19} The exception, of course, is the United States, which is not immediately forced to adjust its fiscal balances because of its reserve currency.

\textsuperscript{20} I use the terms \textit{deficit nations} and \textit{surplus nations} to refer to countries with a deficit or surplus in their current account balance. A current account balance reflects the goods and services a nation imports against those that it exports, plus the net of foreign income, foreign aid, and transfer payments. A deficit nation earns less than it spends, while a surplus nation earns more than it spends. The implications of this for today’s economy are described in more detail below in “Balance of Payments Adjustments” and “The Superbubble and the Dollar Crisis.”
Bretton Woods II: 1971 - Today

Under Bretton Woods I, capital could not flow freely from one country to another because of exchange controls. When the United States decoupled its dollar from gold, the abrupt change from fixed to floating exchange rates put pressure on governments to reduce capital controls and liberalize capital flows. The era of Bretton Woods II, which began with the collapse of the previous system of fixed exchange rates, resulted in loose monetary policy and an explosion in world reserves. No longer bound by convertibility restrictions, central banks were free to create as much money as they wished.

This created major currency volatility for all nations, presenting them with new problems in the management of their exchange rates, balance of payments adjustments, and foreign reserves. Currency instability, in turn, contributed to inflation, slow growth, and unemployment in rich nations. These conditions intensified in 1973-74 when oil-producing nations quadrupled the price of oil. As double-digit inflation, interest rates, and unemployment soared, and exchange rate volatility continued, Keynesian countercyclical policies—based on fiscal intervention in slumping markets—were under challenge. Economists like Milton Friedman and political leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher promoted free trade, unrestricted private investment, and open capital markets, arguing that government bureaucrats could not rival the ability of private markets in allocating capital. They believed that macroeconomic policy ought to be geared toward creating low inflation, rather than full employment.

The major recessions of the 1970s had also affected developing nations. They, too, were severely impacted by oil and commodity price inflation, as well as the rise of broader consumer prices. Their agricultural and mineral exports and domestic incomes slumped and unemployment escalated, making it difficult to build the industrial sector. As foreign investment in developing nations slowed, these countries suffered considerably.

21 Another school of thought contends that Bretton Woods II started about 2003, when the central banks of many emerging nations began to link their currencies formally or informally to the dollar, thus mimicking the system of fixed exchange rates during the period of Bretton Woods I. My view is that the Bretton Woods period did not simply end in 1971 and then restart in the early 2000s. I don’t believe that Bretton Woods should be defined merely as a system of fixed exchange rates. In popular thought, the meaning of “Bretton Woods” is characterized mainly by its original institutions—the IMF and World Bank—which have continued to operate as the world’s international economic institutions during the entire period since the 1940s, regardless of prevailing exchange rate policies.

22 Although little recognized, much of the new political appeal of conservative economics in the late 1970s and early 1980s had its roots in the decision to close the gold window and liberalize the international monetary system. Floating exchange rates, loose monetary policy, the opening of markets, and the abolition of capital controls were all part of a policy continuum which set off an explosion of new credit instruments beginning in the early 1970s. This created the “stagflation” which, as is well known, helped to discredit Keynesian theory. But this new credit also made it easier for lenders to enter the home-loan market, and for homebuyers to obtain credit. This mass availability of credit had a major impact on Western politics, as conservative parties persuaded voters to shun higher taxes and reverse the redistributive policies of the social welfare state. As a result, popular conservative support for supply-side economics grew and national Keynesianism fell into political disrepute in the US, UK, Europe, Canada, Australia and elsewhere.
Under Bretton Woods I, the mission of the IMF had been to monitor the international economy and support the system of fixed exchange rates and stable money, which would promote free trade for the benefit of all nations. Under Bretton Woods II, the mission of the IMF was recalibrated for the era of floating exchange rates and monetary and financial deregulation. The IMF turned into a central planning authority, managing economic policy in developing nations by opening their economies to foreign capital as a condition for receiving cheap loans. But the IMF’s drastic conditionalities on lending—sharp reductions in public spending and domestic consumption, currency devaluations and higher taxes—“tended to impose unnecessary and unacceptable political burdens on the poorest, on occasion leading to IMF riots and even the downfall of governments.”

By the early 1970s, it had become evident that many of the promises of the new international economic system had failed. Aid, loans, and investment were not ending world hunger and poverty—these conditions were growing only worse. A number of economists and policymakers began to call for a restructuring of the international economic system, particularly in the areas of trade, technology, finance, monetary policy, energy, commodities, food, and agriculture. By the late 1970s, many developing countries, disappointed with the prospects of socialism and communism, were looking to a new kind of “global Keynesianism” for answers. Many believed that a restructured international economic system was needed to generate an emergency relief program for developing nations and stimulate the global economy.

Yet North-South discussions were at an impasse. “Between the Bretton Woods and the United Nations institutions, each with their own language and assumptions, there remained a difference of orientation and power. The South had majority votes in the General Assembly which gave assurance of passing resolutions; but the North’s position in the World Bank and

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23 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 216)

24 In this view, rich nations would stimulate the global economy, not through economic policy within their own borders, but by enhancing the economic development of poor nations across the world. Helping these nations would also make them better trading partners for the world’s rich nations, thereby benefiting everyone.

25 The “North-South” metaphor has never been an adequate framework for explaining global economic and social imbalances. Generally, the global North refers to the world’s richer, more developed nations, while the global South refers to the poorer, developing nations. Assigning regional sectors to these classes of economic development is obviously a gross generalization. Besides the problems of geographical anomalies (e.g., Australia as a developed nation in the South), the terms “North” and “South” do not reflect changing circumstances: many of today’s emerging nations, which were formerly developing nations, are still associated with the global South. Although “North-South” remains a useful shorthand for the broad distinction between the extremes of global development, economically and socially, the assumptions behind “developed” and “developing” nations need to be re-examined. (Perhaps a more empirical way of referring to the extremes of wealth is a terminology based on the national current account balance, i.e., “surplus” nations and “deficit” nations. I prefer this terminology because it goes right to the heart of the world’s structural imbalances without moralizing upon the meaning of the economic and social discrepancies, which often frame the world’s rich and poor as abusers and victims and reinforce historical barriers in the international dialogue on development. This is not to deny past injustices, but to suggest that the personal, social, and cultural differences in global economic and social development should find some new means of expression in the international negotiating framework. Recent research and activism involving the global commons has been headed in that direction.)
IMF gave it control over key areas of money and finance.”26 As the dialogue on development faltered, Willy Brandt—the ex-chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany who had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work in East-West relations—was asked by World Bank President Robert McNamara to lead a North-South commission to analyze the current conditions of world poverty and the prospects for international development.

Brandt’s group—comprised of high-level economists and politicians with a wide range of geographical and ideological perspectives—called for an international emergency relief program for developing nations, which was to be supported by a new international economic system. To lift the world economy out of recession in the short term and achieve lasting economic growth, the Brandt Commission advocated that rich nations provide a major stimulus of aid, loans, and technology to poor nations. “We insist,” the commission declared, “that longer-term measures of reform will be essential to the international financial and trading system, without which recovery and growth could not be sustained.”27

They argued that an expansion of markets in the global South would create more production, fairer prices for raw materials, higher wages, and a cleaner environment. In turn, this would benefit the global North by boosting employment through the expanded production of goods to sell to the markets of developing nations. “The large-scale transfers we will propose are seen therefore as measures both to support growth in developing countries directly and to permit a significant expansion of world trade. It is in this sense that we view them as contributing to growth and employment creation in the North as well as the South.”28

The idea of a “global stimulus” didn’t catch on until the past few years. During the period from 1982-2007—characterized by high production, stock market prosperity, and relatively low inflation in the North—few policymakers discussed ideas about boosting economic development in the South to rejuvenate the global economy. Particularly after the Cold War ended and the pace of globalization speeded up, most of the world’s non-aligned nations no longer had the political option of choosing neutrality from the rapidly globalizing economic system. Virtually all nations in Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe gravitated toward the global marketplace, not only for trade and finance, but as the primary means of fighting poverty and promoting international development.29

The span of years from 1982 to 2007 was a time of remarkable growth for many rich and emerging nations, yet the rate of global poverty, social inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change also continued to increase across the world. As the Great Moderation ended in the United States, both the Bush and Obama presidencies abandoned the supply-side ideology of the Reagan era. Each administration embraced old-fashioned national Keynesianism, fostering stimulus bills of $152 bn in 2008 and $787 bn in 2009 to generate effective demand. With the election of a Democratic Congress in 2008 and the increased attention on global warming before

26 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 38)
28 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 68)
29 As many of these nations industrialized and attained stable economic growth, they came to be seen as a kind of global middle class emerging from the lower class of developing nations. Hence, the terms “emerging markets” and “emerging nations” came into parlance in the early 1990s.
the 2009 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, the idea of Green Financing also became a popular platform in the sustainable development community, echoing proposals originally made by the Brandt Commission for “an orderly transition from a world economy and industry based on oil to one that can be sustained through renewable sources of energy.”

The Brandt Report has often been viewed as a form of global Keynesian policy. This is true to a large extent. The report was written just as national Keynesian policy was failing, and many of the Brandt Commission’s ideas were designed to recreate Keynesianism at the global level to make it more viable in sustaining international demand. Since that time, however, the drawbacks of Keynesianism have become increasingly apparent. When he developed his economic philosophy during the 1920s-1940s, John Maynard Keynes was primarily addressing the needs of the world’s industrialized nations for increasing employment and consumption. With the advent of globalization, industrialized economies are no longer as focused on their own domestic markets as they were in earlier years, which limits the effect of large-scale stimulus programs as multipliers of consumer spending for national economic recovery.

In addition, most proposals for global Keynesianism have failed to effectively address the problem of the overcapacity of production. Since the 1970s, global productive capacity has

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30 Brandt Commission (1980, pp. 168-169). A “Green New Deal” between the global North and global South would mean that rich nations would reduce their production, consumption, and carbon emissions, while poor nations would receive credit, investment, and new technology while pursuing their economic development. At the same time, both North and South would reduce reliance on fossil fuels, implement energy efficiencies, create clean technologies, develop renewable energy, clean up natural systems, and establish a culture of sustainable growth.

31 “The [Brandt] report’s simultaneous expansion and internationalism within a framework regulated by governments and international institutions made it a true successor to Keynes’ visionary schemes of the 1940s” (Newton, 2004, p. 118). What were these forward-looking plans envisioned by John Maynard Keynes? As part of the international exchange system discussed at the Bretton Woods conference, Keynes had proposed a new adjustment mechanism—a yearly fee or circulation charge which would encourage trade surplus nations to actively spend, invest, or loan their surpluses for the benefit of deficit nations, rather than hoard them. Although this proposal was rejected by the United States at Bretton Woods, there is much to be said in favor of Keynes’ essential concept of an International Clearing Union and negative interest rates, requiring nations with trade surpluses to recycle their excess. Since the Brandt Report did not broach this topic directly, however, it is best left for another occasion.

32 Unlike other proposals for global Keynesianism, however, the Brandt Report combined economic stimulus for development with comprehensive monetary restructuring. Many recent proposals, like those for a Green New Deal, have focused primarily on financial stimulus without recognizing the necessity for changes in the global monetary system to support that stimulus. Few environmentalists, bankers, and policymakers have seemed to recognize that their goals would be better served by seeking “carbon value” through the currency system rather than a “carbon price” in the marketplace or a “carbon tax” through government policy. Several generations of policymakers and activists have now accepted the popular idea—promulgated by a few prominent twentieth century economists—that the value of money is simply a function of market prices. Brandt’s emphasis on a new monetary system as the underpinning of sustainable development would reverse this entrenched thinking.

33 As David Martin (2009) notes, in focusing mainly on the volume of employment and consumption needed to achieve effective demand, Keynes did not adequately factor in the underlying wealth of labor and natural resources from which that demand arises.
Quilligan: The Superbubble Behind “The Great Moderation”  
outpaced the growth of effective demand, suppressing global wages, incomes, and purchasing power. The more that countries industrialize, the more acute this problem has become. The supply-side policies that produced the Great Moderation—deregulation, liberalization, and privatization—have deepened the crisis of overproduction through easy credit and rising asset prices. These asymmetries in productive capacity are the result of an ideological and political commitment to letting “market efficiency” and inflation reduction sort out the global imbalances between countries with payments surpluses and deficits.

**Brandt’s Monetary Agenda**

While fighting price inflation may be good policy for ensuring stable economic growth, the post-Keynesian overemphasis on inflation has also been destabilizing. Since the early 1980s, when attempts to achieve price stability by controlling money were abandoned, inflation targeting became the new focus of central banks. Influenced by market polemics, many economists and bankers adopted the view that price inflation could be modeled and controlled without paying much attention to the value of money. Rather than meeting long-term monetary targets, central banks would use their own money to determine short-term interest rates and ensure a broad balance between overall supply and demand for the medium term (usually a few years). Thus, instead of seeking to control inflation indirectly, central banks began to aim expressly at price stability.

The fact that these monetary practices have now become mainstream policy does not validate them. Ultimately, the adjustment process should not be the task of either markets or central banks—it should be the task of the international system itself. Markets cannot protect against systemic risk; guarding against systemic risk is one of the main reasons that we have central banks. Yet through inflation targeting for the financial sector, central banks have actually contributed to systemic risk by allowing exchange rates to build up implicit monetary imbalances at the global level. While emphasizing price stability, central banks have also encouraged the huge surges of credit that lead to asset inflation, which is the real source of the underlying global imbalances in saving and investment. As the Brandt Report anticipated, without a way of stabilizing these major financial distortions and asymmetries internationally, the underlying superbubble will continue to build until it bursts and the entire system collapses.

The inherent tension between export-led and import-led economic development is not an easy matter of supply canceling out demand. It is extremely difficult to ensure global economic balance when the domestic economic infrastructure of one group of nations is geared primarily toward production, while the infrastructure of another set of nations is oriented largely toward consumption. What makes this imbalance particularly challenging is that the liquidity in the global economy is already skewed toward global supply and production capacity, which creates instability in the entire system. *A major international financial adjustment is needed to clear the superbubble that has resulted from the different incentives and timeframes in the balance of payment imperatives of surplus and deficit nations—which allows surplus nations to accumulate financial assets without recycling them, while requiring deficit nations to pay their debts and adjust their fiscal balances.*

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*Toward Development of Politics and the Political*
It’s clear that neither global poverty nor climate change are going to be tackled simply through a major stimulus package of aid, loans, trade, and investment from the global North to the global South. Certainly, a global stimulus can provide important short-term economic growth. Yet far more is needed. As the Brandt Report indicated, an effective global stimulus must also be accompanied and supported by a massive increase in income distribution, wage levels, and purchasing power through deep changes in social and monetary infrastructure: for “in the long run countries have to strengthen their capability to sustain development through structural transformation.”34 The Brandt Commission stressed that any international program to merge the developmental needs of the South, the underused capacity of the North, and the needs of the entire world for a low-carbon environment, must be directly linked to the restructuring of the international monetary system.

The Great Recession of 2007-09 has focused the world’s attention on the need for a new monetary system. China, Russia, Brazil, India, France, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis—along with many other states and international agencies—have expressed apprehension about the world’s widening trade imbalances, distorted growth, and misaligned exchange rates. These were the same concerns voiced by the Brandt Commission. “The current monetary disorder, together with the growing tides of protectionism and persistent inflation and recession, could have increasingly dangerous consequences for all countries,” said Brandt. “There is thus an urgent need to establish a mutually agreed international monetary order which would take into account the changes in the world environment since 1944.”35

It’s clear that the path that the world embarked upon at the Bretton Woods conference hasn’t worked and isn’t going to work. It’s time—past time, since these problems have been evident for decades—to think about creating a new international financial architecture, including a restructured currency scheme to reverse or eliminate the systemic errors in the present system. In this regard, Brandt’s team of experts developed a monetary agenda that remains highly relevant today.

“The Commission believes that reform of the world monetary system is urgent and must address itself to the following issues: the exchange rate regime; the reserve system (the creation and distribution of the international means of payment or liquidity); and the [balance of payments] adjustment mechanism as it affects the countries using reserve currencies, surplus countries and deficit countries.”36 The Brandt Commission also called on nations to re-examine the international role of the dollar and to prepare for a new global monetary conference to discuss all of these issues in a comprehensive way.37

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34 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 63)
35 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 206)
36 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 207)
37 Another proposal—closely related to these—is the Brandt Commission’s call for automatic international financing, which continues to be the subject of much international discussion. Essentially, the Brandt Report called for a small surcharge or tax on income, production, consumption, or trade involving exchanges across international borders. New global programs and institutions for sustainable development could be financed through fees on international corporations, international investment, foreign exchange transactions, international trade, international airline tickets, maritime freight transport,
It is worth examining each of these topics now, thirty years after the publication of the Brandt Report, in light of the current state of the world economy. The next section, “Present World Conditions,” will focus on the exchange rate regime, balance of payments adjustments, and the reserve system. The last section, “Looking Ahead,” will focus on the dollar crisis and the need for a global monetary conference.

Present World Conditions

Exchange Rate Regime

The exchange rate is a ratio between two currencies which indicates how much one is worth in terms of the other. It is the means by which one nation’s currency is valued against other national currencies for purposes of trading and exchange. The accounting of national monetary values was fairly straightforward under the system of fixed exchange rates. Since the 1970s, however, when exports and imports began to be invoiced in currencies with widely fluctuating values, differences between the real earnings from exports and the real cost of imports have frequently arisen. These discrepancies have created significant problems for producers and traders, as well as for central banks managing external debts.

Under the new system (or “non-system”) of floating exchange rates, government economists and politicians quickly realized that changes in the exchange rate could be used to manage the domestic trade balance for the benefit of the nation and its producers. Hence, when central banks and governments buy and sell currency in foreign exchange markets, they are largely motivated by the same goals as those of primary exporting nations seeking price advantage in global commodity markets.

All national currency is now fiat—created by central banks virtually out of nothing (since the costs of producing money are negligible). Because currencies are a medium of exchange and not a commodity like wheat or iron ore, their “market” price essentially depends on the decisions of central banks and the confidence of the general public.
of central banks as to how much money to print. Thus, in the era of floating exchange rates, neither exchange rates nor currency supplies are determined by market forces, as many people assume, but are strategically established by a cartel of central banks. When the world economy switched over to these floating exchange rates, central bank interventions in the currency markets seemed like a good way of substituting for the earlier stability of fixed rates. In theory, this manipulation of foreign currency exchange rates promised the kind of predictability and order that the gold standard had provided, but in practice this has not been the case. There are two reasons why the strategic manipulation of exchange rates is not working effectively and is actually contributing to global economic imbalances.

The first reason is financial. During the period of the Great Moderation, most bankers, investors, and policymakers assumed that the new era of credit was beneficial for the economy as a whole. Bankers were happy to extend new loans to investors, investors were profiting, and regulators were pleased to see the banks alleviating credit risk. But easy credit and financial innovation masked the symptoms of the emerging superbubble. Under the old system of fixed exchange rates, banking had been relatively simple. When banks extended loans, they kept them on their own books using rudimentary accounting measures. After the monetary deregulation of 1971, however, banks started selling their credit risk to off-book investors in the growing capital markets. The advent of computers and quantitative methods for managing credit risk also contributed to the proliferation of credit-based instruments using off-book accounting. Without a system of managed exchange rates, accounting standards were blurred and a great deal of ambiguity developed. Although exotic financial products were marketed as the latest form of free-market innovation, many of the new financial instruments such as collateralized debt obligations were never really traded in the marketplace at all. They were valued through the algorithms of complex theory rather than through actual market pricing. As banks lost track of their own mark to market accounting, regulators also lost track of the banks’ capacity to trade and price assets in a credible way. Hence, exchange rates based on these calculations have also misrepresented the real value of assets.

The second reason for the failure of exchange rate manipulation is monetary. In the global exchange rate regime that emerged after 1971, some developing countries have chosen floating or “crawling” exchange rates, while most are linked to a major currency or to a basket of currencies. By pegging their currencies to the dollar, nations like China have to purchase more dollars to prevent their currencies from appreciating, which can lead to inflation. This arrangement is highly contradictory: although their currency values rise and fall with the value of the dollar, the export-driven incentives of nations with undervalued currencies are the very opposite of the import-led model of economic growth in nations like the US. This means that high-growth, producing countries which are pegged to the dollar must suffer the deflationary consequences of any drop in the dollar’s value. If these countries are also running surpluses and accumulating savings, their investment and consumption is less than what it would otherwise be if their currencies weren’t linked to the dollar.

In 1994, China’s central bank fixed the yuan at an exchange rate about 8.28 to the dollar. Since China began generating a large surplus in its trade with the US, it’s been widely argued that the yuan is “undervalued.” Critics say that China should allow its exchange rates to appreciate, which would reduce its trade surplus and allow it to consume more, while increasing
US exports and savings and lowering the US trade deficit. This logic is disputed, however. Some economists believe that an appreciation of the yuan against the dollar could actually cause investment in China to decline, increasing China’s net savings and trade surplus with the US. For its part, China does not think that its manipulation of exchange rates is the cause of global imbalances, which it says are largely the result of cheap money, inflated demand, and asset bubbles in the United States.

Although the large foreign financing of America’s negative current account has been grabbing the news headlines for several years, major global imbalances of this sort are not a recent problem. Over time, the scope of the economic distortions caused by the overextension of credit and the overcapacity of production has certainly broadened, but the issue is hardly new. For several decades, world demand has been in need of rebalancing, including deep changes in the pattern of national and global trade, finance, and monetary activity. The Brandt Commission advised in 1980 that greater international coordination was needed to prevent currency manipulation from resulting in exchange rate instability, distorted capital flows, and prolonged current account imbalances. It said that “key elements of monetary and fiscal policy should now be under urgent cooperative review by governments and central banks so that an appropriate pace of expansion can be agreed on and set in motion, and a better relation among exchange rates be maintained than has recently prevailed.”

The failure of central banks to manage these imbalances through the exchange rate process brings up a broader question. Is the economic conflict today between China and the US simply a matter of resetting exchange rates between the yuan and the dollar? Or is it a larger matter of adjusting payments imbalances between the “surplus” saving of China and the saving “deficiency” of the US?

**Balance of Payments Adjustments**

A current account balance measures a nation’s income relative to its spending. All the trade flows of goods and services, charitable contributions, foreign aid, and other international payments are weighed in terms of what comes in and goes out of the country. Generally speaking, a nation’s current account indicates whether it is mostly saving or borrowing from abroad.

From a quick-glance standpoint, China and the US both appear to be thriving. By the measures of the Great Moderation, the economic relationship between these two superpowers has provided prosperity and economic growth with modest inflation for both nations and many of their trading partners. Yet this growth has resulted from a global economic system that is engineered to create and recreate asset bubbles and trade imbalances. As noted earlier, there are different structural incentives for nations which have balance of payments deficits and surpluses. Through the enforcement mechanisms of the international economic system, deficit nations are required to make timely adjustments, while surplus nations are not required to make reciprocal

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42 Brandt Commission (1983, p. 42)
43 I’m using the terms saving “surplus” and saving “deficiency” here in terms of the financing that is required for domestic investment.
adjustments. Hence, poor nations are obligated to pay their debts or roll them over, but rich nations are not required to recycle any of their surpluses for the benefit of poor nations.

The flaw built into the Bretton Woods system—that deficit and surplus nations must follow these different modalities—has led to two mutually-dependent models of economic development and growth. There is the model of export growth, over-saving, and underconsumption in many Asian nations like China and Japan, as well as Germany and the petrodollar states. And there is the model of cheap imports, low-cost foreign loans, and debt-financed consumption in nations like the United States and the United Kingdom.44 These are two vastly different structures within a single global economy.45 The question is, how did this imbalance occur? Why does Asia save and the US borrow? Let’s start with Asian thrift.46

Since the late 1960s, the terms on IMF lending had been very tough on developing nations. Typically, as a condition for receiving a new loan, a nation was forced to balance its budget, curb its money supply, cut subsidies, and readjust its exchange rates. In effect, poor nations were being penalized for their incapacity to produce tradable goods and services through austerity measures that further eroded their structural deficiencies. As the Brandt Commission observed, “in many cases these measures reduce domestic consumption without improving investment; productive capacity sometimes falls even more sharply than consumption. This is because many developing countries with deficits have a shortage of food or of basic consumer goods or cannot readily shift resources in line with their new needs.”47

Throughout the 1980s, Latin America and Africa experienced a lengthy debt crisis with periodic loan interventions from the IMF, although much of Asia was spared. Well into the 1990s, many nations in Southeast Asia had been enjoying heavy foreign capital investment, rising asset prices, and high economic growth rates. Yet these countries were also running large current account deficits while holding limited foreign reserves. In 1997, asset prices collapsed. International lenders lost their appetite for risk and quickly withdrew their funds. Capital flight began in Thailand and quickly spread to Indonesia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, Taiwan, and the Philippines, causing financial markets and economies to collapse throughout Southeast Asia and raising fears of a worldwide economic meltdown.48 The IMF stepped in with bailouts totaling $40 bn. These rescue packages were tied to drastic economic reforms—cutbacks in government spending, currency devaluations, forced bank failures, and higher interest rates.

Essentially, the IMF imposed draconian measures on these defaulting nations to restore the confidence of the international community in the stability of their currencies. As a result, many

44 This disequilibrium is expressed in the cliché that grew popular during the past decade: “Asians produce products, export, lend, and save; Americans import, consume, and borrow.”
45 As globalization led to greater global economic integration, it also exacerbated the imbalances inherent in the Bretton Woods system. A primary example is the China-US relationship, which is not a case of mutually beneficial dependence, but of unequal co-dependence.
46 The United States penchant for borrowing is analyzed below in “The Superbubble and the Dollar Crisis.”
47 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 216)
48 The financial contagion also spread to Brazil and Russia.
of these countries were forced to restructure politically and financially. The anger against the IMF’s harsh structural adjustment policies was strong and lasting. Chastened by a difficult debt crisis, many of these nations pledged to protect themselves against further speculative attacks and also from having to borrow from the IMF again. Over the next decade, Asian central banks began to increase their savings by accumulating foreign exchange reserves in dollar assets and building up large current account surpluses.

This imperative to save spread from Asia to other nations. In 1996, the year before the Asian financial crisis began, developing economies worldwide were running a combined current account deficit of $78 bn. By 2008, this had turned into a surplus of $4.7 trillion, or about 75% of the world’s $6 trillion of foreign exchange reserves. For some nations, such as the oil-producing Middle Eastern countries and Russia, this accumulation of assets reflects the surging price of commodities. In other cases, surplus nations are manipulating their exchange rates downward against the dollar to boost export growth and increase their currency reserves and current account positions. In both instances, the wealth is controlled by governments, either directly or through state-owned companies, rather than by individuals or companies.

The Great Recession affected all countries. Asset prices and demand for goods and services declined and credit markets tightened. Both nations with current account surpluses, and nations with current account deficits, suffered declines in growth, although to varying degrees. To fight the recession in 2008-09, the central banks in many deficit nations cut interest rates (and some expanded their money supplies), while their governments created massive stimulus packages. These interventions were modestly successful in promoting domestic recovery. By borrowing and spending to raise demand for the world’s surplus output, deficit nations helped prevent the recession from spreading to surplus nations. But for surplus nations, the incentives to run big current account surpluses did not change as a result of the recession. In fact, China, Japan, and Germany ran huge current account surpluses from 2007-09 and seem intent on increasing their savings at the risk of suffering declines in domestic demand and increasing fiscal deficits. Despite (or because of) the stimulus packages created to fight the recession, the current account imbalances among national economies continue to widen and the underlying monetary disequilibrium has become much more pronounced.

Although the recession has dampened demand for its goods, the meager level of China’s 2009 government fiscal deficit and the strength of its massive surpluses indicate that China is set on revving up its exports, expecting a recovery in foreign demand. Other surplus countries also seem to be anticipating that export-led growth and external demand will moderate their withdrawal of domestic stimulus measures and drive their recoveries. But the credit bubble in the deficit nations has not been abated and the expected fiscal deterioration in these countries is still much greater than in the surplus countries. Although the US, UK and Spain spent less, saved more, and reduced their trade deficits between 2007-09, actually shifting their financial balances

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49 Hale (2010)

50 Ben Bernanke observed in 2005 that there appeared to be a “global saving glut” forming, particularly in fast-growing emerging economies and among oil exporters. (http://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/speeches/2005/200503102/default.htm. From this angle, the central banks and sovereign funds of these nations were accumulating their reserve surpluses from excess US consumption.
toward surplus, the fiscal deficits in these nations are still much larger than in surplus nations. Rather than provide a source of global consumption as in the past, countries such as Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland\textsuperscript{51}—along with the US and UK—now represent increased credit risks following years of debt-driven expansion, lack of fiscal discipline, and structural deficiencies.

These internal government deficits—needed to offset chronic current account deficits and sharp declines in private spending—are not sustainable. In effect, surplus countries are still depending on the private sectors of deficit countries to do their borrowing for them. But nations with low rates of saving like the US and UK can no longer play the role of consumer-of-last-resort. Deficit countries simply can’t absorb infrastructure spending or tax cuts that could generate economic growth because of the monetary interest payments on their debt.

Given their large surpluses and foreign currency holdings, surplus nations could provide the engine to get the global economy going again, whether by redistributing their surpluses to simulate demand abroad, or by stimulating demand at home. In the interests of global monetary adjustment, surplus countries like China and other Asian nations, Japan, Germany, and the oil-exporting states, need to expand their economies. This could be done by slashing taxes on consumption, increasing investment in infrastructure and the service sector, stimulating domestic demand, and adopting exchange rate regimes that are less geared toward saving and building up trade surpluses and currency reserves.

The massive monetary expansion engineered by the world’s major economies to protect themselves from the effects of the financial crisis has temporarily reduced the economic pain, but only by deepening the underlying monetary imbalances of the superbubble. The US and European governments have delayed the rise in saving which they require, while China has poured more money into increased production. The undervaluation of Chinese currency—which increases tradable goods production within China—is not only driving trade imbalances with nations like the United States, it is also crowding out traded goods production in developing and emerging markets.\textsuperscript{52} International measures for better regulation are important, but still represent an attempt to preserve the current system of unsustainable growth and overproduction, rather than finding a permanent cure for chronic global excess. Instead of facing the real structural challenge of monetary imbalances, governments insist on reinflating the next bubble, dealing with the symptoms of the illness but not the illness itself.

It is not enough now to ease the pressures on the global economy: the world needs a purposeful monetary design. Sooner or later, there has to be an international agreement for an adjustment process that rebalances the world economy and eliminates the superbubble. Part of the solution is in changing the policies of surplus countries. But it will also require reformulating the international monetary system—which has been responsible for this major misallocation of capital—so that the capital incentives of surplus and deficit nations are thoroughly transformed.

\textsuperscript{51} The fiscal deficits of these nations have been unsettling for the neighboring states of the European Union, as well as for the global economy. The risk of financial contagion from these countries rattled global markets in early 2010.

\textsuperscript{52} Landler (2010). The yuan is undervalued somewhere between 25-40% relative to the dollar and other currencies, according to most estimates.
An international adjustment mechanism is required that will keep money circulating in a stable and predictable way so that it flows to where it is most needed. Because the world’s vast pool of excess savings and the inability to recycle them are at the heart of the global economic crisis, the Brandt Commission stressed that the adjustment process should be placed in the context of maintaining long-term economic and social development. The need for economic and social development applies both to surplus nations, which often restrict their domestic spending on social services and infrastructure while boosting their savings and currency reserves; and also to deficit nations, which bear the burden of adjustment through reductions in employment and public spending while paying down their debts.

“A reformed international system must provide incentives and mechanisms for adjustment by both surplus and deficit countries. The world economy will always display payments imbalances. Since deficits have their counterpart in surpluses, a reformed system must ensure that both surplus and deficit countries have some obligation to adjust. In the past, it was only when deficit countries turned to the IMF for credit that adjustment mechanisms were internationally enforced. Means should therefore be devised, through the IMF or otherwise, to encourage countries in current account surpluses to make long-term loans to deficit countries that are undertaking needed adjustment.”

Reserve System

International reserves are the means of making international payments and managing liquidity. Reserves are generally authorized by central banks and held by treasuries as a stock of international purchasing power. Since 1944, the US dollar has been the world’s reserve currency, which individual nations may (or may not) choose to become part of their reserve assets.

There is no automatic mechanism for keeping these reserves in balance on a global basis. Because of the structural error in the Bretton Woods system—that adjustment imperatives for balance of payments differ for deficit and surplus countries—internal reserves can be used either to finance balance of payments deficits or to store “surplus” savings. When deficit countries turn to the International Monetary Fund for credit, the adjustment mechanism becomes operative and is internationally enforced. Deficit nations are required to make payments on their loans. Yet surplus countries are not under any similar international obligation because there is no adjustment mechanism for recycling their trade surpluses and currency reserves. As long ago as 1980, the Brandt Commission had noted that the expansion of world liquidity was not helping the adjustment process because these reserves were being squandered by the world’s surplus

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53 This is why the new global economic system must be centered on sustainable development, although many current advocates of sustainable development have not grasped the macroeconomic context that is needed to support it. New financing and new technology by themselves will not reduce climate change, create a low-carbon civilization, or meet the UN Millennium Development Goals.

54 Brandt Commission (1980, pp. 213-214)

55 As noted above in “Exchange Rate Regime,” a central bank often buys and sells international reserves to influence exchange rates and stabilize the value of its domestic currency. This enables a central bank using a flexible exchange rate regime to clear excess demand or supply by purchasing or selling a foreign currency. For a central bank that is pegging its exchange rates to the dollar, increases in demand for the currency will push its value higher, and decreases will lower its value.
nations. “Although the aggregate of world reserves has risen,” said Brandt, “their distribution has been highly concentrated and does not accord with any measure of reserve needs.”

The dollar is now about 40% below its value from 1971. At the moment, many countries like China are hoping to minimize the risk that the value of the dollar will decline further as the economy recovers, but they hesitate to sell high volumes of dollars for fear of triggering a fall in its value. In 2008, China expressed deep concern that the gaping US budget deficit could undermine the value of its huge dollar holdings. This has motivated China to call for a global currency to replace the use of the dollar as an international reserve.

Various proposals have been made for a new global currency. The idea has surfaced that the euro could replace the dollar, but several highly indebted states (Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain) have been undermining the confidence of global investors and central banks in the euro and in the political cohesion of the European Monetary System. Some pundits have nominated the yuan for the next global reserve currency and the Chinese government has taken some small steps toward internationalizing it, but China is a long way from developing the deep and open domestic markets necessary for capital convertibility. In the case of both the euro and the yuan, there are misgivings in nearly all countries about allowing a single bloc or nation to control global monetary policy again, as Great Britain and the United States have done previously. Historically, single-nation reserve currencies have encouraged distorted capital flows, misaligned exchange rates, and unstable balance of payments adjustments, contributing to major global economic imbalances.

The Brandt Commission called for a new global reserve currency to increase global liquidity and improve the adjustment mechanism. “It is in the international interest, indeed it is a purpose of the IMF” said Brandt, “that countries should be provided with adequate short-term resources so that they are not forced into measures which may be harmful not only to themselves but also to others by balance of payments pressures which are only temporary in their incidence. For this reason new reserves should be allocated to those countries which are most likely to experience balance of payments deficits and high domestic costs of adjustments, and least likely to be able to finance them from alternative sources. Many developing countries fit into these categories: a low level of development and a high concentration of primary production tend to increase both their export earnings instability and their costs of adjustment. At the same time, they have limited access to international capital markets, and relatively high opportunity costs of reserve acquisition. There is therefore a strong case based on efficiency as well as equity for a larger share of new unconditional reserves to be distributed to the developing countries than is achieved through allocations proportional to the IMF quota system. This is the underlying rationale for what is often referred to as an ‘SDR link.’”

The SDR is a Special Drawing Right issued by the International Monetary Fund. SDRs were created in 1969 to meet the demands of central banks for an orderly increase in official reserves, a decreased dependence on the dollar, and a reduction of global imbalances in money and credit.

56 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 209)
57 Norris (2007). The 40% decline in the value of the dollar since 1971 is a Federal Reserve Board estimate derived by periodically comparing the dollar with a basket of currencies.
58 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 212)
As the Brandt Report explained, “An SDR is essentially a line of perpetual credit in the IMF on which member countries can draw, under certain conditions, to obtain the foreign currencies they need to settle their payments deficits. Its use is limited to central banks and treasuries, as well as the Bank for International Settlements. ... But an SDR has one outstanding feature: it is the only means of meeting international payments which has been established through international contract; for gold and reserve currencies as reserve assets are created by unilateral action (production and sale of the metal, US running balance of payments deficits) and their status is based primarily on custom. The SDR therefore represents a clear first step towards a stable and permanent international currency.”

Although they are in only limited use, SDRs could be especially important in times of national economic volatility, since they allow for the international creation of money and the expansion of liquidity without adding to the global surplus of dollars. Presently, SDRs are denominated in four currencies which are included in a basket comprised of about 44% US dollars, 34% euros, 11% yen, and 11% pound sterling. A full-scale SDR system would allow countries to share the costs and benefits of managing its reserves, as SDRs and domestic currencies are swapped between national treasuries and a substitution account at the IMF. Using a currency basket for an expanded distribution of SDRs would also mean that no single currency holds an unfair advantage.

Yet there are several challenges to the adoption of SDRs. While they have been available for over forty years, SDRs have become only a small addition to—not a substitute for—international reserve currency holdings. In 2008, US dollars made up 64% of the world’s foreign currency reserves, while SDRs comprised only about 4%. Therefore, a broader transition into SDRs—which has been possible since 1969—entails a willingness on the part of the international community to expand their use, which has been lacking. It also means that the IMF quotas governing the distribution of liquidity would have to be altered to create a more functional and equitable formula for SDR allocations. Nor does the IMF presently have the authority, supervision, and independence necessary to function as a global central bank.

A second reason that SDRs may not be a viable alternative to US dollars as the global reserve currency is that SDRs can be held as reserves only by central banks and governments, which means that individuals and companies cannot use them, either in local or global trade. And since the average person could not borrow or spend in SDRs, they would not be an attractive source of liquidity for private markets, banks, and investors. SDRs are simply an accounting unit. While they may be a valuable currency for interbank and intergovernmental exchange trading, SDRs could never become a fully realized global currency since they function mainly as a store of value—not as a medium of exchange.

A third problem is the challenge of China. The yuan does not fully operate as a reserve currency since it is not freely convertible by other central banks that would use it to intervene in

59 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 209)
60 The SDR is the weighted sum of these four currencies, valued in US dollars. Since the exchange rates of these currencies fluctuate, the value of the SDR is recalculated daily.
61 Under current rules, 85% of IMF members must agree to an expansion of SDRs—a challenging threshold for official approval.
foreign exchange markets. Bringing China into the process of creating an equitable monetary system remains problematic.62

A fourth problem is the United States. America has resisted the expansion of SDRs from the time they were created. It’s easy to see why. The widespread adoption of SDRs represents a threat to US dollar hegemony.63 The US literally has a “vested interest” in not allowing an expansion of SDRs (or any other international reserve currency) to take away its privilege of trading in the same currency that it prints.

“The present reserve system is unsatisfactory,” the Brandt Report declared in 1980. “Expansion of world liquidity is erratic in both its volume and its distribution.”64 Yet little has been done to correct these problems, and the monetary imbalances resulting from the

62 Through its massive purchases of US Treasury bonds, China has already demonstrated that it is interested in taking part in the global monetary system as an active player. But China may also be driving a hard bargain toward the creation of a new monetary system. Although it’s still too early for China to play its hand, China’s bargaining position is improving daily. If discussions to restructure the international monetary system were to begin during a time of monetary crisis rather than in advance of such a crisis, China could be in a position to emerge as a monetary hegemon. China has been buying a large amount of world gold supplies, leading some analysts to believe that China is emulating the same path that the United States did in the 1930s, when it purchased the majority of the world’s gold and subsequently displaced Great Britain as the world’s monetary guarantor at the global monetary conference of 1944. Its official rhetoric to the contrary, China must certainly see that appreciating the value of the yuan would help to correct world trade imbalances, and also that many nations—in the East and the West—are eagerly waiting for this to happen. If China promised to abandon its exchange rate to the dollar to alleviate international imbalances, while holding a majority of world gold supplies and making the yuan fully convertible into other currencies, it could attempt to broker an international deal to emerge as the world’s currency guarantor. However, many in the international community do not see this as a desirable outcome, since there is a general sense that whatever currency replaces the dollar, it must not be controlled by a single country. In addition, there are many analysts who do not believe that the world will ever return to a gold standard (assuming that this is what China has in mind), or, for that matter, to any reserve standard that is based on a single commodity. The question is, does China intend to make the yuan a reserve currency? It’s very likely. One possibility would be to issue its own bonds denominated in SDRs, which would enable China to foster a new market for a global reserve currency based on SDR liquidity. Another alternative is for China to slowly develop financial and trading markets for the yuan, gradually transforming it into a reserve currency. While it’s probable that China will eventually create a reserve currency in one form or another, the challenge will be to transform its opaque financial infrastructure into deep and open domestic financial markets and banking institutions through greater transparency, supervision and regulation.

63 The SDR was originally created to function alongside the US dollar in order to expand global liquidity when needed, although this possibility has never really been tested since the volume of SDRs has been limited. Some economists still believe that the US dollar could continue to operate as the world currency guarantor in parallel with expanded allocations of SDRs through the present IMF currency basket (of dollars, euros, yen and pound sterling), although this arrangement could have its own set of problems. Since the dollar is already one of the four currencies in the basket, when it receives dollars the IMF would have to decide to sell them and depress their value, or hold them and risk dollar depreciation. This could lead to a situation in which IMF liabilities were comprised of the four currencies, while IMF assets were primarily in dollars, exposing the IMF to dollar depreciation.

64 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 209)
superbubble have continued to build. Now, three decades later, there is an emerging consensus that the present system, under which the dollar acts as the world's reserve currency, should be subject to a thorough review and that new mechanisms must be established for creating and distributing an international currency to clear and settle outstanding balances between the central banks. Yet it is by no means obvious how to replace the dollar with a new global reserve currency. If the dollar is abandoned and there is no effective substitute for an international payments mechanism, nations may resort to settling their payments on a bilateral basis using their own currencies, as Brazil and China have announced they would do—which is hardly a stable or permanent solution.

An integrated international financial system requires an integrated monetary reserve system. Whatever new currency system is chosen, it should promote the non-inflationary expansion of liquidity and also assist the adjustment process of the monetary system by ensuring that surplus and deficit countries have a similar obligation to adjust. Surplus countries that don’t need additional reserves must be able to direct their allocations to deficit nations which bear high adjustment burdens. A reciprocal adjustment process of this sort would transform the fatal flaw of the Bretton Woods system. But for that to happen, a new monetary architecture is required.

Looking Ahead

The Superbubble and the Dollar Crisis

Since 1944, America has been at the center of the world’s financial system. For over sixty years, most central banks have held the bulk of their foreign exchange reserves in dollars. Because of foreign investors’ faith in the US economy and their seemingly unlimited desire to hold American dollars and bonds as a store of value, US government bonds have supported the value of the dollar, held domestic interest rates to a minimum, and allowed the US to finance its debt cheaply. By importing more than it exports, the United States sends its dollars to foreigners, who return them back to the US through the purchase of stock, bonds, companies, factories, and land. For many years, $2 bn of global capital has flowed into the US each day from global investors seeking safety and stability, good deals, competitive returns, and high growth rates. By relying on foreigners to supply its finance, America has been able to run a huge balance of payments deficit and spend without regard for its debts. The more that foreigners have been willing to invest their dollars in US assets, the more that the US has been able to import cheap

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65 It’s not certain how international discussions on a new currency will progress. Some analysts are proposing a G4 currency basket, comprised of the dollar, the euro, the yen, and perhaps the yuan. The G4 could also take another form, in which these same currencies are not placed in a basket but still share reserve status as independent currencies. Either way, a G4 reserve system is probably not enough to produce the deep changes in the monetary system that are now required. It’s unclear how a multiple currency system would eliminate the superbubble, bridge the imbalances between surplus and deficit nations, and provide for a smoother, more stable and equitable adjustment process. My view is that a multiple currency system would be only an interim solution until the world community is fully prepared to undertake a full-scale monetary adjustment through an integrated currency or currency basket.

66 The notable exception is the Cold War period, 1947-1991, when the Soviet bloc operated its own economic exchange system, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).
products, hold down inflation, enable consumers to keep buying, and fuel worldwide economic growth.

If any other country were to institutionalize its deficit spending as the US has done, the IMF would insist on structural adjustment measures, including government austerity or currency devaluation. Yet because of the dollar’s reserve status, the US has been able to avoid balance of payments problems by purchasing imports in its own currency. Even as far back as the late 1960s, French President Charles de Gaulle was commenting on the unfair advantage held by the United States. The US, he said, was using its position of reserve currency guarantor as a license to print money and finance its debt. As the Brandt Commission recalled, “Since the balance of payments deficits of the United States had become the principal source of growth in world liquidity ... it seemed to have, in General de Gaulle’s words, the ‘exorbitant privilege’ of continuing to finance its deficits through the provision of still more dollars.”

Prior to this, when the US was running current account surpluses, the Bretton Woods nations had experienced little monetary volatility. America emerged from the Second World War with the world’s largest current account surplus and the global monetary system had been fairly stable until the US current account began to slump in the 1960s. When the US ran a negative current account balance in 1971, it was forced to end the gold backing of the dollar. With this deregulation of the international monetary system, the issuance of credit exploded, and the United States, as issuer of the world’s reserve currency, was its epicenter. The proliferation of credit resulted in a “hollowing out” of US industrial infrastructure. As manufacturing jobs left for overseas markets, the US gradually lost the basis of real economic growth. Consumption was now financed by credit, which had a profound impact on America’s current account balance. By 2009, America’s current account deficit was approaching $800 bn, by far the largest in the world.

Given the risks of this huge deficit, why are private foreign investors and central banks still investing heavily in the US? Some investors argue that the reserve status of the dollar will continue indefinitely because it is not affected by the US deficit. The dollar is highly liquid and convertible in both current and capital accounts, and nearly 2/3 of all foreign exchange holdings are in dollars. Since the predominance of world trade, finance, and foreign debt is also in dollars, creating a new currency system would be pointless and enormously disruptive. There is the feeling that, in spite of the recession, demand by overseas investors and central banks will remain steady, foreign investors will continue to look to the US for security, and the global economic system will remain strong. Because of its size, wealth, legal, and political stability—not to mention its highly credible track record for repayment on loans—many believe that there is no reason to fear a monetary meltdown in the US. Since the United States can simply print more money, foreign bond investors are certain they will be paid. While many investors acknowledge the risk, they do not believe that US politicians would let their deficits become uncontrollable. And indeed, the share of US bonds sold at auction has continued to grow.

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67 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 204). Some analysts have attributed the term “exorbitant privilege” to Valery Giscard d’Estaing, who was Minister of Finance under de Gaulle.
68 Index Mundi (2009)
Yet even as the dollar continues to be accepted, the prospect of such a large and persistent deficit presents risks to global financial markets and the global economy. US external debt rose to $3.5 trillion last year and is projected to increase by $1 trillion each year for the next decade. Larger US deficits and higher interest rates are already increasing the global competition for savings and raising serious doubts about America’s capacity to repay its debts. Where is the US Treasury going to borrow this money? Given the rapid pace at which the US is taking on debt, how likely is it that China and other nations—with their own deficits to finance—will continue to underwrite half of the US debt for the next decade as they have in recent years?

If foreigners begin to question buying debts and other investments in the US, America may have to raise interest rates to sustain investment. But with high interest rates, foreign demand for dollar-based assets could slow dramatically. And if foreign investors were to stop funding the US current account deficit, the dollar would rapidly depreciate in value. This would require a further increase in interest rates, which would accelerate government debt, make imports and foreign debts more expensive, and severely impact the American economy.

When the value of the dollar was strong, the US economy attracted investment in spite of the US current account deficit. But without long-term fiscal prudence, international investors have started to ask whether the US can continue to maintain its reserve currency status by engineering low inflation without having to ratchet up interests rates to sustain capital flows. Ultimately, a dollar is just a piece of paper that has value because the government that issues it claims it does and the people who use it believe in it. But the institutions of the US government have been undermining that faith through careless fiscal policy. Now that the dollar is weakening, how long will foreign creditors allow the US to keep running the printing press for the world’s currency before demanding that the US obey the same rules of fiscal responsibility that apply to other countries?

As a result of the Great Recession, public deficits have increased dramatically in many countries. As private credit stagnated, governments were called upon to issue credit and restore the purchasing power that was lost. G20 governments took on the role of spender-of-last-resort, sinking $17 trillion dollars into bailouts and fiscal stimulus to restore banks and financial institutions, which has sharply escalated the public debt. Soaring government debt may be typical during periods of war, but this recent spate of borrowing represents the largest public debt ever recorded in peacetime. Here’s the problem: even though state spending is underwriting private liabilities, these stimulus packages do not substitute for real income growth in nations such as the United States, where huge numbers of high-value production and jobs have already been exported.

In the US, stimulus spending has weakened the dollar, raised the possibility of inflation, and increased government debt to alarming levels. In the past few years, debt burdens in several other countries—notably Greece, Portugal, Iceland, Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Japan and India—have also reached 80% or more of GDP, raising questions about the

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69 Mackenzie and Tett (2010). In early 2010, Moody’s Investors Service, which rates the sovereign debt of nations, warned that the US triple A sovereign credit rating could soon be in jeopardy because of sluggish US economic growth and weak action in tackling the US budget deficit.
sustainability of their public debts and economic growth. But the persistence of the debt-to-GDP ratio in the US is particularly challenging: US government debts are projected to grow faster than its economy for at least the next decade. If the US maintains these huge fiscal deficits, government expenditure will be diverted from domestic public services and investments, and sent abroad in interest payments on America’s surging debt. During the recession, Americans realized that they could no longer take on new debt and personal spending slowed. Yet even if individual Americans continue to increase their savings and use it to pay down their existing debt, it will take at least a decade for US households to reduce their debt/income ratios to safe levels and balance the family budget.

The specter of sovereign debt is already haunting bond markets. Because they are denominated in dollars, even when bonds are rolled over into new debt they will never be fully repaid. This means that when the next recession arrives, the US may be unable to borrow the vast sums needed to cover their outstanding debts. And this puts the United States in a colossal bind. On the one hand, reducing its debt will slow economic growth. On the other hand, sustaining huge deficits by borrowing from abroad to maintain consumption and deficit spending at home will lead ultimately to bankruptcy or extreme currency devaluation.

Mounting government debt will likely trigger the next financial crisis, which would immediately impact the value of the dollar. And a US monetary crash would quickly become global in scope, since sovereign default entails a crisis in the reserve status of the dollar. At the global level, this would deeply impact other nations with current account imbalances and soaring government debt, placing the entire balance of payments system in jeopardy. It also means that the massive adjustment in exchange rates and current accounts—when it inevitably arrives—will be that much more severe.

So how will we unwind the superbubble? Do the US, G7, G20, central banks and the world’s financial institutions intend to create a new economic system before the present one collapses? Or will they leave it up to the marketplace and risk massive financial disaster? In the near-term, the burden of decision rests with the US. It has two choices, neither of which is very enticing. America can either make the tough choice to devalue its dollar—or dither around politically (as it has been doing) and suffer a default. At worst, default could mean debt repudiation; at best, it could involve the restructuring of the terms of loans and interest rates. There is no happy option. The Chinese have a compelling proverb for such a dilemma: “Drinking poisonous liquid to quench thirst.”

**Toward a Global Monetary Conference**

Why did the Brandt Commission call for an international monetary conference? Is this still necessary? Are there any indications of it happening soon? First, let’s briefly review how we got to this point.

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70 The Economist (2010)
71 Mankiw (2010)
72 Qiao (2009)
There is a major flaw in global economic policy, a structural error built into the design of the Bretton Woods monetary system. Although free market ideology has obscured the problem from policymakers and analysts, it has never disappeared. This blind spot has not allowed us to see the period of relatively tame inflation from 1982-2007 for what it clearly was: a series of financial bubbles generated by policies geared toward an overcapacity of production. Our inability to reckon with this emerging superbubble has not allowed us to recognize its deeper structural roots; nor have policymakers and analysts fully realized that the tremors now shaking the pillars of the modern economic establishment are emanating from the long-term suppression of global demand.

Bretton Woods I ended in 1971 when the United States “closed the gold window,” ending the link between the world’s currencies and gold. In the absence of a monetary anchor, exchange rates have been left to float, leading to excessive credit expansion. Under Bretton Woods II (1971-today), the dollar standard has flooded the world with cheap money at a rate faster than the growth of world GDP, and successive bubbles have spread economic instability across the globe. The Latin American and African debt crises of the 1970s and 80s were followed by the Southeast Asian debt crisis of the 1990s. Each of these crises, and many others of lesser magnitude, were caused by a flood of dollars into developing regions from abroad, which overheated their economies and caused them to crash.

In spite of the obvious imbalances resulting from easy credit and high asset prices, central banks have pursued a policy of inflation-targeting rather than using monetary policy to curb rapidly rising asset prices. Efficient market theory—the idea that all participants in the market receive and act on all relevant information when it becomes available—has provided the rationale for these policies. From the perspective of developed nations, these theories seem to have worked. But the period of the Great Moderation, which was characterized by easy credit, low price-inflation, and steady growth, masked the symptoms of the superbubble which was forming within the global monetary and financial infrastructure. In setting interest rates between the extremes of high prices and recession, and ignoring the actual value of money and credit in the process, central banks have typically ignored the signs of asset bubbles until they burst, resulting in financial instability.

It’s one thing to simply say that higher savings in deficit countries and stronger demand in surplus countries will alleviate global imbalances—the reality is far more complicated. Modern states are driven by a global economic machine which runs on only two gears. A nation can create the structural capacity to produce tradable goods and services and generate credit, or, lacking this structural capacity, it can attempt to obtain credit by relying on other nations which primarily produce and trade. A system where credit growth generates economic growth inevitably creates overcapacity, suppresses consumer wages and demand, and allows financial bubbles to build. Market forces do not adjust these structural imbalances. As Milton Friedman observed, “Inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon.”

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73 Friedman and Schwartz (1963). It’s telling that many free market economists, who are otherwise disciples of Milton Friedman, have disregarded the master’s famous maxim. Mainstream policymakers and analysts continue to treat money as though it is a function of the marketplace.
The need for policy change has become evident as a result of the world’s economic integration during the past few decades. As financial markets became increasingly interdependent, international investors have, in effect, been setting asset prices on the basis of global monetary conditions. When asset bubbles are actually driving monetary policy, it’s pretty clear that the tail is wagging the dog. These dynamics must be reversed. Transparency and discipline must be restored. When asset prices rise and cause economic imbalances, even when inflation seems to be under control, monetary policy should be tightened. Central banks should increase short-term interest rates when there are clear signs of financial imbalances. The world needs a monetary regulator to anticipate excessive risk-taking and reinstate a firm link between monetary and credit growth on the one hand, and price and asset inflation on the other. This is necessary to ensure stability both in single countries and throughout the entire international economic system.\(^{74}\)

Without such management, the asymmetric policies of the present international monetary system will continue to encourage surplus and deficit nations to assume different roles and responsibilities. Since many deficit nations lack the structural capacity to produce tradable goods and services, international institutions can put heavy pressure on them to revalue their currencies. Yet there is no corresponding international machinery to prevent nations such as Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and China from keeping their currencies undervalued, running trade surpluses and accumulating foreign exchange, and putting this wealth into “investment funds” which are seldom economically invested.

The superbubble underlying these conditions is a result of the imperatives that the world economic system has bestowed upon deficit and surplus nations. Under the terms of the Bretton Woods agreement, the IMF has the legal powers to ensure that deficit nations adjust their fiscal balances and pay their debts, but has no such ability to ensure that surplus nations accept responsibility for facilitating their own adjustment process and recycle their accumulated financial assets in an equitable and stable way.\(^{75}\) The IMF is unable to link global capacity with global demand. Instead, the global economy must depend on deficit nations to sustain their global demand for the surplus output of the rest of the world. It is evident that the world cannot continue to absorb the excess supply of surplus countries without ensuring greater effective demand.

The recession of 2007-09 demonstrated the weaknesses of the global financial system and the assumptions on which it was built. The dollar has been the dominant reserve currency for more than sixty years, during which period America went from being the largest surplus to the largest deficit nation in the world. With the US now mired in an enormous deficit, the dollar’s role as the strategic reserve currency is in question. It is apparent that the solution will have to be much more than the world’s central banks supporting the dollar through coordinated interventions in foreign exchange markets.

\(^{74}\) Traditional definitions of the monetary system also need to be expanded to include recent generations of ever-complex instruments and non-bank entities that impact monetary decision-making.

\(^{75}\) Phillips (2007). Officially, the IMF is charged with “exchange rate surveillance,” but in practice it is allowed only to publicly identify countries that it believes are unfairly manipulating their currencies for competitive advantage. Thus, the IMF may have embarrassment powers, but it has no enforcement powers requiring violators to alter their currency policies.
The increasing interdependence of the global economy requires international policy coordination, but national interests are still determining international politics. Each national government discusses how a particular global policy will affect its own financial competitiveness and stakes out its position. Then, through the world’s different clubs—the UN, EU, G8 or G20—national representatives meet, discuss this policy, create a joint statement, and call it “policy coordination,” “international coherence,” or “regulatory harmonization.” At these meetings and in the press, world leaders agree on the need for global coordination but rarely commit to binding action and essentially do what they want when they return home.76 Greater global political cohesion is necessary before a new global monetary system can be launched.77 It is critical that surplus and deficit nations coordinate their policies—but as long as they are pursuing their own self-interests, they will not be able to address the world’s monetary and financial imbalances.

Even thirty years ago, the Brandt Commission was cautioning that the Bretton Woods system was designed for a different era. “The Bretton Woods international monetary system reflected the economic and political relations of the time. Since then much has changed—and the new system should reflect the changing political and economic circumstances of nations. The new international monetary system should have a pluralistic basis, in which no single political entity or small group of entities plays a predominant role.”78 ... “We would like to see a more systematic and fully multilateral approach to countries in critical financial situations, rather than present ad hoc arrangements. This could include evolution of the IMF in the direction of carrying out some of the functions of an international central bank. For these and many other reasons, we welcome the many voices now added to our own calling for a review of the Bretton Woods institutions. We believe this should be an authoritative, international review which should lead to an international conference on their reform.”79

On the agenda of a new monetary conference should be the creation of a stable global currency and an international central bank that has the ability to manage that currency and also to monitor the fiscal solidity of member states. To this end, the Brandt Report called for an expanded decision-making process on international monetary policy. It declared that “a broad-based leadership should be established to manage the international monetary system, including provision for a growing role of the developing countries in the decision-making process. Such a collective leadership can be established if there are clear, fair, and explicit rules for managing the system—rules which will protect the interests of all members of the system including the weaker ones. Such rules must ensure that the Fund is not wholly administered on the basis of shareholding.”80

76 The world witnessed a recent example of globally influential decisions by individual nations that were not taken as part of a coordinated international policy. In 2008-09, politicians from the G20 nations created stimulus packages worth $17 trillion geared for their own domestic constituents, while claiming that they were coordinating their efforts to address the imbalances in the global economy.
77 The sovereign debt crises in the European Monetary System in 2010 are prime examples of why a certain degree of political union should precede monetary union. Europe has been pursuing the opposite course since it created the EMS in 1979: political cohesion has lagged behind monetary cohesion.
78 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 218)
79 Brandt Commission (1983, p. 95)
80 Brandt Commission (1980, p. 218)
For the first time since the Brandt Report was published, there are indications of a trend in this direction. China, South Korea, India, Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey have been given small gains in voting power at the IMF, joining the G7 powers in decision-making roles.  

Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England, has proposed that the G20 become, in effect, a governing council of the IMF to help balance world growth and align global exchange rates. French President Nicholas Sarkozy, who has been calling for a new monetary system, will be assuming the presidency of the G20 in 2011 and promises to open up the debate on the structure of a new Bretton Woods economic system. A Financial Stability Forum has been created to help promote a new global regulatory regime. China, Russia, Brazil, India, and other developing nations have also been calling for a new global reserve currency and monetary system.

The Brandt Commission proposed an international conference to discuss a new global monetary system. Thirty years later, it’s no longer a question of if, but when. But what kind of monetary system is needed for the global political community now emerging and how will its responsibility be shared? Who is going to initiate this intergovernmental coordination? What changes in the balance of power will be required to represent the world’s rich and poor economies in global economic decision-making? None of this is clear. What is clear is that the international monetary system is in chronic disequilibrium and needs to be readjusted through international collective action. The next round of currency volatility will very likely result in the collapse of the dollar, which will surely test its status as the world’s reserve currency. If there is no effective system to replace it, the world could face a prolonged state of economic and political instability.

Willy Brandt and his panel sounded the same note of caution in their report three decades ago. “The international community has made little headway in tackling its most serious problems—which begin in the strained system of international economic relations and result in additional burdens on many developing countries. Prospects for the future are alarming. Increased global uncertainties have reduced expectations of economic growth even more, and the problem of managing the international imbalances of payments is increasing the threat of grave crises in international finance. We have serious doubts as to whether the existing world machinery can cope with these imbalances and the management of world liquidity.”

Yesterday’s financial crisis is quickly becoming today’s government debt crisis and tomorrow’s international monetary crisis. A generation from now, we may all be astounded by the naive ideology and complacency which led us to think that these enormous global monetary and financial imbalances were natural and that markets could somehow adjust them. Even in 1980, the Brandt Commission was calling attention to the fact that international production was

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81 Weisman (2010)
82 Norman (2010)
83 Bennhold (2010)
84 Stiglitz (2010)
85 The world community needs to plan and implement the new monetary system in advance of a global economic crisis. Otherwise, as history teaches, predatory forces could precipitate the crisis in order to manage the process and restructure the broken pieces according to their own ends.
86 Brandt Commission (1983, p. 2)
outpacing the creation of a mass global market, and that this overcapacity in excess of human needs (expressed through effective demand at prevailing wages) was creating major structural imbalances and inequities. While the adjustment mechanism of the IMF system requires deficit nations to make timely payments on their loans, Brandt insisted, surplus countries are not under any similar international obligation because there is no adjustment mechanism for recycling their trade surpluses and currency reserves. A new global economic and legal framework is needed by which surplus nations are obliged to reduce tariffs, invest overseas, and revalue their currencies to increase demand for the exports of deficit countries and spend their surpluses back into these nations.

“Fundamentally,” said Brandt, “we require a set of measures which are designed to sustain effective demand in the world and promote an expansion of world trade. Such measures will help to ensure that deflation, balance of payments difficulties and default on debt are not widespread ... and thus help to ease bottlenecks, to create jobs through low-cost labor-intensive industry and to create the necessary social and economic infrastructure. It should provide special benefits to the low-income countries and be linked with the structural changes we propose in the international financial system.”

Major changes in global economic institutions are needed to undertake this global rebalancing of demand and eliminate the superbubble in the global economic system. There must be a rules-based multilateral approach to adjustment which results in a greater redistribution of wealth, rather than the bilateral structural adjustment policies of the IMF which result in its maldistribution. The Brandt Report was the first major international proposal to call for the management of world demand to generate economic output and employment through a global stimulus program for developing nations and a restructured global monetary system so that deficit nations could have access to global liquidity through an equitable, efficient, and stable process. This would require surplus nations to either revalue their currencies to increase domestic demand, or recycle some of their surpluses to increase growth in deficit countries. The report also demonstrated how these policies would open up the means for the creation of automatic sources of international financing, reduce disparities in income, ensure adequate supplies of energy, and reverse environmental degradation. These remain the same challenges today if we are to create a new global economic system and avoid a systemic collapse and long period of global stagnation or depression.

“We are convinced that the world community will have to be bold and imaginative in shaping that new order and it will have to be realistic in its endeavors,” Brandt asserted. “Change is inevitable. The question is whether the world community will take deliberate and decisive steps to bring it about, or whether change will be forced upon us all through an unfolding of events

87 Brandt Commission (1980, pp. 240-241)
88 There was neither time nor space in this article to deal with all of the Brandt Report’s proposals for development, aid, trade, finance, alternative sources of finance, technology, energy, the environment, and the process of global negotiations. I’ve chosen to focus exclusively on the monetary dimensions of the Brandt Report because this guidance is needed now to support the changes necessary in these other important areas. Much more could be said on how a new monetary system would catalyze solutions across the entire range of sustainable development issues.
over which the international community has little control. It is the joint responsibility of all
countries and people to act without further delay.”

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_Toward Development of Politics and the Political_
Toward the Development of More Robust Policy Models

Steven E. Wallis

Abstract: The current state of the world suggests we have some difficulty in developing effective policy. This paper demonstrates two methods for the objective analysis of logic models within policy documents. By comparing policy models, we will be better able to compare policies and so determine which policy is best.

Our ability to develop effective policy is reflected across the social sciences where our ability to create effective theoretical models is being called into question. The broad scope of this issue suggests a source as deep as our unconscious ways of thinking. Specifically, our reliance on modern and postmodern thinking has limited our ability to develop more effective policy, and more particularly, logic models.

The move in some quarters toward “integral” thinking may provide insights that support the creation of more useful policy models. However, some versions of that thinking seem to be unwittingly mired in modern and postmodern thinking. This paper identifies how integral thought may be clarified, allowing us to advance beyond postmodern thinking. Usefully, this “neo-integral” form of thinking supports the creation of more mature policy models by encompassing greater complexity and a careful understanding of interrelationships that may be identified within the logic models that are commonly found in policy analyses.

Neo-integral thinking is related to more complex forms of systems thinking and both are found in recent conversations within the nascent field of metatheory. And, to some extent, a logic model within a policy operates as a kind of theoretical model because both may be used to inform understanding and decision-making. Therefore, it seems reasonable to apply neo-integral thinking and metatheoretical methodologies to conduct critical comparisons of logic models.

In the present paper, these methodologies are applied to critically compare two logic models. The structure of each model is analyzed to objectively determine its complexity and formal robustness. The complexity is determined by quantifying the concepts and connections within each model. The robustness of a model is a measure of its internal integrity, based on the ratio between the total number of aspects and the number of concatenated aspects. In this analysis, one policy model is found to have a robustness of 0.08, while another is found to have a robustness of 0.67. The more robust policy is expected to be much more effective in application. Implications for policy development and policy application are discussed.

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This approach will enable the more conscious advancement of policy through the development of improved logic models and it opens the door for more effective impact of such policies in a political context. From an integral perspective, this paper implies that we should avoid engaging in loosely defined integral thinking that lead to pronouncements about what people “should” do. Instead, this paper shows how to apply a more precise and objective form of neo-integral thinking to empower individuals and organizations to accomplish their most noble goals.

**Keywords:** Drug use, logic model, metapolicy, metatheory, neo-integral, policy, robustness, Scottish Parliament, theory of theory

*Thus traditional political theories, just like current strategic games, gravely overvalue the pacificatory role of rational knowledge: this miscalculation constitutes the self-publicity of these disciplines. Reason always lurks around proportion and dominance.*

Michel Serres in “The Troubadour of Knowledge” (1997, p. 135)

**Introduction**

In his well-known critique of the modern policy process, Sabatier (1999) calls for better theories to improve the process of policy creation. This paper answers that call by providing new insights into the evaluation of logic models. A logic model is common in many policy documents and serves as a concise, diagrammatic representation of the policy, how it will be implemented, and how the results of that program will be measured. In the policy literature, discussions on the logic model commonly include suggestions on how the model might be analyzed by stakeholders, politicians, and experts. The literature does not provide any advice on how to evaluate such models in any objective way.

That gap in the policy literature is addressed here by introducing new methodologies from the field of metatheoretical analysis. Using these methods to compare and improve policy models is expected to engender significant advances in the field of policy analysis. Public policy is political, by definition. Because public policy at all scales has direct impacts and structural influences at all scales of politics and the political, the development of more robust policy contributes to the development of politics and the political, the theme of this special issue.

In this paper, I note the ongoing controversy in the field of policy, and how that controversy relates to the failure to construct effective policy. Next, I identify the logic model as an overlooked lynchpin of the development of policy. I indicate how the logic model shares important conceptual similarities with social theory. Then, I discuss recent innovations in the field of social theory validation and identify how those new techniques are applied to the analysis of a logic model. Finally, I apply those methods to two logic models to identify which model is more likely to result in more effective results.
Effective Policy?

There is an ongoing concern about the effectiveness of policy and the related theory. The US Congress began to take an interest in program evaluation in the early sixties. However, by the late seventies, “Program evaluation has not led to successful policies or programs” (Schmidt, Scanlon, & Bell, 1979, p. 1). It is reasonable to assume that our failure to evaluate or improve our policies relates directly to our ability to understand them – despite the continued efforts of brilliant scholars in the field of policy.

In a review of the current state of public policy theory, John (2003) pays tribute to the classic works of policy (including models developed by Baumgartner, Jones, Kingdon, Sabatier, and Jenkins-Smith) and speculatively asks if “this particular kind of thinking about public policy has come to the end of its line of development” (John, 2003, p. 482). John notes in this discussion that the central debates in public policy theory are still along the lines of the above authors.

So, despite the diligent work of brilliant scholars, our ability to understand and improve policy does not seem to be improving. By the end of the 20th Century, we were still calling for better theory so that we can better understand policy so that we may develop more effective policy (Sabatier, 1999). And, at the start of the 21st Century, the state of world affairs suggests that we still do not have a more effective way to make policy. Even deLeon (1999), who criticizes Sabatier’s work, agrees that our present understandings of policy suffer from weaknesses, including the “lack of predictive capabilities” (deLeon, 1999, p. 26).

DeLeon (1999) suggests that a systems approach might be a useful way to better understand policy. Thus, it appears that “the time is ripe for a systematic evaluation of our metatheoretical assumptions” (Lamborn, 1997, p. 212). Or, more plainly, we need to develop a better understanding of how we develop policy if we are to develop better policy. And, while the present paper does not presume to complete Lamborn’s entire task, it answers his call at least in part by providing a new, systems-based, metatheoretical approach to the analysis of logic models.

Policy and Program Evaluation

Policy and program evaluation are important for developing successful programs for achieving goals and alleviating social ills. Broadly, some approaches to policy analysis might be considered “metapolicy.” That term has been used to refer to a “policy about policies” (Kerr, 1976, p. 351), or an explanation of the social context within which policy is developed, for example, Jacobs’ (1995) description of the differences in policy-making between Canadian and American health care systems. It has also been used to describe policy analysis that results from the collaboration of various groups, such as members of the public, and/or other combinations of experts, scholars, and laypersons (Walters, Aydelotte, & Miller, 2000). Finally, metapolicy has been used to refer to “policy networks” (Detomasi, 2007, p. 321) representing a network of policy stakeholders, or a “structure” of policy problems (Hoppe, 2002).

Within the general area of metapolicy, we have policy analysis. A brief, yet useful, overview of policy analysis is provided by Dror (1970) who lists five issues: (a) The basic modus operandi
of policy making systems; (b) Main components of policy making (organizations and personnel); (c) Information inputs into policy making; (d) Main policy making methods (techniques of analysis); (e) Main megapolicies (what to analyze, operational goals, degrees of innovation, level of risk, time preferences). A similar list is presented for policy-like process of “social design” suggests that designers consider: (a) Bounded rationality; (b) Data for planning; (c) Identifying the client; (d) Organizations in social design; (e) Time and space horizons; (f) Designing without final goals (Simon, 1996, p. 166).

The difficulty of policy analysis might be based on the complexity of policy creation. The process of creating a policy is inherently messy. The garbage can model was commonly applied to understand this process until it was superseded by Kingdon’s model of multiple streams that reveal a window of opportunity (Kingdon, 1997).

In this section, I have provided a brief overview of policy creation and analysis. It should be noted that these approaches investigate policy as a whole. However, this approach does not seem to have led to the creation of better theory of policy or better policy. Therefore, in the present paper I investigate a “micro” approach, with a close focus on the logic model.

**Logic Model**

The many streams of problem emergence, political wangling, and policy analysis result in the creation of a policy document – an explicit written report that presents the shared understanding of what the problem is and how it might be addressed within a limited window of opportunity (Kingdon, 1997). Within this policy document, the logic model serves as a lynchpin by clearly and explicitly identifying how the research, analysis, actors, and anticipated results may be measured to test the efficacy of the policy.

According to McLaughlin & Jordan (1999), There are several ways to present the logic model; although, it is usually presented as a diagram with inputs and resources on the left, connected by one-way arrows to major activities in the middle and one-way arrows to expected outcomes on the right. This diagrammatic representation provides, “a picture of how something works as they provide a link to outcomes (both short – and long-term) from program variables and processes” (Bruder et al., 2005, p. 187, citing the W. K. Kellogg Foundation). “Evaluators have found the logic model process useful for at least twenty years” (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999, p. 66). A typical example is presented in figure 1.

![Figure 1. Example of Logic Model – derived from (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999, p. 67)](image_url)
As widely as it is used, the logic model has also been criticized recently on a number of fronts. First, despite the logical appearance of this model, “it still only represents stakeholders’ best guess or theory for what will be most effective” (Hernandez & Hodges, 2001, p. 10). Although “best guess” might sound a little harsh, such a level of understanding seems commensurate with the level of success we have found with the implementation of policies and programs. Indeed, the rule of practice appears to be, “If it looks reasonably logical, it is an acceptable model.”

This, however, should be seen as a weak standard. It is like preparing to buy a car and asking the salesperson, “Does this car have good batteries?” The answer is always “yes.” The better question would be “How many miles will I get on a single charge of these batteries?” That is the state of our policy analysis process. Certainly a logic model will be analyzed and (at some point in the process) approved as being a “good” model. A more useful question would be, “How good is it?”

Another important criticism of logic models is put forward by Sabatier (1999) in his call for better theories of public policy making. Instead of a neat linear series of boxes, the policy process involves hundreds of actors, specialized scientific and technical knowledge, over many years of time, with each participant attempting to push a different “spin” on the process (Sabatier, 1999, p. 4). The complexity hidden within the apparent simplicity is noted by McLaughlin and Jordan who state:

Although the example shows one-to-one relationships among program elements, this is not always the case. It may be that one output leads to one or more different outcomes, all of which are of interest to stakeholders and are part of describing the value of the program (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999, p. 69)

In seeking to improve the process of policy evaluation, many approaches have been suggested. These include quality control, more effective evaluator training and selection, higher standards and ethics, and encouraging more evaluation overall (Hatry, Newcomer, & Wholey, 1994). Unfortunately, “The criteria for comparing frameworks are not well developed” (Schlager, 1999, p. 252).

Importantly, if we cannot objectively compare policy models, we cannot effectively decide if one model is better than another. Instead, we are forced to resort to so-called common sense and political wrangling. And those are the techniques that got us here in the first place. Should we then throw out the logic model? Or, is there another possible approach?

I adopt the stance that the logic model is indeed a useful tool. However, it is a tool that has not been understood or applied to its full potential. We have not understood the logic model completely because the literature around the logic model has focused on the relationship between the model and the “real world,” rather than focusing at the logical relationships between the propositions within the model, itself.

Therefore, we have only understood half of the “equation.” This partial understanding is like trying to play the violin with one hand. We are able to make noise, but not much music.
Evaluating Logic Models

Rather than revisit the overall process (which has been more effectively explored by more qualified scholars than I), my approach in this paper will be to look at that “missing link” of the explicitly written policy document. Specifically, I will focus on the logic model that is a common part of most policy documents because that logic model is a critical lynch-pin of the entire policy – representing all of the research, the political relationships between the actors, their shared understanding of the situation, and a representation of their plan for improving the situation.

When most authors discuss the “logic” of the logic model, they are referring to the relationship between the model and the real world (through data collection, analysis, and program results). In contrast, the literature does not much address the logic inherent within the logic model, itself. My focus will be on that structure. As Figure 1 indicates, the logic model is an essentially linear representation. Typically, “the logic model is usually set forth as a diagram with columns and rows, with the abbreviated text put in a box and linkages shown with connecting one-way arrows” (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999, p. 69). When examining such a model, an observer may be led to believe that the project will begin, move through a series of steps, and successfully reach the desired end state. In which case, the reader could easily assume that such a model appears reasonable or intuitively correct.

Yet, we must be cautious of common sense. Because what seems to make sense in the creation of a policy might not work so well in application. Such a situation arose recently when:

The intuitive common sense of these policies – in the extent to which they promoted a “master plan” for Massachusetts’s public higher education – helped build the faith of policymakers in the system and its leadership. But it also helped to obscure the costs of the BHE agenda, and to make it difficult for those problems to be addressed in the future. (Bastedo, 2005, p. 38)

After all, if common sense were so effective, we might not have needed a formal analysis and policy in the first place. Everyone would have agreed on a course of action because it simply made sense. Or, the problem would have never arisen in the first place, because everyone would have used their common sense to choose actions that would not lead to such problems. Yet, the problems arise, and reasonable people disagree about the causes and solutions. Thus it seems common sense is not a sufficient tool for determining the logic (or potential effectiveness) or logic models.

On a slightly deeper level, McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) suggest checking the logic model as a set of hypotheses, logical statements, or propositions. However, they do not go much beyond this recommendation. So, the present paper represents and extension of their excellent work. Insights from other branches of social theory can also be applied to continue their line of inquiry. For example, Dubin (1978) suggests how increasing levels of structure within a theory will make a theory more effective. Wallis (2008a) provides an objective methodology for analyzing the structure of theories to advance them along this path.
This structural approach is of some importance based on recent developments in metatheoretical analysis. Specifically, it has been shown that the formal robustness of a theory is a good indicator of its efficacy in application, and, further, that a theory must have a formal robustness of 1.0 before it can be considered revolutionary, in the Kuhnian sense (Wallis, 2009c). Thus, by advancing a theory (or, here, a logic model) toward higher robustness, scholars and practitioners will advance purposefully toward true paradigmatic revolution.

Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that this method could be applied to effectively and objectively analyze a logic model within a policy to determine how effective that policy might prove in application. Such a method would be extremely useful for the evaluation of any policy and, more particularly, those policies that involve high levels of risk and expense – such as a policy for national health care.

Again, here I am not looking at the broad level of policy elements (actors, analysis, implementation, measurement) or the relationships among them. Instead, I take a micro-approach to address a gap in the literature – the analysis of the logic model itself. In this, I will use the term “policy” to refer to the explicit report, or written policy – specifically as exemplified in the logic model, or model. First, I examine policy’s related and underlying context, that of social theory.

**Failure of Social Theory and the Failure of Policy**

In parallel with the limitations of policy analysis, it has become increasingly clear that the social sciences do not provide effective tools for understanding or guiding human activity. This limitation is reflected in the spotty success of economics (Dubin, 1978, citing Rapoport), the failure of social change theory (Appelbaum, 1970; Boudon, 1986), high failure rates in the application of Total Quality Management (MacIntosh & MacLean, 1999), frequent failure of organization development culture change (M. E. Smith, 2003), failure of organizational theory (Burrell, 1997), and theories of bureaucracy (Bernier & Hafsi, 2007). As with the failure of other branches of social science, the inability to develop effective public policy models has left the promise of the social sciences “largely unfulfilled” (Spicer, 1998). The failure of policy should lead to a critical examination of how policy is created, structured, and applied.

This focus of study is especially important because the need for effective policy has not diminished. Today, “The complex and difficult global environment has overwhelmed, exasperated and saddened many observers” (Dennard, Richardson, & Morçöl, 2008, p. 17). For example, our current economic issues may be understood as resulting from a failure of policy. The lack of policy seems to have led politicians to enact a series of ad hoc interventions, where, instead, “the time has come to begin thinking about a systematic approach,” according to House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank (Graham, 2008, p. 1). Similarly, the International monetary Fund (IMF) blames those failures on “policy shortcomings” (Wroughton & Kaiser, 2008).

The failure of policy is not the failure of any one group to achieve their goals (although that is a related issue). Rather, it appears to be a failure of all groups to understand the problem at hand – and render that understanding into a policy document with an attendant logic model that will be
more likely to ensure their success. The biggest problem that we face is that we think we have
the answer. We seek direct answers, forgetting how, “for every problem there is a solution which
is simple, clean and wrong” (Menken, 2009, p. 1). The need for better policy, including budget
restrictions and competing constituencies, propels agencies into a “metapolicy environment”
where they, “… must consider policy making from several perspectives” (Boschken, 1994, p.
308).

Similar approaches to policy have been suggested in the study of complexity theory. For
example, “triangulation” is suggested as a way to coordinate multiple methods of analysis (Roe,
1998). “Full spectrum analysis” suggests the need to carefully analyze a wide range of
information (Mathieson, 2004). Complexity theory has also suggested other, more general,
approaches (Elliott & Kiel, 1999); but they have not yet been proven effective. Whatever the
process of policy analysis that process must result in the creation of some written policy. And,
importantly for this paper, that explicitly written policy will have a logic model with a
measurable structure.

Below, I will present an innovative understanding of integral thinking that seems useful for
understanding the structure of logic models of policy. This neo-integral approach to developing
more effective policy models does not espouse any specific goal outside of the structure  of the
model. In this analysis, I will draw on innovative metatheoretical methodologies that reflect neo-
integral thinking to analyze two versions of policy drawn from efforts of the Scottish Parliament
to reduce drug abuse.

Broadly, this investigation is a form of “design science,” or “policy science,” or “evaluation
research” (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 278). Van de Ven suggests that an important difficulty in such
research is essentially a question of politics, pose, and ethics. From an ethical stance, researchers
should not impose their views on an organization. From a stance of politics and power, it remains
an open question as to whose view should be used. As far as he goes, Van de Ven is quite
correct; there is great benefit to be found through collaborative evaluations. However, there are
more issues to consider.

In addition to the basic issues of investigative scholarship, there is Popper’s call to evaluate
theory (and therefore, to some extent, policy) primarily through “falsification” (Popper, 2002).
Briefly, Popper states that the test of proving that a theory is correct or works is insufficient. For
example, a theory might claim that undetectable fairies make time move forward. Such a theory
might be perfectly acceptable as an explanation for some individual. And, that person might
claim to have proved the theory is true because time does appear to be moving forward (thus
proving the existence of otherwise undetectable fairies).

However, there is no way to prove that theory is incorrect (in this example, there is no way to
independently test for the existence of fairies). Further, and more importantly, if there is no test
to challenge the theory, there is no way to improve the theory.

In contrast, Popper calls for theories that can be proven wrong. For an abstract example,
consider a theory claiming that A and B must both be increasing to cause an increase in C. If an
observer sees an increase in C with an increase in only A or B (or neither), that theory has been
falsified. This kind of critical test encourages the theorist to develop a new and better theory – thus improving the science.

For policy, however, there is no way to determine its efficacy until after it has been applied. This, of course, is a very expensive proposition as global affairs (e.g., war in Iraq and world economic problems). Another difficulty is that a program that is perceived to be successful might not be successful. For example, a socio-economic “rain dance” might be perceived as successful, though there is actually no causal relationship between the dance and the subsequent changes.

Clearly, if we are to understand this issue, we will need a larger perspective. That perspective is a form of “metapolicy analysis.” In the past, metapolicy has referred to a study of the source of policy, or the application of policy. One of the simplest, and perhaps the weakest form of policy analysis might be seen in a simple checklist; where a policy is evaluated to see if it meets the goals of an agency (FSAT, 2009). This approach is considered weak because it does not address the effectiveness or quality of the policy, itself (as reflected in the logic model) – only the relevance of the policy to the organization.

Seeking self-beneficial results is not unusual; indeed, “normally, policy evaluation consists of attempting to find indicators of either impact or the tangible deliverables and outputs of an initiative.” (Ramsey & Bond, 2006, p. 1). However, such outputs are not available before the implementation of the policy. Hence, the need to understand policy from a metapolicy perspective to optimize a policy before its implementation.

Because this paper presents an innovative approach, some disambiguation is indicated. First, I use the term “metapolicy analysis” in reference to the study of a set of explicit policy documents, regardless of their formulation or application. Specifically, for the present metapolicy analysis, I will focus specifically on the structure of the policy, as that structure is understood as the set of relationships between the causal propositions that are found within the logic model. As I will describe in the next section, this rigorous focus on interrelationships has evolved from our history of modern and postmodern thinking.

Structure of Logic Models

As noted in the introduction to this paper, the focus here is not on the grand whole of policy from creation through application. Rather, the focus here is on the explicit written policy – as exemplified in the logic model.

Given the benefits of human interaction (which results in direct and synergistic benefits), it seems reasonable to suggest that we might understand the propositions within a policy as having benefits from similar interrelationships. The main benefit is improved clarity of understanding for those using the model. By obtaining a better understanding of the complexity and interrelatedness of our policy models, we may expect to develop a better understanding of policy, in general.

A policy model is a mental model, a schema, a theory, or, more colloquially, a lens or point of view. The policy model acts as a computer program, metaphor, filter, or sense-making device.
Starting with all the available information, the data go into the model. The “output” is our understanding of the present situation. That understanding implies that we might be able to predict the future results of our actions (to the extent that anything is considered to be predictable).

For example, if a nation has a policy model that represents immigrants as invaders, that nation might take action to fight back against those immigrants, and act to ensure that future immigration is limited or eliminated. In contrast, holding a different lens of policy, a nation that sees immigrants as useful contributors to society would welcome immigrants with open arms. For each approach, there will be some outcomes that are somewhat predictable, and some results that are less so.

These lenses, or models, may be tacit (as in our unconscious assumptions), or they may be explicit (as in a diagram or flow-chart). Either way, these models serve to guide our decisions and impel us to action (or non-action). There are a few basic paths to describe how these models are created. One way is for them to be developed unconsciously, as in Argyris’ “ladder of inference” (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). Yet, when those models remain tacit, we lose some opportunity for communication because tacit information is more difficult to communicate (Kakabadse, Kouzim, & Kakabadse, 2001).

Another way to develop a policy model is to follow the dictates of some authority. While, this kind of explicit direction is more easily communicated, it is not necessarily more accurate or more useful than a tacit mental model. Indeed, there are issues of conceptual colonization and domination (L. T. Smith, 1999). Another approach to developing a policy model is to consciously and critically analyze the available information. This process is seen in the development of academic theory – essentially, the process of scholarship.

More collaborative methods are also available. We may follow, for example, a collaborative process such as the Future Search process (Weisbord & Janoff, 2000). There, a facilitated process of collaboration and communication among at least some stakeholder combine to develop a mind map (which is essentially a shared mental model) that is more complete because it draws on more contributors; a reasonable approach because, “the public always knows more than any of the “experts” (Churchman, 1968, p. 232).

Comparing the dictatorial to the collaborative approaches, it should be noted that dictates (such as “do this” or “go there”) are understood as relatively simple compared with a wall-sized mind map full of information (and potential contradictions). The more complex understandings found in a large mind-map seem to support the efforts of each individual as they find their own path and goal from a complex range of choices. In short, dictatorship is simple while free collaboration is complex. That is to say, a free person must face a multitude of complex choices, while a slave has those choices dictated.

While all these methods are used to create policy models, and some of those models are used to guide policy decision-making, there is no guide outside of application to determine whether one model might work more effectively than any other. In short, the literature has not deeply explored the “internal validity” of the decision making model; where that validity is separate
from the actual application of the model. Of course, there is the tradition of academic validation. However, that approach is limited to the process of citing experts and logical arguments. As noted above, this level of internal validation does not seem to have been as effective in the creation of effective policy. In a reframing of Popper’s “three worlds” of validity, Wallis (2008c) suggests that the social sciences are insufficiently developed to apply Popper’s test of falsification through empirical testing.

This is an important concern, because policy creation, comparison, and change is often “hopelessly confusing” because of the clash of belief systems between the actors (Schlager, 1999, pp. 252-253). And, as a result, some may suggest that the best way to evaluate a Logical Model and the associated policy is to empirically measure the results of the program.

And, indeed, that is an ongoing trend in program evaluation (Hatry et al., 1994). However useful this is for existing programs, the empirical approach cannot be applied to the development and implementation of new policy and new programs. There is simply no way to evaluate the success of a program before it is implemented.

Instead of a single approach to evaluation, Wallis recommends multiple tests – a sort of triangulation – to examine the validity of the model through a combination of tests (internal validity of the structure, external testing in application, and the meaning it makes for the user).

Within the nascent field of metatheory, there are emerging views that may lead to more effective methods of validation. For example, a more effective model might be understood to be one that is more mature. In Growing the Field: The Institutional, Theoretical, and Conceptual Maturation of ‘Public Participation Ross & Glock-Grueneich (2008) develop innovative and useful insights into the structure of theoretical models. They accomplish this by drawing a parallel between the less-understood development of models and the better-understood development of individuals, organizations, and cultures. In each area, the system that is understood as more evolved is the system that is more complex. In their maturation model of theory, based on hierarchical complexity theory (Commons, Trudeau, Stein, Richards, & Krause, 1998) the stages are:

1. Abstract Stage (stories become cases, events are abstracted to data).
2. Formal Stage (two or more Abstract Stage variables are related).
3. Systematic Stage (developing simple hypotheses from Formal Stage relationships).
4. Metasystematic Stage (creating models that account for all relevant relationships).

Importantly, in this maturation model, the systematic stage is one where there is a formal description of how variables interact in relation to one another. This stage requires “multiple input variables” and may suggest multiple outputs as well. This view stands in contrast to less complex (and so less mature) models that suggest simple, linear, causality. Creating a parallel between complexity and some sense of maturity seems to have validity – and is reflected across a broad section of literature.

For a few examples, the process of evolution (a continual process of variation and selection) leads to increasing complexity of our ecological and social environments (Holland, 1995) and the
same insight applies to our economy (Friedman, 1997) where the creation of new products and the selection of the consumer leads to the generation of ever-increasingly complex selection of consumer goods. Indeed, we may adopt the perspective that “the inanimate world, life, and human existence are envisioned as systems of increasing complexity representing physical biological and sociopolitical realities” (Herrmann, 1998, p. ix). This, in turn, suggests that that individuals and organizations, existing in more complex interrelationships, are better able to detect and adapt to the complexities of the market in complex and creative ways (Stacey, 1996).

This idea might be broadly understood as, “More complex models are more effective.” And, as such, this may appear to violate the so-called “rule” of parsimony – which suggests that the better theory is the one that is more concise. The general idea of parsimony dates back at least as far as Ockham’s razor. However, investigations by Meehl (2002) suggest that the claim of parsimony for theory validity is over-used, misunderstood, and is of questionable validity.

Meehl suggests, “no ontological metaproof exists that the world must be ‘simple,’ or that ‘simpler’ theories are, as a class, more likely to be correct. The most impressive theories of mature sciences are hardly ever ‘simple,’ either conceptually or in the formalism” (Meehl, 1992, p. 423). For example, multiple theories (or multiple views) of an organization provide a richer, more useful understanding of that organization (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Edwards & Volkmann, 2008).

The maturity model might be seen as suggesting that a policy model that is relatively simple is one that is less mature; for example, if a policy states, “Our only goal is to make more money.” The enactment of such an immature policy might be expected to cause many unanticipated and unpleasant consequences. A more mature structure of policy would have more aspects. For example, seeking benefits in three areas (e.g., financial, ecological, and human) would be more complex and so more mature than seeking fewer (e.g., only financial). A more mature policy would also identify more linkages between aspects, and those linkages would be better described. A useful tool would be the ability to identify “how mature” a policy might be. Such ability would allow stakeholders to easily identify which policy might be most effectively applied in a situation.

Similarly, theories containing a higher level of structure are also more efficient. The most highly structured theories, “expresses the rate of change in the values of one variable and the associated rate of change in the values of another variable” (Dubin, 1978, p. 110). Such an expression would necessarily be more complex than, for example, stating, “A is true.”

Another tool for understanding the internal validation through an understanding of the structure of theory is found in Wallis (2008a) who presents a method for analyzing academic theories. Usefully, the method of propositional analysis provides an objective indicator of the internal integrity of the theory. Wallis describes this as a measure of the “robustness” of a theory and suggests that theories that are more “robust” (like those of physics and mathematics) will prove more effective in practice, while less robust theories (such as those commonly found in the social sciences) will prove less effective in practice (Wallis, 2009c).
My use of *robust* differs from other meanings. It does not mean, “insensitive to uncertainty about the future” (Lempert & Schlesinger, 2000, p. 391). Nor is robustness used in the more colloquial sense of “strong,” “widely scattered,” or “unchanging.” In short, robustness is a specific and objective measure of the relatedness between propositions within the theory.

In order to objectively determine the robustness of a theory, I suggested investigating relationships between the propositions of the theory to identify the co-causal connections between the propositions. Theories with connections that are more completely interrelated are held to be more effective. For example, a proposition such as, “A is true” would not be of much value because it is essentially an unsupported claim. A proposition such as “B is true because of C” or, similarly, “Changes in B cause changes in C” is more valid because there are more connections between the conceptual components (it is also more complex).

Readers with an interest in the advancement from modernity through postmodern ways of thinking may recognize the first proposition as atomistic/dualistic (because it suggests that A has an absolute value) and the second as contextual (because B has validity only in the context of C). The contextual proposition may also be understood as being linear because change in one is said to cause change in the other.

Adding more aspects to atomistic propositions does not enhance the validity of the theory; for example, “A is true, and B is true, and C is true” is likely to engender more arguments about the truth of each statement (instead of fewer arguments about the truth of fewer truth claims).

Similarly, adding more aspects to a proposition that is essentially contextual, or linear, does not add to the validity of the proposition. For example, “A causes B causes C” is a linear proposition where the aspect of B is redundant (Stinchcombe, 1987) and so adds nothing to the proposition. One might just as well say, “A causes C.” The validity of the aspect has not changed so much as its context has been altered like unpacking a series of nesting dolls.

Rather than these modern or postmodern approaches, it is more beneficial to develop propositions that contain more aspects and have the relationship between multiple aspects carefully explicated: for example, “Changes in A and B cause changes in C,” or to explain those changes more carefully, “More A and more B cause more C.” These kinds of propositions are concatenated. That is to say, there are multiple causes that are evidenced in the resultant effects (Kaplan, 1964; Van de Ven, 2007).

This perspective is in keeping with the idea that more complex theories are more mature and so are expected to “induce more sophisticated practice, data collection, analyses, model testing, and thus further research and model building” (Ross & Glock-Grueneich, 2008, p. 11). In contrast, a simpler theory (containing fewer aspects) means that its sensemaking ability will “catch” fewer areas of knowledge and understanding. Thus, as the theory sees less, it will miss more: “easily unperceived effects” (François, 2008).

Another way of understanding a concatenated relationship between ideas is to think of it as a kind of Hegelian dialectic (e.g. Appelbaum, 1988), where two aspects called thesis and antithesis can lead to the emergence (or change) of a third dimension called synthesis.
This is conceptually similar to the process developed by Bateson (1979), who describes “double description,” where multiple streams of information are combined to suggest a new, third form, of information that is more useful than the previous two. Another example of double description is binocular vision (where the extra sense of depth is added). Bateson shows how these double descriptions create an extra dimension of understanding that is of a different logical type.

There is a parallel between the structure of Bateson’s approach and the structure of theory. As described above, a concatenated aspect of theory is evident in a proposition describing how aspect A and aspect B combine to understand aspect C. This understanding of aspect C through the understanding of aspects A and B suggests a greater level of understanding that, in turn, may be used for more effective policy decision. These concatenated relationships add to the construct validity of the theory (or policy) (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 189).

According to Wallis (2009a), the method for determining the formal robustness of a model follows five simple steps:

1. Identify a specific body of theory
2. Search the literature for concise definitions
3. Identify causal propositions
4. Link casual propositions according to related concepts (where one aspect is influenced by two or more others)
5. Identify the total number of propositions and compare to the number of co-causal propositions (creating a ratio between zero and one).

For an abstract example, let us say we have a theory consisting of the following propositions: A is true; B is true; A causes C; Changes in B cause changes in D; Changes in D and changes in C cause changes in E. There are five aspects (A, B, C, D, and E). Of those five, only E is concatenated (D and C cause E). This allows us to easily find a ratio of well-integrated aspects to poorly integrated aspects of 0.20 (the result of one concatenated aspect divided by five total aspects). Importantly, the validity of each proposition is determined only by the other propositions within the theory.

Theories of physics (e.g. Ohm’s law of electricity) tend to be robust to the 1.0 level. It seems to be the robustness of Ohm’s theoretical model that enabled its effective testing which, in turn, enabled its elevation to the status of “law” and the subsequent revolutions in power distribution, communication, electronics, computers, and more. In contrast, theories of the social sciences tend to have a very low level of robustness—typically between 0.2 and 0.5—on a scale of zero to one (e.g. Wallis, 2009b). And, along with those low levels of robustness, social theories have not proved very effective in application.

In the next section, I analyze two policy models to determine and explain their levels of robustness and thus suggest their potential efficacy in application. In these analyses, the search for formal robustness is much simplified. Using the models provided for analysis advances us through step three above. Within those models, the causal propositions are already identified by the graphic representations of the logic models. Thus, we need only look at the models to follow
step five above – and identify the total number of propositions and compare then to the number of co-causal propositions within each model.

An Analysis of Two Policy Models

Because theories are used to make sense of data, predict the future, and support decision-making, they are conceptually similar to mindsets, organizational schema, or logical models of policy. In this section, I use the insights and methodology presented above to analyze the relationships between propositions found in two policy models that were developed by the Scottish Parliament for a project on reducing damage from drug use (Scotland's Futures Forum Approaches to Alcohol and Drugs in Scotland: A question of Architecture, 2008).

These models are maps for understanding the present and emerging situation. As such, they are representative of policy, including data gathering, analysis, and as guides for the actions of decision-makers. While these models might not represent the complete policy, they are used here as concise representations of the policy.

Usefully, for this analysis, the Scottish report portrays two diagrams representing the same overall policy. Importantly, although both diagrams include very similar aspects, the structure of those diagrams is very different. One arranges the aspects of the policy in a “daisy” pattern, while the other diagram presents the aspects in a pattern of flows and co-casual relationships. In short, the two diagrams present two models of the same policy – with very different potentials for successful implementation.

In Figure 2, there are 12 causal dimensions (or aspects), and one resulting aspect (the goal of reduced damage from alcohol & drugs). The resulting aspect (How can Scotland reduce the damage to its population) is a concatenated aspect because it results from more than one causal aspect. Based on Wallis’ method of propositional analysis, the robustness of this model is 0.08 (the result of one concatenated aspect divided by 13 total aspects). Therefore, by itself, this does not seem to be a very useful model for application.

As a thought experiment, one might imagine disparate stakeholder groups arguing over which aspect is most useful, and where funds should be allocated. Additionally, each group in Figure 2 seems to be conceptually isolated from the others – trapped in its own “silo” of limited understanding. One group sees prevention as the cure, while another seems enforcement as the tool of choice.

Similarly, each group might blame the other for lack of overall success of the program. Additionally, we might expect that special-interest groups might struggle to alter and control the meaning of the model over time. The number of petals in the daisy might expand or contract depending on what groups get funded. In short, if Figure 2 were the only guide, this worthy effort toward collaboration might lead, instead, to conflict.

Fortunately, the policy analysis did not stop at this point. Admirably, the project combined expert analysis and input from stakeholders to develop the model shown in Figure 3.
Figure 2. Dimensions of the problem
(Approaches to Alcohol and Drugs in Scotland: A question of Architecture, 2008, p. 9; public domain)
Figure 3. The 2008 Landscape
(Approaches to Alcohol and Drugs in Scotland: A question of Architecture, 2008, p. 62; public domain)
Figure 3 includes many of the same aspects as Figure 2. There are, however, key differences between the two models. First, in Figure 2, the goal of reducing damage from drugs is explicit, while in Figure 3 that goal is tacit. In the same way that most people do not need to be reminded that a useful goal is to achieve a better life, the goal is seen as superfluous when included in the model. Individuals who are seeking a better life do not need to be reminded of that goal: they need useful policy to help them get them there. Second, Figure 3 presents a model that is more complex than the model presented in Figure 1. Although Figure 3 depicts one aspect less than Figure 2, Figure 3 depicts 22 causal relationships, compared to the 12 causal relationships depicted in Figure 1. This increase in complexity suggests more maturity (Ross & Glock-Grueneich, 2008) in the policy model.

Importantly, Figure 3 depicts eight aspects that might be considered concatenated (affected by two or more other aspects). The exceptions are: the science base, wellbeing of community, regulation, and prohibition. Therefore, based on the above-mentioned methodology, the robustness of this model is a respectable 0.67 (the result of 8 concatenated aspects divided by 12 total aspects).

By way of a thought experiment, Figure 3 seems to suggest a more effective model for change, primarily because the actions of each group are expected to produce relevant results for other groups. While the actions of law enforcement may not be evident to public health workers and vice versa, the actions of both are likely to be visible to the broader community.

For example, enforcement may believe that they are taking effective action through their criminal justice approach. Similarly, the evidence and research scholars and the intervention and recovery professionals may believe that they are taking effective action through changes to the science base and the treatment, social support, and health promotion (respectively). Yet, if changes in those areas do not show up as changes in illicit trade and patterns of misuse (visible to the community), either those efforts are not being effective or the model is not an accurate representation of the situation.

We may speculate how stakeholders using a more robust model may be less inclined to argue around the measurable results because each indicator is linked to multiple other indicators. This allows for more direct feedback for more rapid learning so the stakeholders can more easily change their approaches if needed.

Of course, the formal model is based on assumptions that have been made explicit. For example, Figure 3 depicts the treatment (including social support and health promotion) as influencing the balance of benefit and harm as well as the illicit trade. This suggests that the opinions around the effectiveness of treatment must be determined by the view from “downstream.”

If those monitoring the balance of benefit and those engaged in illicit trade agree, than it would appear that treatment is doing a good job. If they disagree, it points to the need for a more effective understanding of the situation. And, that understanding may change as the project
advances and new information suggests adjustments to the model. Those changes should be agreed to through a collaborative process.

While the model in Figure 3 seems to have a fairly high level of robustness, it is far from perfect. There are several opportunities to improve the model. For example, in Figure 3 drug trade and alcohol trade are shown as “affecting” the balance of benefit and harm. It is unclear from the model exactly what those effects are.

Does more alcohol trade cause more social harm? Or, are the potential negative effects of the alcohol trade ameliorated by the benefits of treatment? Other uses of vague language include words like: impacts, influences, determines, subverts, inform, shape, and others. More effective language would be “increases” or “decreases.” With experience, analysis, and expertise, the quantitative relationships of those qualitative aspects might also be more accurately developed.

Another opportunity to clarify the model is seen in the aspects of regulation, prohibition, alcohol trade, and drug trade in the upper left hand corner of the model. There, prohibition and regulation are in a linear relationship between policy and legal frameworks on one side, and alcohol trade and drug trade on the other. Abstractly, this is represented as A causes B causes C. In such linear relationships, the intermediate term (B) is redundant (Stinchcombe, 1987) – it adds nothing to the robustness of the model.

Similarly, the aspects of regulation and prohibition are in “parallel” with one another. That is to say, every causal relationship that affects one aspect also affects the other. Therefore, it could be said that regulation and prohibition are effectively the “same thing.” The same is said of the aspects of alcohol trade and drug trade. Parallel aspects do not add to the robustness of the model, and, like linear aspects, should be removed (or revised) in increase the robustness of the model.

I contend that the important difference between the two logic models compared in this section is not simply a matter of complexity, nor is it a matter of the relationship between the model and the analysis and/or implementation of the policy. Instead, the important difference between these models is best seen in their formal robustness (0.08 in the first and 0.67 in the second).

For an abstract example, consider how the model shown in Figure 3 might be made more complex by adding additional “petals” to the daisy – in the form of additional stakeholder groups. While that would add complexity to the model, all the previous concerns (e.g., conflict between stakeholders) would not be reduced. Indeed, they are more likely to increase. And, it is useful to note, that potential for conflict would reduce the chance for successful implementation of the logic model, and, not coincidentally, would reduce the robustness of the model. Therefore, we may conclude that we can increase the chance of policy success by increasing the robustness of the logic model within the explicit policy document.

The evaluation and discussion in this section suggests that it is indeed possible and useful to evaluate policies and programs by investigating the complexity and formal robustness of logic models, and that following these approaches will lead to policies that are more effective in application.
Surprising Insights

An unexpected insight emerged during this study when I noted that a critical shift occurred between Figure 2 and Figure 3. Figure 2 is an axial theory of the sort suggested by grounded theory (Glaser, 2002). An axial theory may be characterized by having a number of causal influences— all leading to a common result.

In contrast, Figure 3 represents a theory used for achieving that shared goal where the goal itself is tacit to the model. This is important to the extent that having a goal is very different from having a theory that will enable one to reach that goal. This approach seems to be in line with the idea of “problem solving without a goal” (Simon, 1996, p. 106), where the goal is to find greater understanding.

For example, by way of analogy, let us say we have an engineer whose goal is to design a radio. The engineer will doubtless use Ohm’s law to design that radio, and, procedural errors aside, the radio will function effectively. Yet, it should be noted, Ohm’s law does not include “radio” as a word or concept.

This example stands in stark contrast to many theories and policy models where the goal is an explicit part of the theory. In the example of designing a radio, a goal-oriented theory might include the proposition, “More electricity, more radio waves, higher standards, more components, and more engineers will result in the design of more and better radios.” While this claim is undeniably useful, such a goal-oriented theory has a very low robustness. Further, no workable radios would be designed without the use of Ohm’s (robust) law.

Rescher (2005, p. 106) explores the difference between theory and goal suggesting, “… it is accordingly important to distinguish between the ontological systematicity (simplicity, coherence, regularity, uniformity) of the objects of our knowledge…. ” Or, metaphorically, the lens is different from the observer and different from the observed. Similarly, in his explorations into metatheory, Ritzer (2001, p. 161) suggests the idea of “decentering” where theorists should move away from identifying a goal and move toward developing metatheory that is understood as a “field of relationships.”

A “goal” is not the same thing as a task, concept, or relationship. The goal is more like a vision or an ideal. Therefore, having a goal (imaginative or creative ideal) as an integral aspect of a theoretical construct—which is better described as a representation of an existing perceptual-based system—is a violation of ontological systematicity, and specifically a violation of uniformity. It is an apple among oranges—out of character and out of its appropriate category. The distinction between the two seems to have been inadvertently glossed over by “…what rhetoricians call chiasmus, an exchange of properties that serves to blur the differences between the entities from which the properties are drawn” (Fuller, 2006, p. 22).

For a metaphorical example, if one enjoys viewing the color red, one may enjoy sitting in a room with red walls, or viewing red roses. One may even go so far as to wear red-tinted
spectacles. However, using red-colored glasses to view red roses will tend to obscure the roses. Similarly, a theory that explicitly includes the goal can, in some sense, obscure a deeper level of understanding. In short, the present analysis suggests that it is important that we do not confuse the goal with the policy understanding necessary for achieving the goal. Importantly, therefore, having the goal as a part of the model may be a distraction at best and a critical flaw at worst.

### Conclusion and Extensions

Our philosophies are moving away from modernist, through postmodernist and into more effective, neo-integral, ways of thinking. In this paper, methods based in neo-integral thinking have proved useful in identifying and comparing the complexity of policy models (Ross & Glock-Grueneich, 2008) and the degree to which those models are integrated (Wallis, 2008a, 2008b). This evolution in thinking seems to be reflected in our approaches to policy development.

In decades past, theories of policy development were relatively simple. It was found, however, that this approach did not result in effective policies and programs. Luminaries such as Kingdon advanced the field by offering more complex models. However, the current state of the world suggests that these new models have not resulted in the creation of more effective policy. This has led to a criticism of Kingdon’s work by Sabatier who has provided alternative models to better understand the policy process. Despite, or because of, this conflict in the field of policy, there is no clear consensus about how to compare policy models in any objective way. This impedes our ability to choose between multiple competing policies or to identify the best way to improve a program.

A common feature in almost every policy is the logic model. Yet, the policy literature leaves tacit the idea of investigating the internal structure of a logic model. Before the contribution I offer in this paper, there was no way to conduct an objective comparison of policies – we were forced to rely on the “plausibility” of a model (e.g. Schmidt et al., 1979, p. 48). As such we are forced to rely on untested assumptions and, “relying on unspoken assumptions may lead to folly as easily as wisdom” (Wallis, 2009c). Based on the current state of the world, this certainly appears to represent our level of policy evaluation and comparison.

Because the logic model is an explicit representation of the policy document, it stands as an abstract representation of the policy - a lynchpin of the process. Critically, comparing logic models with a sense of objectivity allows us to reliably decide which policy to implement or how to advance a policy toward greater effectiveness. The present paper provides an important contribution to the policy literature by suggesting two methods for the objective analysis of Logic models.

In developing objective measures for logic models (to the extent that they represent the policy as a whole) this contribution answers multiple calls: first, for better theory (Sabatier, 1999), second, for more predictive theory (deLeon, 1999). These insights, in turn, suggest the opportunity for a research program to determine if there is a relationship between the robustness of the logic model and the successful implementation of the policy.
The metapolicy analyses reported above were a critical comparison of two logic models using a methodology originally developed for metatheoretical analysis. Results indicate that the highly robust \((R = 0.67)\) model in Figure 3 will be more effective in application than the low robust \((R = 0.08)\) model in Figure 2.

A limitation of this study is the difficulty of confirming the correlation between the robustness of a policy model and the effectiveness of that model in application. Similarly, this analysis does not address aspects of policy-making that are outside the formal model or “off the page,” such as the mood, health, superstitions, or prejudices that might alter the politician’s decision-making process. Additionally, this study is limited because it compares only two models. Future studies should compare more models, models from a wider range of policy areas, and compare policies with the results of their implementations.

Additionally, future studies should investigate the robustness of historical policy decisions to find what correlation exists between the robustness of the policy and the historical results of that policy’s implementation. In this form of study, it would also be useful to determine if the policy decisions actually followed the policy. It may be found that the stated policy had a high level of robustness while the implemented policy had a low level of robustness (or vice versa). For future policy development, I suggest that any policy analysis should include a study of the logic model itself, to determine the robustness of the policy.

Of course, a robust structure of policy theory is not the be-all, end-all of policy. As noted earlier, it is also important to consider other aspects of policy development (including data gathering, analysis, and how the policy is implemented). Improvements in each of these areas will add to the efficacy of policy. The ideas presented in this paper are intended to complement, not supplant, existing methods of policy analysis.

Our understanding will always be limited, but that does not excuse us from expanding our understanding. By developing an understanding that is more complex and more carefully integrated, we may understand more clearly the richness and the limitations of our knowledge – and how we may improve the production and efficacy of policy models and policy with significant implications for improving the human condition.

References


The U.S. Imperial Jugger-not:
Saturation Points and Cultural Globalization

Meg Spohn Bertoni¹

Abstract: Globalization is not merely inevitable western cultural conquest. The assumption that the juggernaut of western hegemonic domination will continue until the world is consumed is a common one, but not an accurate one. That accuracy is compromised by a number of related misconceptions about the nature of globalization. Some of these have to do with an attachment to dichotomy in a world too complex for dualism. Some of them are related to assumptions about the nature of trade, of trends, of inevitability, and of statistical prediction that turn out not to be accurate—and by extension misconceptions about the unidirectionality of cultural exchange. Most are related to misconceptions about the nature of culture—particularly in oversimplifying, and making strange assumptions about, nonwestern cultures. Cultures change over time, with generations and historical forces—today’s cultural changes make up tomorrow’s cohesive culture. Cultures die not when they change to reflect the new attitudes and lifestyles of the peoples who live in them, but when they stagnate and become static, preserved only in museums, artifacts and books, and not in the everyday lives of the people themselves. Finally, phenomena do reach a saturation point, from biological populations to the motion of catamarans to absorption of cultural values, and these can be observed using methods of nonlinear dynamics. This project considers common misconceptions about globalization and culture, and uses concepts from nonlinear dynamics to expose the nature of the movement and saturation points of cultural globalization.

Keywords: Complexity, culture, domination, dualism, globalization, international system, nonlinear dynamics, non-western, prediction, self-organization, saturation points

Introduction

In recent years in international relations, globalization has become a major area of study. No wonder—it touches every other area of interest in international relations, and its effects are clear to people around the world. However, a number of misconceptions about it have been popularized, among scholars, students, and members of the general public alike. One of the most pervasive is that globalization is merely inevitable western cultural conquest. The assumption that the juggernaut of western hegemonic cultural domination will persist until the world is utterly consumed is a common one, but not an accurate one.

A large part of the misconception problem is the ways in which scholars and journalists have been trained to think about global phenomena, which permeates the ways in which they write

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about it and inform others. It is high time, however, to abandon theoretical structures that are no longer useful in comprehending and explaining complex phenomena such as globalization. In constructing strong theory, it is imperative to abandon the pervasive focus on dichotomy and other artificial simplifications, and consider frameworks more appropriate to the very complex international system, which defies dichotomy and oversimplification. This piece addresses some of the major misconceptions about this area of inquiry, and suggests more complex, dynamical ways of thinking about the complex, dynamical world order.

With regard to politics and the political, this article offers academics, journalists, theorists, students, and curious members of the general public (among others), a different way to think about the things we are all told about the nature of globalization and culture—and common assumptions about them. From this, one hopes we may all consider our dynamical world more completely and accurately, whether working to shape still-struggling post-Cold War political theory, traveling to or thinking about other cultures, or forming our opinions from the world news of the day. Through bringing together international relations theory, nonlinear dynamical systems, and additional critical thought from cultural studies, the global affairs classroom, and even evolutionary biology, we may gain insight into current problems in thought and in practice with regard to international politics—from political and cultural relationships and impacts, to the theories that shape thinking and policy, to the interconnectedness of global society and its development.

First, we consider what some of the most common misconceptions are surrounding globalization, and some of their likely causes. Each of the misconceptions is then regarded in detail, and critiqued along the way, using observations about the global system, culture, theory building, and key concepts from nonlinear dynamics. Through careful consideration, we can draw some conclusions about different ways of thinking about globalization that may yield greater understanding and more fruitful international relations theory.

Global Misconceptions

During the last four spring terms at a moderately-sized western American university, the author has taught a graduate-level course (usually two online sections) about the phenomenon of globalization, and its many forces and implications. Happily, the online sections include graduate students who are participating in the course from various locations around the world, are from other countries, or are otherwise well-traveled. Through asynchronous discussion, these many informed perspectives often create a truly global one, offering insight considerably greater than the sum of its parts to all the participants. So pervasive are certain misconceptions about globalization, however, that they are not only largely held by the general public, but they are also held by nearly all of this bright cross-section of the adult population, at least upon entering the course.

There are many possibilities as to how this state of misconception and misinformation persists. One is that globalization as such is still a very new field of study. Although answers to current questions may become obvious with hindsight and experience, the pressure to predict is strong, and journalists and scholars alike try hard to have the next big, important idea that will guide the field of study of globalization through its nascent period and beyond. Some find ideas
and latch onto them, wanting them to be true because they offer the comfort of a predictable trajectory in a global system currently rife with uncertainty.

This pressure is likely exacerbated by the paucity of strong and far-reaching post-Cold War theory in international relations. The former world order, with its two spheres of influence and zero-sum game theory, when put into historical perspective, was something of a fluke, albeit one that lasted half a century. As we return to the messier and far more historically prevalent world system, the last few generations of scholars have not been trained to think about it, because it was not then pertinent to the contemporary world order. Those international relations scholars who were trained before the Cold War, and whose work was to have informed the coming decades before the outcomes of World War II changed everything, are now separated from the generation of scholars tasked with creating new theory responsive to the twenty-first century’s global system by at least two generations, if not by retirement, or by death. Starting from scratch is more difficult than building on the work of the previous generation. In the meantime, many theories are circulating and awaiting broad recognition. It makes sense to keep trying until something catches on.

Another possibility is simply that some of the people with the greatest access to publication about the new global system do not have truly typical experiences of the places they visit and later write about. Often, the elites of given nation-states or regions have more in common with each other than they do with their own fellow residents of those states or regions. An elite American, for example, is likely to stay in the finest hotel in Nairobi, with other traveling elites (some of them Kenyan, certainly, but even a hotel full of local citizens is still a mere hotel full in a nation of thirty-eight million—and an atypical hotel full at that) and as far as possible from Nairobi’s shanty town of Kibera—and its more than one million inhabitants. Elites from all parts of the world usually prefer to isolate themselves from the grittiness of most of the world’s everyday existence when they can, and consequently, often miss the whole picture, or even the typical one—and these are the people who have the best access both to travel and to publication. Therefore, they are most likely to inform opinions at home, and even bright, critically-thinking people rarely get the perspective of the average person’s experience in another country unless they actually manage to go there at some point. In the meantime, global golfing and fine dining anecdotes, for example, are a poor substitute for informed cultural insights about regular folks in other parts of the world.

Additionally, with the general public more interested than ever in international news, and a twenty-four-hour news cycle, we get surprisingly little insight about international events from the American news media. It used to be that each news organization had regional bureaus all over the world, so when news happened there, someone was on hand to report on it, and to give some informed geo-political context to the events. This practice of maintaining far-flung news bureaus is no longer considered cost-effective, and news personnel are quickly flown to the place where news is happening instead. While this does gather information for news organizations at unprecedented speed, the lack of context previously available with knowledgeable localized news bureaus damages the quality of that information. When the news consumer gets the story, historical and other contextual pieces may be missing, or merely assumed rather than confirmed, or lived. In this way, misinformation is often carried along with information. The savvy news consumer may consult multiple sources on a given story in order to better inform his or her own
comprehension, but this method is often considered too time consuming for the general public to engage in on a daily basis. In this way, misconceptions are also perpetuated, by omission, lack of context, and assumptions, by the news organizations and by the consumers themselves.

The most common misconceptions (often bolstered by some news media and even some scholarly articles) are these:

- Globalization is either “good,” or it is “bad.”
- Globalization is primarily about trade, and trade causes peace.
- Globalization is a new phenomenon, and it is truly global.
- Past events are a good blueprint for future predictions.
- Globalization is a one-way street of destructive cultural domination from the west to the rest.

In order to avoid such misconceptions, to rethink them, or even to come up with new and applicable theories responsive to the twenty-first century, it is necessary to think differently about the nature of the international system—that is, as a large, complex, and interconnected system. It is poorly suited to two-poled game theory models and dichotomous constructions. It is, however, well suited to the emerging science of nonlinear dynamics. Let us consider each of these misconceptions in turn, and the conceptual pieces from nonlinear dynamics that can help us consider the reality of the messy international system, rather than creating flat, oversimplified constructions, theories, and models, and attempting to argue their application in a complex world.

“Globalization is either ‘good’ or it is ‘bad.’”

So pervasive is this notion, in the virtual classroom, in the literature, and elsewhere, that it seems that we cannot continue to consider anything else until we have solved this conundrum—and that is what makes it the major question to be answered about globalization. The international system, however, is dynamic, complex, and in a constant state of flux. Globalization is a sort of complex system within that one, with many sub-systemic forces of its own. It is too complex to be labeled either “good” or “bad,” and even if it weren’t, it has no intent or agency of its own by which we may judge its moral character.

For the sake of consideration, however, perhaps we should attempt to qualify it further. Perhaps we could say, “good for trade” and “bad for non-western laborers.” Even these statements require further iterations of qualification, though. Aside from points of comparison (e.g., Better or worse than what?), these normative assessments break down immediately at the first sign of attempted qualification, too. Good for whose trade? In the long term or just the short term? Is the interconnectedness of global markets not also a vulnerability when things aren’t going so well, giving one piece the power to bring down the whole? Bad for which non-western workers? Those who are immigrants working in sweatshops located in the west, or just those who are still in their countries of origin? Bad for each individual worker, or bad for their community, nation-state or region? How is it bad? Is it bad if there are jobs in a poor area where there were no jobs before, even if wages are low by western standards? What if it is a clean
industry and doing less environmental damage than, say, clear-cutting rain forests in favor of farmland? Is that still bad?

It is possible that this desire for comfortable dichotomy is part of Cold War international relations theory’s two-poled, zero-sum legacy, but the literature of globalization is rife with it, whether the either-or pair is good-bad, corporation-worker, the west-the rest, patriarchal-feminist, old-new, rich-poor, and the list goes on. Certainly, a construct may be simplified to make a point and help guide one’s thinking about complex issues. After all, an actual-size roadmap is of no use. However, one that oversimplifies something so complex, claiming it falls into one of two specific, diametrically opposed categories, is at best a blunt instrument.

Additionally, to attempt to resolve a dichotomous pair by saying, “perhaps the answer lies somewhere in between these two points” does not help us either, attractive as it may seem, at least from a conciliatory standpoint. The Golden Mean of the Ancient Greeks does not sharpen that blunt instrument, or our insights. In the immortal words of Stephen Jay Gould, “I strongly reject any conceptual scheme that places our options on a line, and holds that the only alternative to an extreme positions lies somewhere in between them. More fruitful perspectives often require that we step off the line to a site outside the dichotomy” (Gould, 1990, p. 51).

The complex nature of globalization is not so much about the flipsides of conceptual coins, or even their edges, as it is about complex, emergent behavior of entire systems. Stepping off that line is beginning to happen, however. Let us consider some of the key concepts that resolve the perception of globalization as somehow “good” or “bad.”

How do birds keep their movements so orderly, so synchronized? Most people assume that birds play a game of follow-the-leader: the bird at the front of the flock leads, and the others follow. But that’s not so. In fact, most bird flocks don’t have leaders at all. There is no special “leader bird.” Rather, the flock is an example of what some people call “self-organization.” Each bird in the flock follows a set of simple rules, reacting to the movements of the birds nearby it. Orderly flock patterns arise from these simple, local interactions. None of the birds has a sense of the overall flock pattern. The bird in front is not a leader in any meaningful sense—it just happens to be there. The flock is organized without an organizer, coordinated without a coordinator.

Bird flocks are not the only things that work that way. Ant colonies, highway traffic, market economies, immune systems—in all of these systems, patterns are determined not by some centralized authority but by local interactions among decentralized components. As ants forage for food, their trail patterns are determined not by the dictates of the queen but by local interactions among thousands of worker ants. Patterns of traffic arise from local interactions among individual cars. Macroeconomic patterns arise from local interactions among millions of buyers and sellers. In immune systems, armies of antibodies seek out bacteria in a systematic, coordinated attack—without any “generals” organizing the overall battle plan. (Resnick, 2001, p. 3)

So it is with the phenomena we are considering here. Globalization is not a conscious entity. It doesn’t make decisions or direct the behavior we associate with it. The flow of goods and
ideas, of human capital, generational change and migration: none of these things has a leader or an organizer. These phenomena and others emerge without direction in the global system in much the same way bird flocks make their ways and traffic jams emerge from the flows of vehicles. Nobody directed that traffic jam to happen, just as nobody directs the Internet or global climate change. This is not such a strange concept, although it is also, for some reason, not quite as intuitive as perhaps it seems it should be.

Almost everywhere you look these days, there is evidence of decentralization. You can see it every time you pick up a newspaper. On the front page, you might find an article about the shift in corporate organizations away from top-down hierarchies toward decentralized management structures. The science section might carry an article about decentralized models of the mind, or maybe an article about distributed approaches to computing. And in the book review you might read an article suggesting that literary meaning itself is decentralized, always constructed by readers, not imposed by a centralized author.

But even as the influence of decentralized ideas grows, there is a deep-seated resistance to such ideas. At some deep level, people seem to have strong attachments to centralized ways of thinking. When people see patterns in the world (like a flock of birds), they often assume that there is some type of centralized control (a leader of the flock). According to this way of thinking, a pattern can exist only if someone (or something) creates and orchestrates the pattern. Everything must have a single cause, an ultimate controlling factor. The continuing resistance to evolutionary theories is an example: many people still insist that someone or something must have explicitly designed the complex, orderly structures that we call Life.

This assumption of centralized control, a phenomenon I call the centralized mindset, is not just a misconception of the scientifically naïve. It seems to affect the thinking of nearly everyone. Until recently, even scientists assumed that bird flocks must have leaders. It is only in recent years that scientists have revised their theories, asserting that bird flocks are leaderless and self-organized. A similar bias toward centralized theories can be seen throughout the history of science. (Resnick, 2001, pp. 3-4)

The centralized mindset persists, along with an attachment to dichotomy, but we are beginning to let go. This will be discussed in greater detail below. In the meantime, as a complex part of a complex system (the international system itself being such a self-organizing system as the patterns discussed above), globalization is no more “good” or “bad” than a particular weather system or a mammal’s endocrine system. It has neither benevolence nor malevolence, nor does it have intent. Nobody is controlling it. It is merely complex.

“Globalization is primarily about trade, and trade causes peace.”

By extension, then, globalization is certainly too complex to be primarily about any one of its major components. If it weren’t, we would not have had to coin a new term like “globalization” in order discuss it. Certainly, trade is one of the complex sub-systems of globalization—but let us not forget the globalizing of religion, of ideas, of social contact, of human migration, of
language, of culture, of advancing technology and telecommunications, of environmental and ecological concerns, and many others.

Interestingly, those who champion globalization as being primarily “good” are often those who believe trade causes peace. The logic works like this: everybody wants to make money and exchange goods and services. Therefore, if one is having a financially fruitful relationship where one and his or her trading partner are mutually making money and exchanging goods and services, both will want that to continue. Therefore, each will be inclined to work at keeping that relationship strong and stable, will share at least that value and probably others, and will be less likely to allow violence to come between them.

That is arguably an admirable sentiment. History, however, does not bear this theoretical prioritizing out, and the lessons of history might even have us label it terribly naïve. There have been many instances throughout history where previously strong trading partners became embroiled in armed conflict. The Delian League, created after the first Peloponnesian War, made much of the Aegean friendly trading partners, and the entire League friends and trading partners with Athens—until Athens, the greatest beneficiary of all this trade and good feeling, started the second Peloponnesian War, during which they were roundly smashed by the Peloponnesian Confederacy, including Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, and others. The *Pax Romana* was largely based on trade and tribute, and still it fell. Early European colonists initially experienced good trade relations with local Native American societies. France and Germany were trading partners before World War I, and even stronger ones between the world wars, at least up until 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. The United States continued to trade with Germany until 1941. These are just a scant few examples of the rich historical tradition of making war on former trading partners.

Even when trading partners enjoy a long period of peaceful trade and never have any significant conflicts with each other, trade truly does not cause peace. Trade and peace are often correlative, but if their relationship is at all causal (however unlikely), it is more likely that peace simply aids the preferable conditions for trade—while that peace lasts. The misconception that trade causes peace is not a new one, either. Often, when some new invention seems to have a stabilizing force and to create more commodious conditions for the exchange of goods and ideas, articles and speeches proliferate that credit trade. Consider this account of how this misconception played out during the Long Peace:

The long peace that followed the Battle of Waterloo was increasingly explained as the result of the international flow of commodities and ideas. “It is something more than an accident which has turned the attention of mankind to international questions of every description in the same age that established freedom of commerce in the most enlightened nations.” So wrote one of the early biographers of Richard Cobden, merchant of Manchester and citizen of the world. Variations of the same idea were shared by Sir Robert Peel, William Gladstone, John Stuart Mill, scores of economists and poets and men of letters, and by England’s Prince Consort, Albert the Good. His sponsorship of the Great Exhibition in the new Crystal Palace in London in 1851 popularized the idea that a festival of peace and a trade fair were synonymous. The Crystal Palace was perhaps the world’s first peace festival.
In that palace of glass and iron the locomotives and telegraphic equipment were admired not only as mechanical wonders; they were also messengers of peace and instruments of unity. The telegraph cable laid across the English Channel in 1850 had been welcomed as an underwater cord of friendship. The splicing of the cable that snaked beneath the Atlantic in 1858 was another celebration of brotherhood, and first message tapped across the seabed was a proclamation of peace: “Europe and America are united by telegraphic communication. Glory to God in the Highest, On Earth Peace, Goodwill Towards Men.” That cable of peace was soon snapped, and so was unable to convey the news in the following year that France and Austria were at war, or the news in 1861 that the United States was split by war. (Blainey, 1988, pp. 18-19)

Where, then, does the idea that trade causes peace come from? It is likely the result of misread linear statistical analysis. For one thing, linear statistics can make it tempting to project future events based on past ones (a practice which will be challenged in greater detail below). They also lend themselves to a variety of misinterpretations. This is a prevalent problem in international relations theory overall, and indeed, in the social sciences as a whole. It is a fundamental conflation of correlation and causality.

In the second most prominent fallacy about trends, people correctly identify a genuine directionality, but then fall into the error of assuming that something else moving in the same direction at the same time must be acting as the cause. This error, the conflation of correlation with causality, arises for the obvious reason (once you think about it) that, at any moment, oodles of things must be moving in the same direction (Halley’s comet is receding from Earth and my cat is getting more ornery)—and the vast majority of these correlated sequences cannot be casually related. In the classic illustration, a famous statistician once showed a precise correlation between arrests for public drunkenness and the number of Baptist preachers in nineteenth-century America. The correlation is real and intense, but we may assume that the two increases are causally unrelated, and that both arise as consequences of a single different factor: a marked general increase in the American population.

…The common error lies in failing to recognize that apparent trends can be generated as by-products, or side consequences, of expansions and contractions in the amount of variation within a system, and not by anything directly moving anywhere. … Thus, if we mistake the growth or shrinkage of an edge for movement of an entire mass, we may devise a backwards explanation. (Gould, 1996, p. 32 – 33)

In other words, trade and peace are correlative—that is, they often travel together. The relationship is not causal, however. Trade does not cause peace, rather, trade and peace are both made possible by political and economic stability, and bolstered by any number of other factors, such as desire for imported goods, a curiosity about other peoples, simply having no interest in conquest at the time, and the like.

Unfortunately, for an area of focus so obsessed with numerical measurement and precision of economic forecasting, many trade theories are disastrously unresponsive to the motion of real-
world trade dynamics. Other than critically assessing what linear statistics is really telling us and keeping in mind how correlation can masquerade as causality otherwise, the new theories about trade and economics that are responsive to real-world dynamics are those that embrace the complexity of the system rather than trying to pare it down to simplified components. Consider, for example, an account of how complexity theory contributes to economics.

Conventional economics, the kind he’d been taught in school, was about as far from this vision of complexity as you could imagine. Theoretical economists endlessly talked about the stability of the marketplace, and the balance of supply and demand. They transcribed the concept into mathematical equations and proved theorems about it. They accepted the gospel according to Adam Smith as the foundation for a kind of state religion. But when it came to instability and change in the economy—well, they seemed to find the very idea disturbing, something they’d just as soon not talk about.

But Arthur embraced instability. Look out the window, he’d told his colleagues. Like it or not, the marketplace isn’t stable. The world isn’t stable. It’s full of evolution, upheaval, and surprise. Economics had to take that ferment into account. And now he believed he’d found the way to do that, using a principle known as “increasing returns”—or in the King James translation, “To them that hath shall be given.” Why had high-tech companies scrambled to locate in the Silicon Valley area around Stanford instead of in Ann Arbor or Berkeley? Because a lot of older high-tech companies were already there. Them that has gets. Why did the VHS video system run away with the market, even though Beta was technically a little bit better? Because a few more people happened to buy VHS systems early on, which led to more VHS movies in the video stores, which led to still more people buying VHS players, and so on. Them that has gets. (Waldrop, 1992, p. 17)

This is just one example of an economic idea previously considered counter-intuitive that turns out to have a great deal of real-world application. It is only counter-intuitive, however, because it runs counter to assumptions about the nature of economics and of the global economic system. It is far easier to discard new theories that don’t fit with the current mindset than it is to rethink the assumptions of a field of endeavor. The new thing, the smaller thing, is ignored in favor of the larger body of comfortable existing ideas, even if they are rapidly losing what explanatory power they may have had in a more simplistically viewed global system. In this way, increasing returns plays out ironically. Them that has gets, even in the way that the more widely prevalent model doesn’t fit the reality of the strange, emergent world order.

“Globalization is a new phenomenon, and it is truly global.”

While the world does seem to be getting “smaller” and more interconnected in some places, it can only do that where the proper infrastructure exists. Is the world getting “smaller” in Sierra Leone, for example? The average person there does not, for example, have an Internet connection. It is possible there is a satellite television somewhere nearby, but not in everyone’s home. Goods are not available with the ease they are in the industrialized world—nor is a broad range of communication, or easy mobility of people or capital, for that matter. If globalization does not reach all over the globe, perhaps it cannot be considered truly global—at least not in a uniform, all-encompassing way (and the lack of homogeneity in and across cultures is very
important to consider, as we shall see below). By the same token, there is also no reason to think that the phenomena of globalization will continue where there is no infrastructure to support the means of their spreading. Uniformity is thwarted by too-broadly differing conditions in which people make their lives.

Further, the assumption about the developing world—that it will develop infrastructure, technology, and financial and social systems in much the same way that the industrialized nations have (just some years behind)—is very strange indeed once examined closely. Consider, for example, that in many parts of the developing world, one can get an excellent cellular telephone signal. Much of the African continent was never wired for telephone land lines, and as a result, bypassed that quickly-obsolescencing technology completely. Why would any African government, NGO, or telecommunications organization implement such a technology, when the newer technology is readily available, more practical, and a great deal less expensive? The developing world need not, and should not, follow along the western trajectory, especially while creating any technological or communications infrastructure. Where infrastructure does not exist at all, the globalizing forces that use that infrastructure cannot reach (just as a train cannot travel where there is no track), and where it is being built, it may well take on a completely different character than what the western world imagines. Different cultures with different experiences create their futures differently, not homogenously, along the same linear track.

It is also important to note that people have been traveling, trading, sharing technology and culture and ideas, and conquering each other, for as long as there have been humans. Nor did globalization begin with the European age of discovery, or with Greek and Roman trade routes, or with China’s Silk Road. While we lack surviving written records of every contact or conquest, we do have an archaeological record that puts various peoples’ travels at various points in the human timeline. Conquest, the exploitation of others’ resources, battle, hunting to extinction, climate change, and all the things we may think of as being more negative about how humans interact with each other and their environment on a global scale, have been going on for thousands upon thousands of years. (For a particularly good discussion of many of these meetings and impacts, see Diamond’s (2005) Guns Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies.) The primary difference in what we are observing today and what has been happening throughout history is that these days, it is simply happening at greater speed (facilitated by ever-progressing technology), and with a larger swath of the overall human population participating at once.

“Past events are a good blueprint for future predictions.”

While considering past experience is useful for analyzing present situations and how they unfolded, the past is not particularly helpful in predicting the future. For one thing, hindsight often gives us a sense of inevitability that we then project onto future events. It is easy, in hindsight, to see a chain of events as it unfolded and assume it was inevitable. However, simply because we have arrived here does not mean it was somehow meant to be, or that progress to this point came as a single, straight, unidirectional arrow. Let us return to Gould for an excellent example of how our perceptions in hindsight make the continuation of trends look inevitable. In discussing the evolution of horses, he remarks,
The lineage of *Hyracotherium* to *Equus* represents only one pathway through a very elaborate bush of evolution that waxed and waned in a remarkably complex pattern through the last 55 million years. This particular pathway cannot be interpreted as a summary of the bush; or as an epiphany of the larger story; or, in any legitimate sense, as a central tendency in equine evolution. …

We therefore arrive at my favorite subject of ladders versus bushes, or … individual pathways chosen with prejudice versus entire systems (full houses) and their complete variation. … Evolution rarely proceeds by the transformation of a single population from one stage to the next. Such an evolutionary style, technically called *anagenesis*, would permit a ladder, a chain, or some similar metaphor of linearity to serve as a proper icon of change. Instead, evolution proceeds by an elaborate and complex series of branching events, or episodes of speciation (technically called *cladogenesis*, or branch-making). A trend is not a march along a path, but a complex series of transfers, or side steps from one event of speciation to another. The evolutionary bush of horses includes many terminal tips, and each leads back to *Hyracotherium* through a labyrinth of branching events. No route to *Hyracotherium* is straight, and none of the labyrinthine paths has any special claim to centrality. … We run a steamroller right over a fascinatingly complex terrain when we follow the iconographic convention for displaying the pathway from *Hyracotherium* to *Equus* as a straight line. (Gould, 1996, p. 61 – 63)

The same can be said of the evolution of this emerging global system, and our interpretation of inevitability about a great many things. Any number of things could have happened in the complex, self-organizing international system, and looking backward down the pathway of things that did happen does not make those things inevitable, or even necessarily likely, in any way. Furthermore, knowing this should serve to educate us all as to how likely we are truly to know what is coming next. If we cannot consistently and accurately predict the weather more than five or so days out, predictions about the global polis are at least as problematic (and just as inevitable). Any branching or sidestep may be next. Since there was no inevitable straight line to this moment in history, we certainly should not assume that the timeline between this moment and the one from which we may later look back upon it will be a straight and predictable line either, or a pat and perfect stage, merely because we can see, in retrospect, the path we took to get here. We cannot accurately assume inevitability.

Gould also mentions in *Wonderful Life* (1990), a sort of prequel to *Full House*, that rewinding and “replaying life’s tape” of the evolution of life on earth would not likely yield the same results—too many random things come into play along the branching, forking “bush” of human experience. For example, if a particular creature had not survived a mass extinction when an underwater layer of sediment collapsed upon its contemporaries, chordates and vertebrates might have evolved very differently, or not at all. If other contemporaries had survived instead, the basis for later generations of life would have been entirely different as well. Creatures evolve as they do because of a mixture of natural selection, geography, luck, and many other factors. With one minor change in any of them, the evolutionary story of a particular family of creatures becomes entirely different. With life and ecosystems and natural populations being so closely intertwined, if any are different, all is different.
So it is with globalization in particular, and human cultures and populations in general. Had the invading Normans not had stirrups on their horses’ saddles at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, they would not have had the great tactical advantage of being able to fight from horseback, and might not have won. English might then have remained a phonetic Germanic language, rather than being heavily influenced by French at that time. English today might be much more easily spelled, pronounced and learned, but for the stirrup. One tiny, unaccounted-for piece of hardware thwarted inevitability and altered forever the evolution of a linguistic system.

At the time, the English considered their victory over the Normans inevitable: they outnumbered their foe and fought for their way of life on their own ground. So it is with many major turning points of history. We see it even today. The world was a changed place on September 12, 2001, yet nothing was inevitable about the changes precipitated by the previous day’s attacks. Initially, Americans came together in solidarity, and much of the world mourned with them. What if the US had continued along that course of unity instead of pursuing a series of fearful and destructive polices at home and elsewhere? The invasion of Iraq certainly was not inevitable. It was not even connected to the terrible events of September 11, except by specious argument.

Like looking back from the horse to its early ancestors, many things look inevitable in retrospect from where we stand, but we must not confuse a retrospective straight shot that omits the many branchings and missteps and decisions along the way as inevitability. Were we to rewind and replay history’s tape, events could unfold entirely differently, depending on human perceptions, decisions, and random factors. We could not have known then what would come to be. That being said, perhaps we should not look forward and assume we are ever on some sort of historical straight path to inevitability, rather than on a branching fork of our story, or a misstep or false start of some kind. The world changes suddenly and we cannot account for it. Consider the aforementioned generation of international relations scholars, training to understand a pre-Cold War multipolar international system, or the myriad dissertations being written in 1989 about Cold War politics when the Berlin Wall came down, changing everything. The human experience is not inevitable, whether looking backward or forward.

“Globalization is a one-way street of destructive cultural domination from the west to the rest.”

As with forensic science and physical evidence, every contact leaves a trace. The flow of cultural impacts, goods and services, communications, and socialization move in many directions, not just one. Globalization is more mutual than that, with the goods, attitudes, and news of other cultures welcomed in, and permeating, everyday western and non-western lives alike. We in the west can get mangoes (the most popular fruit in many parts of the world, but not in the US) in the supermarket all year ‘round. We can get hummus, and sushi, and cheap electronics, and thousands of other imports we use throughout our daily lives, with the same ease and convenience with which we get a carton of milk or loaf of bread. Most major US cities have restaurants featuring the ethnic foods of scores of other countries. One can have Ethiopian food one night and Pho the next. Japanese anime and manga interest artists and fans all over the world. Bits of culture flow in many different directions, with the west on the receiving end, too. Cultural exchange, and indeed acceptance, if not embracing, of it, is nowhere near unidirectional.
With regard to cultural impact and change, we have a word for cultures that do not change anymore, that are not dynamic but static, that are preserved perfectly in time, in museums, and in books and artifacts: dead. Cultures change over time, and with generations and historical forces—today’s cultural changes make up tomorrow’s cohesive culture. Cultures die, not when they change to reflect the new attitudes, interests and lifestyles of their people (particularly the next generation, who will carry the culture forward), but when they stagnate and become frozen in time and context, and are no longer lived out in the everyday lives of the people themselves.

Additionally, it is important to note that American and other western businesses that do well in other parts of the world are those that adapt to local tastes and sensibilities. Some westerners who go abroad certainly take notice of this practice. As one student in an online section of the aforementioned globalization course noted,

I did go into a McDonald’s in Singapore once looking for a vegeburger and thinking I might find it in an Asian McDonald’s. I was wrong. They didn’t have soy burgers but they did have more than one type of fish sandwich and their buns were made from rice and not wheat. There were other changes on the menu that reflected the tastes of the location. But at the same time, there was no question in my mind that I was in an American fast food restaurant. In my opinion, McDonald’s is McDonald’s no matter where you go.

But even so, I don’t think that because American fast food is all over the world it means the people are becoming Americanized any more than it means I am becoming Swedish if I go to IKEA. (F. Birchall, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

With this clever comment, an interesting thing happened. Other students chimed in, mentioning their liking for IKEA, some adding that they would like to see IKEA stores in their locations. It is unclear what makes members of the general public, graduate students, and professional scholars alike think this is not precisely what happens all over the world: “I like McDonald’s. We should get one here.” McDonald’s (and similar corporate entities, of course) thrives in other places because the people there like it. They spend their money there, and the business becomes successful. It does not make the people, or by extension, their culture, American, and they are also perfectly capable of determining whether or not they care to frequent the novel franchise or continue to go to the local restaurants to which they are accustomed. Frankly, it is far more disrespectful of people in other parts of the world to imply they are incapable of making their own consumer decisions than it is for American companies and multinationals to offer local consumers novel options with which westerners might not agree. As noted before, this is not to say that globalization, or large corporations, or trade, are “good.” It is simply to say that the ultimate act of disrespect toward people in other parts of the world (developing and otherwise) is to take away their own choices about their own habits and preferences, particularly in assuming they should not be offered those choices because they will not understand what the proper things for them to do with those choices are with regard to their own cultures.

Additionally, living cultures are not uniform, even those altered by deliberate conquest. Traditions, languages, sensibilities and tastes survive. Different people in different parts of the same country eat different foods, celebrate holidays differently, have different dialects, and
identify themselves by region, or town, or even family or neighborhood—not just by country. Consider the United States. Even leaving aside its diverse immigrant and ethnic populations, someone who works a farm in rural Wyoming is living in a rather different culture from someone who works in the high-tech industry around Boston, and both of them would likely feel out of place in Los Angeles or Tallahassee, perhaps even for different reasons. This is also the case in countries around the world: cultures are shaped by the people who live in them, and their ways of life, interests, and preferences, of which there may be dozens, scores, or hundreds in a single country or region. In India, for example, most people speak Hindi, as well as additional separate languages of their regions or states, not to mention different foreign languages. India is incredibly diverse. Any Indian would find the idea that their culture is somehow uniform patently absurd.

How, then, would it be possible to make a nation or region that is composed of very diverse eddies of cultures, even within itself, suddenly become homogenous with an outside one? Even if it were done on purpose, each culture would have to be induced in its own special way—which already precludes true homogenization. People and their cultures are not homogenous, even when they all prefer similar things or do certain things in similar ways. They are complex, and another culture cannot be dropped into place around them and suddenly take over completely. People will still choose the things they prefer. Cultures and people are not homogenous from within. They cannot be made so from without.

The Nature of Saturation Points and Systemic Equilibrium

Finally, phenomena do reach their saturation points, from biological populations to the motion of catamarans to absorption of cultural values. When one spills a glass of milk, the spill can only spread so far. Then it must stop spreading, reaching a new state of equilibrium as a puddle, contained by such factors as volume and surface tension. It will then begin to contract again, with evaporation. It does not continue to spread \textit{ad infinitum} until it is shallower than a molecule thick, and then spread itself upon the breeze, contaminating all it contacts with lactose. It reaches a saturation point in its motion, it can go no further, and it stops. A forest fire can only spread as far as it has fuel to consume, which is why the technique of starting a backfire works: firefighters start a smaller fire in front of an advancing forest fire, effectively removing any fuel and stopping the larger fire. Even without a backfire, a fire stops when it runs out of fuel, cannot make the leap from one source of fuel to another because of distance, or when it has saturated its area, and it too begins to recede. Nothing spreads indefinitely—not milk, not fire, not cultural domination—everything has a saturation point.

What happens to a more complex system when it reaches a saturation point, then? Other factors in the system, which were present all along, often come to the fore, and if the system is stable or contained enough, will usually nudge it back toward equilibrium. Take for example the catamaran. The additional hull is a hedge against the boat tipping over. The higher it lifts up out of the water, the stronger the gravitational pull back down. It is not merely a matter of, “what goes up must come down,” but of the “going up” part of the system actively setting the “coming down” into motion, and indeed, feeding it.
Let us consider a slightly more complex system—a biological one, composed of foxes, rabbits, and lettuce. (For a more detailed discussion of modeling behaviors of complex biological systems, see Gleick, 2008, beginning on p. 70.) When the lettuce has a good year, perhaps producing a bumper crop, the rabbits feeding on it also dramatically increase in population and vitality. The foxes have a rough year trying to catch all the strong, fast rabbits. When the foxes have too rough a year, though, there aren’t enough foxes to cull the growing rabbit population—particularly the sick and aging ones, as they are easiest to catch. The quality of the rabbit population suffers for not being culled, and the next year’s lettuce population cannot support the growing, hungry rabbit population. The rabbits begin to die off. With the rabbits weakened by hunger, age and other problems, the foxes begin to have an easier time catching them, and the foxes have a much better year. Additionally, with an increased mortality rate among rabbits, and therefore more rabbit carcasses, the soil is better fertilized, bringing the lettuce population much-needed nutrients, particularly after the population had been decimated. The following year, the lettuce has a comeback.

The cycle may not necessarily repeat itself in the same way, or even at all, but the change in each population affects the others, and approaching saturation points bring the system back toward equilibrium. Once the rabbits are doing well, they do not then take over the entire ecological niche, making it homogenously all-rabbit. For one thing, the population would die off without the lettuce to feed upon and the foxes to keep the populations and systems in functional equilibrium—and long before the population could become all-rabbit. Rather, that population reaches toward equilibrium, in balance with the lettuce and fox population. A system out of balance often reaches toward a new equilibrium, even if it never quite reaches a steady state.

So it is with culture. People stop consuming when they stop being interested, or they have had enough, or they do not appreciate a particular extra-cultural influence that they see as invasive or destructive—they resist. They resist relinquishing the things they deem more important than novelty, much like the companion hull of a catamaran resists being airborne, driven back to its point of preferred equilibrium by the very motion of novelty itself. People are pulled back to the familiar things they value like gravity pulls the hull.

Sometimes they choose things they consider improvements, creating a new equilibrium, but that doesn’t necessarily harm the larger culture either. For example, if the author were to start pasta dough in a food processor rather than as a pile of flour on a noodle board as some of her immediate ancestors have, that does not mean she has rejected the more traditional technology completely, or that she never uses it anymore, or that she will never teach it to anyone else. It may simply mean that she is running short of time this evening, or that the thought of getting flour under her fingernails today is unappealing. The culture of pasta making, or of her ancestors immigrated from northern Italy, is not dead simply because one small aspect of it now has the option of being slightly more convenient (or, in this case, is perceived as having been improved upon). Further, those recent ancestors would likely have used food processors sometimes, too, if they had had them. The essential cultural value in this case is in taking time to make good food, and then enjoying the good food with others. Shaving the first fifteen minutes off the much longer process doesn’t hurt the result, or the larger cultural value. It simply keeps the flour out from under one’s fingernails, and perhaps allows one time to start an after-dinner granita, or make a phone call inviting one more loved one to dinner.
Similarly, people do not swallow trends and products as whole cultures. Once everyone has an iPod who wants one, the consumer “trend” does not continue until every single pocket in every single country around the world has an iPod in it (although even then, we would eventually run out of pockets, which are, after all, a finite commodity). When the novelty of a new McDonald’s wears thin, people lose interest, stop going, and business drops off. One side of the catamaran lifts, and is pulled back down by gravity. It does not continue to lift until it takes flight. Cultures reach saturation points with new ideas and influences, which they ultimately adopt or reject, not wholesale, but in segments, communities, and as individuals. Cultures do not become uniformly something else because of outside products or ideas.

Analytical Method: A Suggestion

As it happens, and as has been hinted at throughout this article, the field of nonlinear dynamics offers a number of ways to think about saturation points in biological, mechanical and social systems. We have already been considering some examples throughout, from self-organization and increasing returns to thinking about cultural contact more as a truly global complex system than as a unidirectional line. This is also the true challenge of twenty-first century thought in international relations: shedding the linear mindset that is the legacy of Cold War dichotomous thinking, and instead using intellectual tools that illuminate the nature and dynamics of real-world complex behavior. Now let us consider an example of the behavior of systems and saturation points that we could use to analyze the cultural ones we have been discussing.

There are a number of ways to investigate the motion of saturation in systems such as the global polis. Natural systems, including those based on natural behaviors such as human behavior, behave remarkably similarly to each other—so much so, in fact, that we can take any of the metaphorical examples we have discussed here (bird flocks, traffic jams, forest fires, spilled milk, mammalian endocrine systems, evolution of horses, weather, biological populations, catamarans, market trends, and so on), operationalize them, and gain some insight about their shared nature—and by extension, of globalization, which also shares those similar qualities. How would we go about that, though—how would we even begin?

The common thread in understanding all the various kinds of systems mentioned is in leaving behind the “centralized mindset” discussed earlier, in favor of thinking about self-organizing behavior, as these are all self-organizing systems. Nobody directs any of these things, just as, as previously mentioned, nobody directs the Internet or the antibodies protecting a body from illness. That is the very essence of thinking differently about the nature of global interactions and culture. Nobody directs the weather, or the lettuce-rabbit-fox ecosystem, or the evolutionary path of horses. They are all self-organizing systems, as is globalization itself.

One good way to investigate self-organizing systems is with agent-based modeling. Agent-based modeling uses very simple computer programs to model behavior. The user has a few programmable pieces with which to simulate what can become some very complex behavior: the “agent” or creature, such ants seeking food and letting other ants know where to find the food; the movable objects the creatures act upon, such as the food; and the background, which can be divided into cells that also have their own behavior.
Let us take our example of the forest fire. In his delightful and succinct book *Turtles, Termites, and Traffic Jams*, about decentralized behavior and modeling it with an agent-based modeling tool called StarLogo, Mitchel Resnick specifically considers how to model a forest fire and its fuel saturation. (The book is an excellent introduction to StarLogo, and to agent-based modeling in general.) Using StarLogo and a handful of very brief commands, Resnick programs some patches to be trees and others to be empty. In this way, he investigates how close together the trees have to be (the density of available fuel) for the forest fire to burn from one end to the other. Resnick tells us,

> When the program starts, there is a neat line of red fire on the left edge of the screen. Then the fire spreads from tree to tree. In some places, the fire quickly reaches a dead end, surrounded by empty space. In other places, the fire continues to spread from tree to tree. Overall, the fire paths form fractal-like patterns on the screen. (Resnick, 2001, p. 106)

He is suggesting the nonlinear nature of this system—no surprises there. What insight Resnick does gain about the nature of fuel density and fire saturation is that the fire needs an extreme tree density in order to consume the forest entirely, and still a surprisingly large amount just for the fire to make it from one side of the forest to the other.

What we’re most interested in, of course, is the behavior of the system. It doesn’t matter if we’re talking about a fire consuming trees or an outside culture subsuming others—we want to know about spread and saturation. Whether we’re considering trees or individual members of a culture, the spread of fire or cultural products and ideas, spots where there is no tree fuel and fire cannot spread or spots where there is no interest in outside cultural products and ideas and those cannot spread. We would model the behavior in much the same way.

What we may take from Resnick’s behavioral study is that, in order for an outside cultural value, or a trend, or a desire for a particular brand of hamburger, to spread so that it consumes a whole culture, the density of fuel—in this case active consumers—is the key. Those consumers must have a considerable density indeed. With Resnick’s tree density, even at fifty-five percent, with more than half the forest area being trees, the fire *never once* made it all the way across the screen. Until the density reached a much greater extreme, the fire was never guaranteed to burn its way across the entire forest, but the odds got significantly better after a threshold of sixty-three percent was reached. Still, the fire did not consume the whole at that density.

This suggests that the conditions necessary for the consuming of an entire culture—never mind every one of the cultures of an entire planet—has to do with the density of individuals interested in adopting the outside culture. If that density is not critical, the outside idea or product or value does not catch on, and it is very difficult indeed for the entire culture to be altered, except in the most extreme of circumstances, just as it is difficult for the fire to get enough fuel to prolong its trajectory to the other side of the forest.

It is in this sense that the previously-discussed misconception of homogeneity is so very important, for cultural density is not merely population, but the active members of a particular part of a particular society. They must be homogenous enough for a specific outside idea, product, value, or the like to have enough appeal to spread from one individual to another, and
they must be of close enough cultural proximity that the spread can happen—that individuals can introduce that idea, product, or value to each other. If the members of the culture are disparate enough in their own interests and ideas (and, as we have seen, they are), very little will appeal to enough of them that that critical density can be reached. Similarly, if they communicate infrequently with each other, or live in isolated communities (and, as we have seen, many do), that critical density will also not likely be reached.

If we’re looking for specific densities necessary for cultural conquest, we may consider the forest fire model as a rough analog. More than half of the members of the existing culture, then, would need to have contiguous access to each other and similar enough tastes for the outside piece of culture to catch on at all, but it still wouldn’t catch on through the entire culture. Nearly two-thirds of the contiguous, actively interested existing culture would have to accept the outside piece and pass it on for it to spread through the existing culture—and it still wouldn’t subsume the whole. In other words, the study of the behavior suggests that complete subsuming of hundreds of disparate cultures, the vast majority of which are nowhere near each other conceptually or physically, ultimately fails. This is because the cultural acceptance of enough aspects of the outside culture never reaches that critical density that would allow it to subsume others. The world is simply not culturally homogenous or contiguous enough for it to work.

Conclusion

Although many misconceptions exist when considering the complex forces that make up the phenomenon of globalization, the right theoretical tools are a great help in rethinking those misconceptions. The insights we glean from using theoretical tools capable of describing and explaining such complex phenomena are the ones that will help us build useful theory in twenty-first century international relations.

As a start, we can reject constructions relying on dichotomy or dichotomous values, and those that assign moral judgments to self-organizing complex systems. A complex system is merely complex, and unable to be funneled into dichotomies, or to live up to moral judgments as if it were a conscious, decision-making agent. We can use our common sense to ask questions of our scholars and our media to determine what might be missing from their accounts. We can be aware of the temptations to confuse correlation and causality, and to view events in hindsight as an inevitable straight shot, and not succumb to those temptations. We can seek to understand globalized responses to western culture on other peoples’ own terms, and understand our own cultures and theirs better for it.

Finally, the west’s, and specifically the US’s, culture cannot and will not dominate all others. Certain aspects of it will reach an interest saturation point among particular members of particular cultures, based on their own individual interests and values—or perhaps they have already—and stop spreading. Places without the infrastructure to support the components of other spreading cultures are already as saturated as they will be, at least for the foreseeable future. There is also nothing inevitable about the spread of cultures and their values, about the multiple complex phenomena of globalization, or about complex systems in general. The lack of inevitability, however, together with the fact that nobody is directing these phenomena, suggest that globalization is what we make of it, both in our practices, and conceptually—and that the
more interconnected we all become, the more powerful and impactful our individual choices are in shaping the global cultural future.

References


A Multi-Party Imaginary Dialogue about Power and Cybernetics

Phillip Guddemi

Abstract: This paper is written as a multi-sided dialogue intended to present a number of ideas about power. Some of these ideas are my own, expressed in a kind of evolutionary idiom of adaptation though they were partly developed in reaction to Foucault (and are far more indebted to Foucault and cybernetics than to contemporary evolutionist thinking). There is a deep irony in that my way of thinking is primarily rooted in the cybernetic anthropology of Gregory Bateson; however, he was deeply skeptical of the concept of power. My personification of him in this dialogue, as “Bateson,” demonstrates this skepticism and brings into the discussion other relevant ideas of his. The third participant in the dialogue, Mary Midgley, is included because her consideration of Hobbes’ ideas leads us to consider yet another, probabilistic, way of thinking about power.

Keywords: Adaptation, epistemology, power

The following is a multi-sided dialogue imagined as being between various persons who have been and remain influential within my own evolving thought about power. My ideas have roots in the cybernetic anthropology of Gregory Bateson; however, he was deeply skeptical of the concept of power. My personification of him in this dialogue, as “Bateson,” demonstrates this skepticism and brings into the discussion other relevant ideas of his. In counterpoint to his views (which can be documented as his or as having been prefigured by his), my own persona in this dialogue articulates evolving aspects of my own thought which relate to concepts of competition, status, and risk. The only other participant is Mary Midgley who brings into the discussion her unique perspective on the political thought of Hobbes.

Bateson: Not everyone feels that the concept of “power” needs re-examination. Most people, perhaps, are fairly satisfied with it, and not merely in the “political” sphere. I got very discontented with the way certain people were using the concept of power in the family therapy business. For example Jay Haley, the family therapist who was a coauthor with me of a paper about schizophrenia, used to postulate that every participant in a family system was engaged in a struggle for “power.” And the entire movement which calls itself “neuro-linguistic..."
programming” seems to be based on ideas of power and control. I stopped sending people to study Milton Erickson’s techniques of hypnosis after finding out that they so often seemed to come back “craving for power.”

It’s ironic that Norbert Weiner called cybernetics the study of control and communication. Because if cybernetics teaches anything, it is that our control, over what we like to call our “environment,” is radically limited. Each of us is only part of whatever system it is we are participating in.

There is a certain scientific hubris about control which I reacted against. It goes with ideas of linear cause. We find the cause and we can obtain the effect, assuming that the effect is something that we want. Effects we don’t want we call “side effects” or “unintended consequences,” and then we work on minimizing those. But they are precisely what we don’t want to think about, so we don’t, until we have to. Therefore we are always running faster and faster to mitigate the effects of our previous interventions. The world is always falsifying our simplified versions of it, but we simplify because it is the only way to “get things done.”

So what we think of as our control over the world, and over others, is always limited. But over and above that, “power” has problems as an explanatory principle. I had always warned against “power” as well as “energy” as being quantitative metaphors about qualitative things, not applicable to the world I call “creatura,” the world of biology and communication that operates on cybernetic principles rather than according to billiard-ball physics. And of course power has a meaning in that world, as does energy—and in our veneration of physics, which comes from our success (or apparent success) in controlling our physical world, we naturally apply ideas from physics to living systems in ways that don’t make sense. With energy, for example, we have psychic energy, which to me is a false metaphor for that reason. Similarly we have Freud’s hydraulic system of the self—maybe that’s been largely forgotten these days, good riddance, though there was a lot else in Freud that’s been thrown out with the bathwater…

There is another point about power, which is that you are always yourself autonomous, or as Maturana and Varela put it, autopoietic. Or as I often put it, your energy comes from your own breakfast. If you kick a ball, the energy of the ball is transferred from your foot to the ball, but if you kick a dog, the dog just might bite you back, because the dog has its own source of energy, which we call its metabolism. It is autonomous in that sense. Foucault, who has been cited in the service of a lot of nonsense using the word power, actually said that power is always a relation between beings (people, but I think his analysis works for animals too) who are mutually autonomous in this way. He calls it “action upon the action of others,” but what this means is that you as the less powerful one are still responsible for your own actions, and the more powerful people are there in your environment and you are making choices about how to deal with them. But see, the opposite is true too—you are in their environment, and they are making choices as to how to deal with you. There is no unilineal power.

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4 Bateson’s criticism of students he sent to see Milton Erickson can be found in an unpublished interview with Bradford Keeney, quoted and cited (pp. 224-225) in Erickson, Takeuchi, and Gilligan (2002).
5 Weiner (1948/1961)
6 See Bateson (1979, pp. 112-113).
Near the end of my life, I set a challenge to cybernetic thinkers of the future. I did this in a little-known conference devoted to what it means to be a “power broker.” It was a conference about an urban planner in New York named Robert Moses, but really, my thoughts were not specific to him. I challenged that conference to “try to spell out in terms of patterns of interaction in real time what the metaphor ‘power’ really denotes – a re-examination of the basic premises of political science in the light of cybernetics.”

Phillip: So let me try to take up this challenge, as I have done in a 2004 conference in Copenhagen, in an article for Cybernetics and Human Knowing, and in a recent presentation for the systems theorists on Foucault.

Put in an evolutionary frame, the key idea I want to develop is very simple. All organisms live in and adapt to an environment. For social animals, among the most important constituents of that environment are other animals of the same species. Power, or if you like, social power, comes from this simple picture. We say that A has power over B if B is adapting to A more than A is adapting to B. Really I don’t know why this formulation has not come about sooner.

I suspect the reason it hasn’t is that conventional theories of power seem to look at it from the agency of the power-wielder. Power is seen as some faculty or property or quality inherent in an agent, which enables that agent to do things. And indeed what we call power-to can be seen as something which is the capacity of an agent. However, I find that power-over, or social power, can more fruitfully be seen from the point of view of the adapting person (or organism), the one who is “underneath.” This transformation is similar to that in reader-response theories of authorship, and it can be shown to be inherent in second-order cybernetics and in constructivism.

It turns out that power, which is a heterogeneous thing when it is looked at from the perspective of “what sorts of things make the powerful powerful,” finds a kind of conceptual unity if it is seen instead as that to which the less powerful adapt. This adaptation can be unconscious or automatic or it can be quite conscious and strategic. Adaptation in this kind always is done by an autonomous agent of the type which Bateson talked about, and indeed Foucault made a similar point. And since we are always adapting to each other, we are by this definition or conception also always exerting power over each other—a concept which fits well with a kind of Foucaultian capillary concept of power. But clearly some people exert more power over others than others do, and we can see this as similar to gravity. Gravity is a force exerted by

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8 Bateson (1974, p. 26)
10 Guddemi (2006)
11 Guddemi (2008)
12 Foucault’s point:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.). (Foucault 1982, p. 428)
all matter on all other matter, but depending on the mass of the objects, the gravitational pull of A on B may far exceed the gravitational pull of B on A. So why not the same for power? The power of A over B exists to the extent that B’s adaptation to A is more than A’s adaptation to B.

**Bateson:** But what is this “more than”? Such a concept of power imposes a quantitative metric on phenomena that are not always quantitative. Ever since the triumph of quantitative science we have lost the knack of looking at patterns.

Power in this sense is a human construction rather like money. These are unbiological ideas, and they distort our experience as biological organisms. In the world of biology it is not true that more is better. It is a world of optimizing not maximizing. You have to have just the right amount of hormone in the right place in the developing body, not too little, not too much. The same with other quantitative things—as I wrote, protein, oxygen, sex, warmth, entertainment, water, air—maybe even money. Or “power.”

But money is something of which we assume that the more we have of it the better off we are. And we make the same assumption about power. These are cultural assumptions and they are among the precise ones which are helping us destroy the planet.

Here is another example of a related construction, which we have now imposed on the helpless brute animals: “dominance.” We have this whole idea that social mammals impose on each other a rank order such as our own societies have had. But this is now being challenged by some of the primatologists themselves. Bruno Latour has mentioned in his work the baboon studies of Shirley Strum, who demonstrated a new way of looking at baboons, male baboons no less. She simply denies that they have a dominance hierarchy, certainly not one based on aggression. Instead, like us baboons use social skill, reciprocity, and cooperation, though aggression is part of the mix as well. And no one should be surprised at this, but we are. Because we have a protocol to place baboons in a “dominance” rank order, and because this protocol works for us (in ways which provide a kind of self-confirmation), we assume that the protocol describes what the baboons are doing, but Shirley Strum says no.

**Mary Midgley:** I believe our culture’s concept of power can be seen in Hobbes, the 17th Century political thinker. “So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all Mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to: or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Pt. 1, Ch. 11).”

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13 Bateson (1974, p. 27)
14 Latour (2005, p. 69)
16 Strum’s skepticism about dominance order in primates was prefigured, in my opinion, by Bateson’s skepticism about transitive order in biological systems generally. With respect to human power relations he reiterated this skepticism in his 1974 draft paper, *op cit.*, pp. 26-27.
17 Midgley (1978, p. 8)

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*Toward Development of Politics and the Political*
Marshall Sahlins has recently argued that this is “the Western illusion of human nature.” And he makes a good case that it is a longstanding folk belief going back to Thucydides and even earlier, that we are innately competitive and avaricious. He doesn’t see other cultures as having made this assumption, or having come to this conclusion.\textsuperscript{18}

But I am interested in the Hobbes quote because of the way he shows power to be an insurance.\textsuperscript{19} In our societies we amass money and power because we want them to buffer things that might happen to us later. This is how the desire for money and power becomes boundless.

We can distinguish the desire for enough, from the desire always to be certain of having enough. Recent work on happiness shows that it increases along with income up to a certain point, and then after that point there is far less correlation between income and reported happiness.\textsuperscript{20} We can think of that point as the “enough” point of any particular society. Hunter-gatherers, as another example, when they supplement their subsistence style with working for pay, will often work just as much as necessary to get what they want, and then they will stop, with little to induce them back to work. It takes a social transformation for them to feel that they need more.\textsuperscript{21}

But this is exactly what Hobbes is saying with respect to power. The desire for power, like that for money, doesn’t come from wanting more happiness or fulfillment in the present. A limited amount of money, or power, would suffice for these, and Hobbes as much as admits that. The desire for more, whether this is money or power, comes from fear or anxiety about possible loss. If one could always insure against everything that might happen, one could maybe relax in the present. However, there is always some other unlikely event that could happen. We accumulate and accumulate, both money and what we perceive as “power,” in hopes that we can thereby defend against all the possibilities that might threaten us, and yet each further accumulation comes with its own associated vulnerability, so that we are always in fear and never truly enjoy what it is we have accumulated.

**Phillip:** This insurance concept could provide us with a possible metric for power, although I don’t think this has been done. Power could be measured as a derivative expression based in probability, just as we find in insurance itself. Life is full of uncertainties but each of these uncertainties has a particular probability. If I can decrease the probability of something I don’t want happening to me, I will do that. I can decrease my risk. But in a social world I can often do that by increasing yours. It is not always as zero-sum as that, but it can be.

Robert Sapolsky has studied status hierarchies among baboons\textsuperscript{22} and Michael Marmot has studied them among human beings.\textsuperscript{23} Even granting what Shirley Strum has to say about the self-confirming aspects of dominance theory, there is still a difference in the very bloodstreams of baboons who occupy different social places, whether you prefer to call these effects of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Sahlins (2008)
\item \textsuperscript{19} Midgley (1978)
\item \textsuperscript{20} Layard (2005)
\item \textsuperscript{21} Bird-David, Nurit (1992)
\item \textsuperscript{22} Sapolsky (2004)
\item \textsuperscript{23} Marmot (2004)
\end{itemize}
dominance or not. Status in your group counts; the lives of those lower in status are more chaotic than that of those higher up. This can be the doing of the higher-ups themselves, for example if they bully the lower-downs. “Stress” is less at the top and more at the bottom, precisely because those at the top experience fewer perturbations and fewer risks.

So a possible metric of power could be about comparative insulation from risk. However, as Ulrich Beck shows in his work on the risk society, this is not always easy to ensure in our changing society, in which previously unknown risks emerge all the time.

Still, if you look at those at the bottom of social hierarchies, you will see that in general they undergo more risks with less buffering, they have to adapt to more, and they have fewer resources with which to do this.

Bateson: “Stress” is another of those physical metaphors for biological realities. In *Mind and Nature* I define it as follows: “Lack of entropy, a condition arising when the external environment or internal sickness makes excessive or contradictory demands on an organism’s ability to adjust. The organism lacks and needs flexibility, having used up its available uncommitted alternatives.”

Stress is the result of double binds, and for me double binds are the result of adaptation which is challenged. You are perfectly adapted to one thing and another thing comes along which makes your earlier adapted behavior “wrong.” Over time if you are stably adapted to one thing, because it is always there in your particular environment, then you will tend to hard-wire your response to it. As with practicing the piano, or any skill, eventually your knowledge proceeds to more and more unconscious levels of the mind. But when something that deeply learned starts to be “punished” in some way, due to some changes in your relationship to others, for example other people, then you will experience, at minimum, psychological pain.

Phillip: And it seems that people above others in hierarchies are able to keep those below in just that kind of uncertainty. This is part of the “risk society” which is a phrase that comes from Ulrich Beck. The higher-ups experience a certain buffering of the demands of the environment, while the lower-downs have to adapt not only to the ambient environment but also to the activities of the higher-ups. Risk is transferred to those least able to bear it, and power is the mechanism for how this is done. Maturana and Varela refer to the “perturbations” of the environment, but people make their own perturbations for each other, which they experience as “stress.” Power is the measure and mechanism for how some experience more stress than they cause, and others cause more stress than they experience.

Bateson: No, this makes power into a dormitive principle. If you want to say power is itself this transference of risk, or stress, that is one thing; but you are making just pretty phrases if you

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24Bateson (1979, p. 253)
26Beck (1992)
27 Maturana and Varela (1992)
28 For “dormitive principle” or rather “dormitive explanation,” see Bateson (1979, p. 95).
call it a mechanism. You are adding a black box you don’t need. Say instead that bullying is the mechanism, or rational persuasion (in the sense of how a robber with a gun rationally persuades you to give him your money).

Also I think that the double bind is not restricted to people who have to cope with a stressful environment, even if it is other people who do so much to make it stressful. In fact I think that the classic double bind that I described in relation to schizophrenia, is more especially experienced by people whose environment has changed from a stability it used to have, to a new situation in which their old adaptations are maladaptive. In the evolutionary context this is the prelude to extinction. But those who endure in their lives a relatively stable exploitation full of suffering may not be experiencing so many double binds, in spite of a miserable existence.

Phillip: Maybe the lower-downs experience a loss of possible efficiency in their adaptation, incurring a kind of cost to their bodies and even their minds from having to deal with perturbations outside their control. But they may get a kind of flexibility from this, in that they have less to lose when big changes happen. This seems to relate to what these days is fashionable to call privilege. You have privilege when you have such a good adaptation to the way things are that you don’t have to think about it, which in Bateson’s terms means you can “hard-wire” it, while others have to be more conscious about factors in their environment which you can rely on more than they can. But this relative privilege is also the prelude to a classic double bind for the privileged, when the underlying environment shifts. They are more adapted to stable situations but less so to changes.

In human terms this looks like a kind of comeuppance for people who have been living it up like feudal lords, or Wall Street. But in ecological terms this analogous dynamic is more obviously sad. The animals and plants of the tropical rainforests have had a stable environment for millions of years in which to develop very special adaptations which could only have emerged due to that relative stability. The perturbations we humans introduce as we destroy these tropical rainforests challenge the “privilege” of these specialized organisms, while our activities “reward” organisms which can adapt to a variety of changing ecosystems, such as rodents, weeds, and cockroaches.

In evolutionary biology there is the concept of fitness. But fitness measures adaptation against some theoretical optimum with respect to an environment—as if the environment itself was not changing. Of course environments do change, and most especially when they are composed of one’s fellow humans.

Bateson: I can see a problem with your use of hierarchies as a metric for power though. What about a newborn baby? The moment that baby comes into a family, the parents have to adapt to that new baby—their whole world changes. Freud used to refer to “His Majesty the Baby.”

So the point I want to make is again, against this whole idea of a metric for power. Is there a metric that will capture both the power of the parents to determine the basic environment for the baby, and also the power of the baby totally to transform the lives of these same parents?

29 In a talk before the American Society for Cybernetics conference at Urbana, Illinois, in 2007, entitled “Do Power and Privilege without Responsibility Make You Stupid?”
And it is not so different for politicians. They have to adapt to what the people want, to a great extent. For example, Goebbels, in Nazi Germany…

Phillip: I’m going to interrupt you here. I’m not sure I like that example so well. But it’s true that the “adaptive landscape” of any leader is composed of that leader’s followers. Some followers are more equal than others in this respect, such as lobbyists for powerful businesses. But no leader can lead without followers, and leaders who try to articulate a personal vision beyond what their people are ready for, can get into trouble.

I am willing to say that the people have power against the rulers. But here is the thing. Even among animals, an alpha needs subordinates to be an alpha—but an alpha may disregard a particular subordinate more than that subordinate can disregard its particular alpha.

Bateson: But what I was getting at was the idea that there are indeed types of power. In my presentation for the conference on “Broken Power” I used the metaphor of the parts of a play. Or, as a similarly dramaturgical example, the courtroom. The judge has one type of power, the jury another, the attorneys yet another, and the security guard for the court building, yet another. Like an ecological system, composed of relations between predators and prey, each of which has an evolving and changing role, and each of which continually adapts to the other.

I said there that “Perhaps the nearest ‘reality’ to the metaphoric myth of ‘power’ is a large or important part in an ecosystem.” An ecosystem is a whole in which no individual organism, or even species, has control over that whole. Particular plants and animals demonstrate themselves as being important within the larger system – but they are not determining the operations of that system in a linear way. Similarly, the powerful in society are not, after all, independent variables which determine the less powerful, in the way that independent variables in science are analyzed to determine dependent variables.

It’s true we like to think of our power that way, for example for parents vis-à-vis the children who dominate their lives. This is the idea of the “blank slate,” you know. By the way it’s a total nonsense to assume that I, or Margaret Mead, or any of those people, thought that power worked that way. It wasn’t anthropologists in our day who thought that cultural change was easy, that you could just impose it as a blank slate on people. That was the dream of control in our generation, but you saw it more in psychology, like B.F. Skinner. If you look at my work you find it was always against putting people (or even animals) in Skinner boxes.

You came to me years ago with some idea of making your own major in college—you could do that then, at U.C. Santa Cruz. You wanted to write a major in “cultural planning.” Anyway, I told you that you should definitely do that, you know. You should work at trying to figure how to plan culture. But in the end, I told you, you would look at the whole thing and come out with a belly laugh. The belly laugh would come to you because you would eventually realize that cultural planning is impossible. Because, as I told you, “you can’t deal with love in that way.”

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30 Bateson argued famously that even Goebbels, charged with the manipulation of public opinion in Nazi Germany, had to tailor his message to the German people. See Bateson (1972, p. 486).
31 See Bateson (1974, p. 27).
To speak of “love” in any way is somewhat taboo in academia, and I used to relish the shock value in using the term. When I refer to love it is not merely to speak of an emotion, although emotion is certainly part of it. I wanted to counter the idea that cultural change is easy. Our most intimate ways of dealing with each other and our relationships are culturally patterned and punctuated. Changing these is very difficult and facile shortcuts to cultural change, such as those which try to leverage the use of force, are not usually effective. And of course in addition to their ineffectiveness they can hurt people in ways not intended or planned.

Maturana has now taken up the matter of love, and he sees it both as a feeling and as a behavioral foundation for the cooperation that is typical of the human species. As a principle, he sees love as interacting with another as a legitimate other in relationship, as opposed to dominance and power which do not legitimate the other. He contrasts the human care for infants and friendly cooperativeness with the chimpanzee, which he finds to be more “political” than humans in emphasizing dominance and power. Perhaps like the hippies of the 1960s, Maturana seems to see love in this sense as natural to human beings.

Phillip: But wouldn’t it be true that human beings have at all times been both loving and political? Maturana makes an opposition between Homo sapiens amans and Homo sapiens aggressans but I suspect we have always been both, just as chimpanzees are both, but I think he is right that love is a bigger part of our mix than it is for the chimpanzees. Also I should mention that in some relational views of “power” it is still a factor even in loving relationships, and this accords with most contemporary thought including feminist thought.

A group of cooperative humans, for all that cooperation is based on trust and what Maturana calls love, may have an advantage in fighting another hostile group of humans which has not developed so much cooperation. There you might have love in the service of aggression. Indeed armies cannot fight without the esprit de corps which is the fellow feeling, the relational morale, of the soldiers in the armies. The ideology is that it is the hierarchy which creates the effectiveness of armies, but “love” indeed does its part.

On the other hand, when you do have the social breakdown situation that Hobbes describes—and no, I don’t believe it is the “state of nature,” but it does happen—when you have people split into small groups fighting for supremacy, we tend to believe that it can promote “love”—or at least peace—when one of them decisively wins. That was the idea of the Pax romanum, the Roman empire which established such a complete supremacy that, in the provinces, if you decided you didn’t care about your sovereignty or rights anymore, you could turn your attention to peaceful pursuits, to the arts of trade for example. (And if you look at trade, you will find both the love and the war within that too.) You could turn your attention away from the question of who wins, admit that the Romans did, and do a few things that didn’t involve worrying so intensely about who was on top. (And of course this is exactly what Hobbes advocated.)

I don’t recommend this idea to today’s would-be imperialists however—even those who want to impose “democracy” (promote love by means of war, which is what doesn’t work). What is now called asymmetrical warfare means that small groups can disrupt big societies, and

33 Maturana, Verden-Zoller, and Bunnell (2008)
something like the P	extit{ax Romanum} is no longer possible, because the little dogs no longer admit defeat and they can always disrupt what the big dogs want to do.

The idea I am putting forth, to look at who is adapting to whom, represents, I suspect, a departure from a traditional concept of power. It does not arise from the figure of the dominant patriarch or alpha who, as we like to think, has desires and uses his agency to fulfill them. I suspect this figure is the origin of our imaginary—our mental picture we see when we use the word power. Blake called him Nobodaddy—nobody’s daddy, whom we imagine as everybody’s. A figure to be envied, or not. A pinnacle of a status hierarchy.

Things have gotten too serious to have such a frivolous image of the landscape of power in which we live. To have before us on our minds above all else the question of who gets what, in the short run at least. (Though it is frightening to look at any English dictionary and note the pages and pages which have to be devoted to the verb “to get.”) Nor am I trying to argue this on behalf of the temporary kings of the mountain, who will hold that position briefly enough in terms of the time scales we as humans are now in a position to affect.

Power is not a possession, but a summary term of a complex relational configuration of events subject to continual change. We need to recognize that we are mutually embedded in and with each other, involved in webs of circular cause. All of us unavoidably adapt to each other all the time, creating by our mutual adjustments a sort of shifting landscape of mutual influence or power, in which unilateral control is impossible. However, wise action may be possible, and perhaps new metaphors of power can help.

**Bateson:** In my position paper for the “Broken Power” conference, I mentioned a number of partial meanings of the “power” metaphor, a number of phenomena which “power” is invoked to explain. One of these was “scope, in either time or space.” We would hope that enlarging the scope of our understanding would empower us. Indeed, I noted that “power,” when scope is large, begins to approximate “wisdom.” But wisdom crieth out in the house tops and no man regardeth?34

I hope that a re-examination of the premises of the concept of power, can bring forth wisdom. In spite of the tendency of wisdom to be disregarded even when it cries out in the streets, perhaps in these times we are searching it out.

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34 Bateson (1974, p. 27). He is quoting a common 19th Century abridgement of Proverbs.


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The Power of Balance:
Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry

William R. Torbert

Editor’s Introduction: We feel privileged to republish portions of The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry. Originally published by SAGE in 1991, the book’s copyright has reverted to the author, who wished to share our selection of excerpts as a contribution to this special issue’s theme. Torbert’s body of work has always been about fostering “the development of politics and the political,” at each of the scales highlighted in the book’s title, as well as in all of the domains in which he has served. As he wrote in the original preface to the book, the work was 20 years in the making, and now, nearly 20 years after that, we wish for at least some portions of this classic work to be back in circulation.²

The “power of balance” as conceived by Torbert represents an integral paradigm of principles, theory, and praxis. Deployed, the paradigm is one that can indeed inform and shape the development of self, society, and scientific inquiry. To explicate that fulsome vision, the book’s fifteen chapters develop the themes of three sections: Theory and Strategy, Heart and Practice, and Vision and Method. Here, we have excerpted from several chapters in Theory and Strategy, and from one chapter in Vision and Method.

This means, of course, that we present but a small fraction of this integral classic, leaving out all of the rich, in-depth illustrations, including the author’s learning practice as he first attempted to enact the principles.

Yet, we hope even this abbreviated form of The Power of Balance supports at least two goals: to offer deployable insights and practices for developing politics and the political; and to take root as part of a foundational canon for integral political thought, research, and praxis. How we readers deploy these principles in our own actions will determine the degree to which self, society, and scientific inquiry transform.

Keywords: Action inquiry, developmental psychology, Hobbes, justice, Kant, legitimacy, liberating structures, mutually-enhancing power, Plato, power, power of balance, practices, political principles, Rawls, Rousseau, social justice, social science, transformation.

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² Editor’s note: We reproduce this work with the author’s permission and in its original style, which uses notes at the end to cite source references and supply author commentary.
Chapter 1. Power and Justice

This book proposes that leaders in politics, business, the media, education, and science can exercise an inherently positive kind of power that can be called “the power of balance.” It also proposes that leaders must exercise this “power of balance,” if they are to succeed in generating and sustaining organizations that:

1. empower their members;
2. reliably increase their productivity and legitimacy; and
3. transform appropriately in, and responsibly manage their impact on, turbulent environments.

A further claim is that, whereas other types of power corrupt, and require balancing by one another in order to limit corruption and injustice, the exercise of the power of balance generates increasing self-balancing, increasing personal integrity, increasing institutional efficacy, and increasing social justice.

In the final chapter of my previous book, Managing the Corporate Dream, I suggested that leaders must be able to exercise four different types of power. I argued that these must be blended differently at different times, with different people, if they are to succeed in cultivating growth and transformation among individual organizational members and in overall organizational strategies, structures and systems. These four types of power I call “unilateral power,” “diplomatic power,” “logistical power,” and “transforming power.” The ability to exercise and appropriately blend these four different types of power I call “the power of balance.”

In this book, I wish to explore in much greater depth how and why this hypothetical power of balance is necessary for achieving personal human fulfillment, for generating reliable organizational productivity under changing conditions, for cultivating social justice, and for conducting a truly informing and responsible social science. I also wish to illustrate in greater depth what the turbulent but dignified experience of personal and organizational search toward the power of balance feels like. For, in order to develop this power, each person, organization, and society must undergo multiple transformations.

We also see societies throughout the world—from the Soviet Union to South Africa—in a kind of turbulence that holds both the promise of constructive transformation and the threat of destructive violence and chaos. On a still larger scale, we see the human world as a whole on the brink of transformation beyond primary reliance on a balance of power among nation states to increasing reliance on international institutions, especially in the area of international finance.

This chapter focuses on several questions about the different types of power, leading toward the question of what kind of power generates constructive transformation. The questions this chapter addresses are:
1. what are the differences among three types of power—unilateral, diplomatic, and logistical?
2. how does each type of power relate to a particular conception of ethics and justice? And, 
3. how have political philosophers and administrative theorists before now thought about power and justice?

Unilateral Power

From the first systematic treatise on power of the modern period—Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*—to Nobel prize winner Herbert Simon's *Models of Man*, power has most frequently been defined as unilateral—as the ability to unilaterally and unidirectionally cause the outcomes one wishes.²

Sometimes, as with Hobbes, the ultimate unilateral power is described nakedly as the physical power to kill another. All men are equal, Hobbes tells us, in their ability to kill one another. Hobbes shows us the most primitive position that 'natural man' can assume. The most primitive position is one in which the basic passion to live, along with the narrowly selfish passion to kill others in order to preserve one's own life, rule. Reason is subordinated to these passions. It serves instrumentally to choose the best ways to preserve one's life.

Hobbes draws this picture, not to defend it as necessary, but rather to highlight its futility and the need for transformation. He characterizes life in this state of nature as a “war of all against all” which renders each individual's life “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

The fear of death motivates people to yield their smaller, problematic powers to a common sovereign. This sovereign uses the much greater collective power to secure an order, which however uncomfortable and unfree it may seem in a given instance, protects the people from the 'war of all against all' and death. Hence, by yielding their power to an omnipotent sovereign, people increase their pleasure and reduce their pain (death and the fear of death). They “maximize their utility,” in the more quantitative and less passionate language of later writers—even if the sovereign is extremely domulative and restrictive.

The sovereign must have absolute unilateral power, according to Hobbes, because any separation of powers increases the likelihood of struggle among the powers and hence of civil war and death. Hobbes carried his argument that the sovereign must have absolute power to its logical conclusion. Absolute executive power precludes an independent judiciary. In a true Hobbesian state, the law is what the sovereign says it is and what the sovereign says it means. The law is, by definition, just. There can be no appeal to a natural law, to philosophical principles, or to a Supreme Court beyond the sovereign, for such appeal undermines the absolute power of the sovereign. In a sense, then, Hobbes presents a philosophical justification for the view that “might makes right.”³

Writing amidst the English civil war and the beheading of Charles I during the mid-17th century, Hobbes could find immediate experiential validation for his concern. But to us Hobbes' position almost certainly sounds extreme, perhaps even crude. If this position seemed realistic in mid-17th century England, it hardly seems applicable to late 20th century America. In fact,
however, our city streets sometimes closely mirror Hobbes' state of nature. Today, as I write this, the lead article in The Boston Globe begins as follows:

It was growing dark on a recent winter afternoon when the frightening news swept through a local youth program: the van that usually drove the teen-agers home had broken down. A terrified silence blanketed the room as youths realized that they might have to walk home along the darkened city streets.

“A kid came to me in a total panic,” said Laval Brown, program coordinator of the Dorchester Youth Collaborative. “He was terrified. He said, 'I can't walk home, I just can't walk home. Someone got killed on my street. I'll get killed too.’”

The youth made it home, running all the way. But in the last eight days, three young men did not make it home alive and a fourth was fatally shot through the window of his mother's apartment. And the city's children know it. They know that at a time of mind-bending violence they cannot entirely be children on the city's streets, that they must surrender some of their freedoms to preserve their lives.

Instead, they live by rules no adult ever taught them and recognize boundaries that are on no city map.

“There're just certain places you don't go,” explained Brian McKinney, 16, a rangy figure standing on a small porch above an abandoned lot in Dorchester. “You don't take no shortcuts, ever, 'cause people be waiting for you. Sometimes you alternate your route on the way home. Myself, I try not to know a lot of people. You can't trust 'em.”

“I try not to know a lot of people. You can't trust 'em.” Obviously, a realistic approach to life under conditions such as those just described; obviously, too, a dreadfully impoverished approach to life. Surely, we wish to say, there must be more to social life than this! Yet before we explore how this may be so, we must briefly acknowledge the vast arenas of human experience that are today characterized by such conditions and such a worldview. To take just two examples: whole countries—most notably Colombia—are deeply influenced by the corruption and violence explicitly cultivated by drug cartels and individual drug barons; also, whole countries—most notably Iraq and its president Saddam Hussein—operate in terms of unilateral, threat power both outside (Hussein has threatened to “scorch half of Israel” with weapons of mass destruction) and inside (depopulation of the Kurdish minority and the death penalty for ‘insulting’ the president). As I make my final revisions, Iraq has just completed the blitzkrieg takeover of Kuwait.

An Ethical System Consistent with Unilateral Power

“Might makes right” and the fear that controls behavior under such conditions is not ordinarily viewed as a serious ethical theory, but rather as the antithesis of ethics. An ethical perspective is usually thought of as providing a basis for decisions other than one's initial desires and fears. Certainly, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls (whose views on power, justice, and ethics will
be considered below) do not view might as inherently right. Indeed, we will see Rousseau argue precisely that might cannot make right.

There is one ethical theory, however, that corresponds closely to the Hobbesian perspective on power. This is utilitarianism. I have already hinted at this correspondence between Hobbesian might and utilitarian right in writing of people's choice to yield power to a sovereign as increasing their utility.

In utilitarian ethical theory, the right or just decision is that which generates the greatest good for the greatest number. The good is that which increases pleasure and reduces pain for each. To maximize pleasure and to minimize pain is to maximize utility. In this theory, rationality is defined as the instrumental calculation of how to maximize utility—how to satisfy desires, not as a criterion for judging the worthiness of one's desires. This is one of the principal correspondences between the Hobbesian theory of power and the utilitarian theory of justice—that both explicitly treat desires as ends and reason as a subordinate, calculative means.

Given this correspondence, the correspondence already hinted at follows. Hobbesian political theory can be restated in utilitarian terms as:

1. the fear of death and the likelihood of actual death are infinitely more painful than any other deprivations; hence,
2. the pleasure of their attenuation by means of the Hobbesian sovereign will outweigh any finite pains the sovereign's particular decisions may inflict.

Because we ordinarily associate utilitarianism with neo-classical economic theory—laissez-faire market theory in particular—and because such economic theory is ordinarily thought to emphasize state interference in individual decision-making, the overall correspondence between utilitarianism and Hobbes is not immediately obvious. But, as draconian as the Hobbesian power equation sounds, it does not require a sovereign who is absolutely dictatorial in all decisions. Thus, the Hobbesian sovereign could choose to cultivate a vigorous market system within a larger framework of executive prerogative.

Over the past generation, Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore may have best exemplified such a correlation of unilateral executive power and utilitarianism. On the one hand, there are real questions about the degree of personal, media, and judiciary independence of expression in Singapore; on the other hand, there is no question about the support for a market economy in Singapore. In 1990, Brazil's new president, Fernando Collor de Mello, is making a similar attempt: to use a strong authoritative initiative, in the form of a “shocking” economic plan, to stop inflation and create a more market-regulated economy.

The deepest correspondence between the Hobbesian perspective on power and the utilitarian perspective on economics, ethics, and justice is that both perspectives implicitly require a kind of rationality that weighs, compares, and organizes desires, rather than merely calculating how best to achieve them. How the Hobbesian perspective does this is clearest and most nearly explicit. Simply put, in his theory the omnipotent power of the sovereign is based on a rational contract to which people's desires are henceforward subordinate. Insofar as such a contract is adhered to,
such adherence represents the victory of constructive, framing, long-term reasoning over immediate desires abetted by instrumental, calculative, short-term reasoning.

That utilitarian theory also implicitly requires an omnificent, rational sovereign who organizes the relations among desires is less obvious. Nevertheless, it does. For, in order to calculate the greatest good for the greatest number, one must assume that both individuals and society have a rational capacity that reduces all qualitatively different pains and pleasures (e.g. hunger and loneliness, or chocolate, oat bran, and hearing God's voice) to a comparable, quantitative scale (a lowest common denominator).\(^5\)

In his early book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith explicitly describes such a self-regulating inner observer (he called it “the man within the breast”) as existing within each individual. A careful reading, however, shows that Smith is inconsistent: he also recognizes at some moments that such a sovereign inner conscience must in fact be explicitly constituted by each individual and that few individuals actually engage in the work of constituting such a conscience.\(^6\)

Later, Smith would describe, in *The Wealth of Nations*, how a competitive pricing system generates an efficient quantitative scale for comparisons—a lowest common denominator among otherwise-qualitatively-different values. Just as “the man within the breast” purportedly serves a self-regulating function on the individual level, the “invisible hand” of the market pricing system under competition serves this same self-regulating function socially. But a pricing system cannot determine the definition of what is property; hence, the prevalence of Intellectual Property Committees in major corporations today, and the litigiousness of the software industry. Nor can a pricing system determine the value of money, money-making, and money-saving, as compared to leisure or consumption. That is, a pricing system cannot determine how a person should value his or her time (for example, writing earns me no money; consulting earns me a great deal of money; but I value writing much more than consulting).

The trick is that a pricing system can wonderfully *reflect* how people value time. But if persons are not independent valuers of their own time, guided by self-determined aims, they may fall into believing that price determines action, and they may do what pays most or costs least for that reason alone. So, a pricing system can trick people about their own self-interest, especially if it is defined as the primary rational calculus in decision-making. Indeed, Adam Smith showed that he understood that the “invisible hand” might just as likely mislead persons about their interests as serve those interests.\(^7\)

The United States is a country that holds “consumer sovereignty” and “everybody is entitled to his own opinion” as among its highest individual and social values. People are assumed to be rational in the sense of able to calculate how to satisfy desire, but there is little tolerance for the possibility that personal and social decisions require something more than calculative rationality—that they may require the construction of a framing, regulative rationality that related valued aims to valued actions. Religion fills this need for a regulative framework, if it is felt at all, and religion is typically considered to be non-rational—a matter of personal feeling, faith, preference. One result of this atomistic, utilitarian approach is an energetic, individualistic, entrepreneurial approach to life. Another result is a great deal of internecine among regulative...
frames (in marriages, organizations, and communities) that people do not regard as being rationally resolvable and that they consequently do not cultivate the skills or proclivities to resolve directly.

If there is in fact a strong correspondence between the utilitarian orientation and the exercise of unilateral power, as suggested in this section, we would expect people in this country to resort to the exercise of unilateral power in the face of unresolved conflict. Hence, we would expect a high homicide rate, a high divorce rate, and a hell of a lot of litigation. All these are true of the United States.

Here, it is worth emphasizing that the exercise of unilateral power need not sound like the physical, life-and-death matter that Hobbes makes it out to be. It may just as well appear in the guise of a rational, impersonal, bureaucratic, even scientific phenomenon. Such is the quality of unilateral power in the work of Nobel prize winner Herbert Simon who has been thinking about organizational bureaucracies during the mid-20th century, Simon says, “For the assertion, 'A has power over B', we can substitute the assertion 'A's behavior causes B's behavior.' If we can define the causal relationship, we can define...power. ...[It is] a problem of giving operational meaning to the asymmetry of the relationship between independent and dependent variable.”

Again, as with Hobbes, we see power defined as unilateral and unidirectional (asymmetrical). But this time the power may, presumably, be physical force, social attraction, or a cognitive structure such as an organizational chart.

Whether the writer be political scientist Robert Dahl, economist John Kenneth Galbraith, or organizational theorist Jeffrey Pfeffer, this underlying definition of power as causing change in the less powerful, no matter what the will of the less powerful, remains the same. As Pfeffer summarizes, “Most definitions of power include an element indicating that power is the capability of one social actor to overcome resistance in achieving a desired objective or result.”

Indeed, so universally accepted is this element of the definition of power that many readers must be wondering why it merits discussion. Nevertheless, this book does contest this element of the definition of power. I do not contend that power never has an element of unilateral, unidirectional causation that overcomes resistance. But I do contend that other kinds of power can also be exercised, and that power cannot, therefore, be defined as the ability to unilaterally and unidirectionally cause the outcomes one wishes.

Another Approach to Power—Diplomatic Power

The second most common approach to power is, paradoxically, the very reverse of the first approach. In this view, power is generated, not by the power-wielder, but by the power-yielder—by the consent of the governed. A century after Hobbes, and in response to his claims, Rousseau introduced an argument against the notion of power as necessarily unilateral causation and in favor of power as consent. In this version of power, a visible leader is successful in exercising power to the degree that he or she has the diplomatic ability to determine what the governed actually want and to present proposals that will gain their consent.
Rousseau proclaimed at the outset of *The Social Contract*,

If force creates right, the effect changes with the cause: every force that is greater than the first succeeds to its right. ...But what kind of right is that which perishes when force fails? If we must obey perforce, there is no need to obey because we ought; if we are not forced to obey, we are under no obligation to do so. ...Let us then admit that force does not create right, and we are obliged to obey only legitimate powers.\textsuperscript{11}

Rousseau goes on to argue that, since coerced consent yields no obligation, legitimate power can only be founded on unanimous, uncoerced consent.

This is no mere abstruse principle of political philosophy. In business, Chester Barnard, a twentieth century corporate president, states unequivocally, "There is no principle of executive conduct better established in good organizations than that orders will not be issued that cannot or will not be obeyed... To do so destroys authority, discipline, and morale."\textsuperscript{12}

To what kind of social contract would any and all individuals give consent? Only, Rousseau tells us, to an “association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.”\textsuperscript{13}

How is such a condition possible, the reader may well ask. Rousseau's great insight, which inspired Kant in turn, was that a person is free only when obeying his rational will, and that since reason is precisely internally consistent and generalizable, everyone's 'rational will' will be the same. Hence, a state governed by rational will—what Rousseau called the General Will—is a state in which persons are simultaneously united with all and free to do as they wish.

The obvious question is how one discovers what truly constitutes this General Will. As one helpful step, Rousseau offered a conceptual distinction between the rational General Will and another quality that he named the Private Will or the Will of All. The Will of All is the sum total of what people desire irrespective of whether it is rational in the sense of being universalizable. In other words, the Will of All can be a version of utilitarianism or 'consumer sovereignty'—those decisions that generate the maximum pleasure or utility among the concerned population, irrespective of their general rationality or universalizability.

For example, if slavery for some and addiction to drugs or alcohol for many is what gives the most pleasure to the most people, then the organization or state should promote these conditions, if the state is guided by this version of the Will of All. But since such conditions abrogate the freedom of some and the rationality of many, they will not be consented to by all, they are not universalizable, and, hence, they do not represent the General Will. More subtly, a democratic assembly may refuse to raise taxes to cover budget deficits, and this action may very well represent the wishes of a majority of citizens, and hence the Will of All, without necessarily representing the General Will.

Another, different version of the Will of All is any claim made by a leader that certain decisions and actions represent the historical spirit or future destiny of a whole people,
irrespective of the effect of such decisions and actions on those not included in the definition of that people. Authoritarian leaders like Napoleon, Hitler, Lenin, or a modern corporate chief executive can claim to act in the name of the people, even if a majority opposes them. They can claim, indeed, to be acting on behalf of the General Will, courageously opposing the temporary Will of All, without any clear method for determining whether this is so. In short, this discussion sharpens the question of how one distinguishes the Private Will from the General Will.

Unfortunately, as with Adam Smith’s lack of clarity about how to develop an embracing and rational self-observation by “the man within the breast,” Rousseau is equally unsatisfying about how to distinguish the Private Will from the General Will. It was part of his genius to distinguish clearly on a conceptual level between these two types of social will. But it was part of his limit not to provide a practical political method for making this distinction in actual cases.

Nevertheless, the notion that there is a kind of power, derived not from the strength of a power-wielder but rather from the consent of power-yielders, has played a central role both in philosophy and in practical affairs since Rousseau. Thomas Jefferson’s words provide the most influential expression of this point of view: “Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Perhaps the most obvious arena in which the Will of All exercises power is the realm of entertainment and the media. The media and entertainment personalities who have the mysterious talent to draw mass attention become the source of far flung enterprises. Their power is based on others’ willingness to give them their attention. As one player on the Hollywood scene recently put it, “All of Hollywood is parasitic except for true talent.” In this formulation, true talent represents legitimate authority because it commands the power (and revenues) associated with the willingness of the population at large to attend to it.

This “diplomatic” type of power has something to do with justice or legitimacy as according with the people’s will, and something—but something very much less obvious—to do with the rationality of such a will.

A Third Perspective on Power and Justice—
Rational, Logistical Power and the Theory of Rights

Kant responded to Rousseau’s enunciation of the General Will by concentrating on the rational element in such a will, rather than on the element of consent. In doing so, Kant did not develop a political or managerial method of determining the General Will; instead, he transformed the idea of freedom as obedience to rational will into an ethical injunction for individuals.

“Everything in nature works according to laws,” Kant tells us. “Only a rational being has the power to act according to his conception of laws, i.e. according to principles, and thereby has he a will. Since the derivation of actions from laws requires reason, the will is nothing but practical reason.”¹⁴ We are free only when we exercise our rational will, not when we are compelled by irrational desires. Hence, insofar as we have will at all, we will consent to what is rational.
Indeed, in Kant's view, as we can see in the foregoing quotation, not unilateral force, not consent, but reason is power. In Kant, 'reason,' 'power,' 'will,' and 'freedom' all directly imply one another.

Kant's 'Categorical Imperative' enjoins each of us (because he believes that, upon reflection, we will find it the only rational way) to act only in ways that are universalizable. This means to act only as we would wish others to act toward us and only in ways that treat ourselves and other persons as ends (never merely as means). For example, Kant suggests that, following the Categorical Imperative, we would not lie, since we would not wish others to lie to us, and we would not commit suicide, since we would not thereby be treating ourselves as ends. Kant is resolutely puritanical in his devotion to the rational:

The pure thought of duty and the moral law generally, unmixed with any extraneous addition of empirical inducements, has by the way of reason alone... an influence on the human heart... much more powerful than all other incentives... When a righteous act is represented as being done with a steadfast soul and sundered from all view to any advantage in this or another world, and even under the greatest temptations of need or allurement, it far surpasses and eclipses any similar action that was in the least affected by any extraneous incentive; it elevates the soul and inspires the wish to be able to act in this way. Even moderately young children feel this impression, and duties should never be represented to them in any other way.

In this passage, again, we see the identity that Kant makes between reason and power, even in interpersonal relations between adults and children. The resulting political vision is of an ideal 'Kingdom of Ends' (a phrase that Kant uses), wherein each citizen is highly independent and free, never coerced, persuaded only by rational argument, and with the right to be treated with the full dignity of an End. In this approach, legitimate or just action is action that procedurally does not violate another's rights; and just laws provide equal protection to all citizens, regardless of race, religion, or sexual preference. Whether or not the action or the law maximizes utility or is voted as desirable is irrelevant to its justice, according to Kant.

For example, most people may be disgusted by consensual acts of homosexual sodomy among adults. Such acts may be regarded as sinful by certain religions. Indeed, the Supreme Court may rule (as it did in Bowers v Hardwick, 1986) that no “right of privacy” protects one against prosecution for such acts. Nevertheless, any law that discriminates by criminalizing such acts only when they involve partners of the same sex is clearly not a universalizable maxim, and violates the Constitutional provision of “equal protection under the law.”

Insofar as we think of power as unilateral coercion or peer pressure to conform to some irrational Will of All, the purely rational Kantian position and procedure appears to abjure the use of power altogether—to treat power and justice as mutually exclusive. As the foregoing quotation demonstrates, Kant did view these other two types of power as illegitimate. But he also viewed them as ineffective, and this follows from his distinctive view of what power is. Power is the ability to do something rational rather than being caused to do something by internal desire or external pressure.
Hence, from Kant's perspective, real power and true justice are co-terminus. Put differently, for Kant power and authority are co-terminus: real power is invariably authoritative. Whereas the Hobbesian view of power and justice emphasizes the physical, monarchical, executive function; the Rousseauvian view of power and justice emphasizes the emotional, democratic, legislative function; and the Kantian view of power and justice emphasizes the rational, aristocratic, judiciary function.\textsuperscript{18}

This overview of the three approaches to power and justice invites us to question whether there is yet another approach to power and justice that combines all three. Historically, of course, we know that an actual social contract—the Constitution of the United States—based on the combination and separation of these three types of power, was constructed at the same time as Kant lived. But this social contract did not, during its first century, embody Kant's Categorical Imperative. It permitted slavery. Not until after the bloodiest of civil wars and the passage of the 14th amendment did the Constitution more nearly represent a successful blending of the three types of power. And not until political philosopher John Rawls published \textit{A Theory of Justice} in 1972 did we have a more or less complete intellectual explication of this fourth approach to power and justice.\textsuperscript{19}

**Integrating Unilateral, Diplomatic, and Logistical Power**

In his description of child rearing in a just society, Rawls exemplifies how the three types of power we have so far reviewed interact with one another. First, he says, the child will learn the “morality of authority.” At this stage, parents unilaterally enunciate and enforce rules of conduct. But, according to Rawls, their unilateral power is not absolute and arbitrary. It only becomes authoritative (legitimate) and only has the power to generate moral development toward principled conduct insofar as parents:

1. make just rules;
2. give the reasons for them in an understandable fashion; and
3. enact the rules they enjoin when the rules apply to them as well.

In Rawls' words:

First, the parents must love the child and be worthy objects of his admiration. In this way they arouse in him a sense of his own value and the desire to become the sort of person that they are. Secondly, they must enunciate clear and intelligible (and of course, justifiable) rules adapted to the child's level of comprehension. In addition they should set out the reasons for these injunctions so far as these can be understood, and they must follow these precepts insofar as they apply to them as well. The parents should exemplify the morality they enjoin, and make explicit its underlying principles as time goes on. Doing this is required not only to arouse the child's inclination to accept these principles at a later time, but also to convey how they are to be interpreted in particular cases.\textsuperscript{20}
Obviously, the exercise of unilateral power that Rawls condones in a just society is no mere arbitrary or narrowly selfish use of such power for private or utilitarian ends, irrespective of its impact on others' rights and development. In fact, directly to the contrary, Rawls here advocates a loving and principled use of unilateral power.

Next, Rawls establishes the role for diplomatic power or peer consent in the development of the youth in a just society. As the child becomes a teenager, he or she learns the “morality of association.” Through participation on sports teams, the school newspaper, and other such organizations with peers, the youth begins to mold his or her conduct based more on pleasing equals than on obeying superiors. In Rawls words, again:

Someone attaining...the morality of association...is concerned to win acceptance for his conduct or aims... While the individual understands the principles of justice, his motive for complying with them, for the time at least, springs largely from his ties of friendship and fellow feeling for others, and his concern for the approbation of the wider society.21

These experiences of the proper “morality of authority” and “morality of association” gradually lead the youth to realize that positive experiences are associated with the principles of justice behind the rules obeyed and the approbation received. Hence, gradually, as the youth becomes an adult, he or she makes the rational principles of justice fully explicit and gives them allegiance in their own right. Thus the adult becomes committed to a “morality of principle.” In this way, all three types of power play a role in human development in a just society, according to Rawls, and they do so in a way that reinforces allegiance to the principles of justice from generation to generation.

What are these principles of justice? Rawls formulates two principles of justice that he believes follow from rational reflection. Interestingly and consistently, these two principles themselves reflect all three types of justice associated with the three types of power. His first principle of justice is:

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.22

His second principle of justice is:

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged…and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.23

Rawls’ first principle of justice is compatible with Kant’s Categorical Imperative. The enunciation of a system of liberties for all emphasizes rationality by the word “system,” emphasizes treating each citizen as an end by the word “liberty,” and emphasizes reciprocity and universalizability by emphasizing that everyone is entitled to this condition.

Rawls’ second principle of justice generates additional conditions that will attract the consent and approbation of citizens and will also generate utilitarian results. Inequalities of position and
wealth (to which those with less would not consent, all else being equal) are to be tolerated only as these benefit those with less. In other words, a person may consent to receive less income than another, if the additional income motivates the other to become a doctor and cure the less wealthy person. If persons with less income gain greater utility from being healthy than they would from the additional income, they will rationally prefer and choose this condition over that of having equal income but less health. Herewith, Rawls integrates rationality, rights, consent, and utility in his two principles of justice.

The Gap between Theory and Practice — The Difficulty with Doing Rawls Justice

Rawls' work is a theoretical tour de force. Although it has sustained critiques from all angles of the scholarly spectrum, it has proved remarkably robust on a theoretical level. Its Achilles' heel is the question of practice.

There are three problems of practice, of which Rawls solves only one. One problem of practice is: once a just state is created, will its normal practice sustain its citizens' commitment to just outcomes and to maintaining the necessary institutions? This problem of practice Rawls can claim to have solved by showing how children's upbringing in a just society will lead them to adopt a morality of principle and how this principled morality will lead in turn to the two substantive principles of morality he articulates.

The third problem of practice is: given this gap between current practice and just practice, does Rawls' theory provide a vision and method for transforming the relatively unjust and corrupt society into one that is more just and displays greater integrity? The answer to this question is, again, “No.” Although the very explication of his theory may improve legislative, executive, and judicial decision-making, Rawls does not explicitly present that as a process for transforming a relatively unjust society. Nor does he present any other process for transforming a relatively unjust society.

We should, however, pause to consider the efficacy of explicating a robust theory of justice as a method of social change. We see, first of all, that it is a very Kantian approach to social change. Through his theory of justice, Rawls acquaints us with our social duties and provides us with no inducements to act in a just manner other than “the pure thought of duty.” We will recall that according to Kant, “The pure thought of duty and the moral law generally...has by the way of reason alone...an influence on the human heart...much more powerful than all other incentives.” So, explicating a theory of justice can be defended as a method—indeed it can be defended as the best method—for influencing a relatively unjust society to become more just.

But Rawls himself does not believe that the explication of principle or theory alone is sufficient to generate justice from generation to generation, even in a society that is already just. As we have seen, he holds that in a just society parents must exercise their unilateral power over children, and youthful friends their diplomatic power over one another, as parts of a long process of cultivating adult personalities that listen and respond to the voice of reason. Moreover, the parents are to love their children and to act consistently with the ideals they preach, if they are to
attract their allegiance to those ideals. In short, according to Rawls, much more than the explication of pure reason is necessary to sustain an already just society. Unilateral power, diplomatic power, love, and an awareness of incongruities between one's own reasons and actions (a precondition for developing consistency between one's own principles and practices) are all also necessary.

In a relatively unjust society, the dilemma of how to generate justice must be all the greater. Parents are less likely to be enjoining true principles of justice to their children. They are also less likely to display congruity or integrity—that is, to act consistently with whatever principles they enjoin. Also, friends are less likely to exercise diplomatic power in a manner that reinforces true principles of justice.

Hence, in a less just society, children are likely to experience their parents' power as relatively arbitrary, rather than as conveying a rational and admirable morality of authority. Likewise, youths are likely to experience peer groups as requiring conformity to relatively arbitrary norms, rather than as reinforcing their parents' teachings through a rational and admirable morality of association. And adults are likely to experience organizations where superiors and peers also act in relatively arbitrary and internally inconsistent ways, rather than according to a rational and admirable morality of principle. Socialization of this kind breeds fear, distrust, and disrespect for designated authorities and for peers, as well as low self-esteem and little faith in one's own reason.

Under such conditions, superiors are likely to assert their authority unilaterally and without justification, especially under challenge. Subordinates are likely to consent and conform externally, especially under threat. Reasoned discourse is likely to retreat further and further from the political world into specialist, 'ivory tower' or bureaucratic settings.

To transform such a relatively unjust society—to narrow the gap between the actual and the ideal—requires a kind of power that goes beyond the unilateral, diplomatic, and logistical kinds of power discussed in this chapter. It also requires a conception of justice that goes beyond the utilitarian, consensual, and principled conceptions discussed in this chapter.

The next two chapters introduce the developmental process that persons evolve through if they are to approach the conception and practice of this dynamic, transforming type of power and justice.

**Chapter 2. From Political Philosophy to Developmental Psychology**

Chapter 1 reviews three distinct conceptions of power and justice, as well as a fourth conception that integrates all of the first three types of power and justice. Starting from the most common definition of power as the unilateral cause of outcomes one desires, we next discussed diplomatic power that attracts others' consent, and then described the logistical power of reason to will what is consistent and right irrespective of inducement and desire. Then, we examined the Constitutional and Rawlsian conception of power and justice as including all of the first three.
We saw that the first two types of power and justice—unilateral power and utilitarian justice, on the one hand, and diplomatic power and consent, on the other hand—are rooted in satisfying desires. By contrast, the second two types of power and justice are rooted in a rational, principled conception of individual rights and socially just relationships.

None of the four approaches to power and justice so far examined explicitly shows how relatively unjust settings can be transformed into more just settings. Yet all of them suggest, at least implicitly, that a key ingredient in the necessary political alchemy of transformation is a constructive rationality—a rationality that frames desire. Hobbes gives us a specific rational contract that is to transform the state of nature into civil society, while claiming that no rational distinctions between less and more just societies are possible once society itself is created. Rousseau conceives of a principle whereby rationality can operate continuously in the generation of social decisions—not just once in an initial contract. Yet he cannot give us any specific laws or institutions through which it works. Kant tells us a specific law—the Categorical Imperative—that a truly rational individual would give himself or herself. Yet he does not tell us how any individual develops this degree of rationality, nor how society as a whole encourages such development, nor how such a general principle is to be applied to concrete and unique circumstances.

It is Rawls who first shows how a just society would organize social institutions and families to encourage the development of principled rationality in new generations. But he does not tell us, anymore than the others, how one can transform a relatively unjust, corrupt society into a more just one.

Surprisingly, it is the most ancient of Western political philosophers—Plato—who tells us most about why power ordinarily corrupts and about a kind of power that generates integrity and justice in conditions where by no means everyone is committed to justice. Early in The Republic, Plato introduces a character, Thrasymachus, who argues that “might makes right.” But Thrasymachus is confounded by Socrates' questions. May not sheer strength used unilaterally turn out to have effects different from those initially imagined, Socrates asks. If so, the mighty one will not have succeeded in doing right even from the point of view of achieving his own intention, let alone from any other perspective. For example, by building up German power and starting World War II, Hitler presumably intended anything but his own suicide in a bunker, anything but the governing of Germany by four alien powers, and anything but the creation of the state of Israel.

Not only may there be a great gap between intentions and outcomes, but also between different intentions at different times. Even if Hobbes' sovereign holds all power, his will may not be one across time. Now he exerts power in one direction; now in another. He himself may not recognize the conflict between his different decisions. Nevertheless, gradually, Hobbes' state (or a modern corporation) may begin to lose power as it falls into unintentional inner struggle. In short, unilateral, unidirectional power can generate unintentional effects and system-disintegration over time.

Lord Acton's famous line, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” seems to be based on the intuition that the greater one's unilateral power, the more unbalanced and enslaved to one's irrational desires one becomes, the less one attends to one's effects on
others or oneself, and the less effort one makes to guide and limit one's actions according to any criterion of rationality. This process of feeding desire and avoiding the negative feedback that would feed one's awareness gradually reduces one's awareness, responsibility, rational consistency, and moral integrity, until one is absolutely corrupted.

The question arises whether there is a type of power that increases awareness, integrity, and justice? Plato answers “Yes.”

A Paradigm of Just Action

We can return to Rawls' theory of justice to begin constructing a more dynamic paradigm of just action, for he provides the building blocks to go beyond his own conception. We saw that Rawls argues that, in raising children who will preserve a just society, parents must formulate rules comprehensible to their children, enact a consistent morality themselves, and gradually make the underlying principles explicit. This is an educational paradigm which depends for its felicitous effects on a parental awareness that embraces the realms of intuitive principles, rational rules, their own actions, and their effects on their children, and that observes and corrects errors and incongruities in translations from one realm to another (for no one can be expected to get this right to begin with, or once and for all time). I emphasize this last part because it is this dynamic feedback and correction process that must be present if the process is to become increasingly just, and is the process that Rawls misses.

Rawls enunciates an analogous dialectic for each individual in his recital of the primary goods that all rational persons will want, whatever else one or another may want idiosyncratically. He names four primary goods:

1. intuitive self-respect or self-esteem: “Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them” (p. 400);
2. a rational long-term plan of life given reasonably favorable circumstances... [for] the good is the satisfaction of rational desire” (pp. 92-93);
3. the liberty and opportunity to develop and exercise the action competencies necessary to realize a rational life plan; and, finally,
4. the income and wealth that results from such competent work.

Again, we see the need to cultivate an awareness that embraces the realms of the intuitive whole, the rational strategy, plan, or rules, congruent action, and outcomes (in this case, income), and that observes and corrects errors and incongruities in translations from one realm to another.

An analogous, dynamic process of cultivating an embracing awareness of mission, strategy, operations, and the bottom line, and of observing and correcting incongruities among them, is necessary for continual quality improvement in business enterprises and other organizations.

As we will explore in Section III, Chapter 13, an analogous dynamic process of cultivating an awareness of paradigm, theory, research methods, and data—and of observing and correcting incongruities among them—is necessary for a liberative and responsible social science. In political life, the paradigm of just action is again analogous. That action is just which:
1. gradually explicates the underlying principles of justice;
2. elaborates laws and policies consistent with those principles, as well as internally consistent with one another;
3. duly administers this justice in a way that is both substantively and procedurally congruent;
4. gains increasing voluntary compliance by the citizenry; and
5. observes and corrects incongruities among principles, laws, administration, and effects on the citizenry.

Chapter 3: Developing toward Transforming Leadership

First Glimpses of Transforming Power

This is the key “trick” or “secret” of transformation—that it can be generated neither by internal motivation alone, nor by external pressure or opportunity alone. An exercise of unilateral power can force changes in external behavior, but cannot transform the meaning-making structure of a system. Developmental theory tells us that transformation to a qualitatively different and more inclusive way of making meaning requires playful, reciprocal initiatives between system and environments, child and parent, student and teacher, manager and mentor.

Hence, a person exercising transforming power invites mutuality—a mutual exercise of power guided by a living awareness of what is currently at stake for the particular systems participating in the transformation. The chick seeking to crack the egg shell from the inside may not succeed alone; but if the mother hen cracks the egg before the chick is ready, the chick will surely die. Only if both cooperate appropriately from inside and outside can transformation occur.

Transforming power cannot be insolently and unilaterally wielded. Instead, it requires a continual, humble effort—not just to be rational—but to be aware of the present moment in all its fullness. This awareness effort includes and transcends one's own material interests, emotional preferences, and intellectual theory about the situation, as well as those of the others and the institutions involved. This effort also transcends the narrowness of the present and experiences how the past is growing into this moment and the future is growing out of it.

In order to avoid such outcomes [as were discussed in a section not included in this excerpt], transforming power is not merely open to, but actively seeks, challenge and contradiction. Indeed, properly appreciated, each moment of potential transformation is such a challenge, since the person seeking to exercise transforming power is relating to systems that do not initially share an understanding of what is at stake.

The person seeking to exercise transforming power must seek challenges to his or her approach in every way possible—by taking on dilemmas of increasing complexity or social scope, or dilemmas that go more deeply to the heart of the culture as a whole, or by discovering new ways of conducting inquiry that better show the negative consequences of his or her perspective and action. The active search for such challenge is essential precisely because the Strategist perspective is likely to be a powerful one that permits one to exercise significant influence—even transformation—in the wider world. The Strategist's perspective can therefore
easily outshine and subordinate other perspectives. It can generate ego-inflation and an associated blindness and lack of living awareness that can make the very strength of the Strategist demonic. To confront and thwart this tendency, transforming power must be understood, to put it in the strongest form possible, as self-mortifying. It would rather not influence than inappropriately influence. This is how far transforming power goes to seek challenge and contradiction.

As the foregoing paragraphs also imply, transforming power is nothing if not timely. A distinguishing feature of a Strategist stage theory—and of developmental theory in particular—is that it explicitly draws the attention of the person holding the theory to the question of timing in action. However, any theory of development and transformation, such as this one, clearly has general, universalistic elements to it, and may be applied “in general” without specific attention to the uniqueness of the given situation. This, again, is a danger of the Strategist who tends to identify with the theory. In fact (or, more precisely, in act) transforming power is never properly applied in general, but always in response to the unique circumstances of particular situations and systems—always in response to a living awareness that revivifies and revalidates (or else disconfirms) the general categories of the theory.

Put differently, transforming power is not enacted in a deductively logical fashion. It does not deduce a specific action from general principles. Instead, transforming power is enacted analogically. It seeks analogies between a general theory and an independent apprehension of the present situation, felt from the inside as a participant in it.9

Finally, transforming power empowers all who come within the radius of its influence, including those who oppose its influence. The exercise of transforming power is intrinsically a cooperative ‘positive-sum’ game, not a competitive “zero-sum” game. It generates greater power—a greater range of awareness, control, and influence for each person or organization that transforms to a later stage of development. Also, because it seeks challenges, tests the feedback received for validity, and defers to validated negative feedback rather than defending against it, the exercise of transforming power empowers opponents as well. As stated above, transforming power invites mutuality; the more others are empowered and the closer they come to exercising transforming power themselves, the more nearly mutual occasions of influence become.

[Chapter 3’s] Conclusion

There must be a “power of balance,” I felt (though I gave it no name then), that was less coerced and coercive in the realm of diplomatic power. There must be, I felt, a power of balance that anyone, living an outwardly ordinary life in familial and organizational settings, could embody. This power of balance would have room for Pope John's unilateral coercion of Monseigneur Tardini, and for the logistical subtleties of the Motorola vice-president's “octave” meeting-strategies, and even for Gandhi's forms of diplomatic power on occasion, just as it would also have room for the transforming power that both Pope John and Gandhi most clearly exercised [referring to illustrations not included in excerpts]. But the power of balance would, precisely, have each subordinate type of power (including transforming power) rather than being (fully identified with) any one type of power. It would exercise each type of power occasionally and intentionally, not always and assumptively. And, the power of balance would always be
exercised in the service of increasing mutuality, development, and inquiry, no matter which of the subordinate forms of power it displayed at a given time.\textsuperscript{34}

Only a theory and practice of this type of power can ultimately generate a more just organization or society from a relatively unjust beginning state. Only this kind of power is self-limiting and self-legitimizing because its aim is to support the development and empowerment of others and because its practice is to challenge itself and publicly test whether it is in fact accomplishing this. Hence, only this type of power generates genuine authority—authority based not on unilateral power or custom and longevity, but rather on just action (defined in Chapter 2).

**Chapter 5: Exercising the Power of Balance in Middle Management**

**Creating Liberating Structures**

I and my associates have been experimenting with such “liberating structures” in business, governmental, and educational settings for the past twenty years and have adduced eight essential qualities of liberating structure. The following pages first explicate these eight qualities briefly and then illustrate them by references to a particular organization.

Before offering this rather complex definition of liberating structure, I want to offer some simpler heuristics that I use to create such structures and some brief illustrations to give the idea some life. The more complex set of eight essential characteristics derive from after-the-fact analysis of such structures. They are helpful for testing whether an invented social structure is a liberating structure; but I suspect that they are far too ponderous to help in conceiving a liberating structure.

The simplest heuristic for creating a liberating structure is to list all the limiting conditions (e.g. lack of money, employees without the right skills, etc.) that prevent one from accomplishing some desired goal; and then set about inventing a structure that recognizes and even uses these limits to reach the goal. In principle, this is no more than the old saw: “turn problems into opportunities.” But this cliché is as rarely enacted as it is regularly espoused, especially in the domain of creating social structures for doing tasks. The reader may recall the description from the previous chapter of the initial meetings of the MBA core team at Boston College. The problem was that faculty groups typically argue themselves into terminal depression and withdrawal rather than agreeing to anything.

Rather than attempting any number of complicated and covert means to overcome this limiting condition, we simply recognized it and made a game of making fast decisions. Once several decisions were made, the limiting condition no longer existed, so the elaborate structure temporarily set in place to make fast decisions was no longer necessary either.

A second simple heuristic for creating a liberating structure, which the foregoing illustration also exemplifies, is to create a structure which, if it works, will become unnecessary. The most fundamental reason why liberating structures are necessary in the first place is that few human beings today operate at the late stages of development where they can follow the interweaving of the four territories of experience and can exercise mutuality-enhancing transforming power, such
that they take full executive responsibility for the effects of their actions and treat one another as true peers. The most fundamental aim of liberating structures is, therefore, to cultivate the development of subordinates toward the later stages (never forgetting that development cannot be forced). Hence, if liberating structures succeed, organizational members will increasingly take executive responsibility, will increasingly treat one another as peers, and will increasingly create their own liberating structures.

A third simple heuristic for creating liberating structures is to ask oneself how to maximize both of two apparently opposite values, such as power and justice, or inquiry and productivity. Usually, we think we have to sacrifice one of these for the other, or else compromise between the two. Totally new solutions to such dilemmas begin to suggest themselves if we disdain our competitive assumptions and seek counterintuitive solutions. Thus, for example, the previous chapter illustrated how project groups in the BC MBA program are required to engage in unusual levels of mutual inquiry and evaluation; yet this inquiry unleashes rather than paralyzes productivity (because of the details of how it is organized).

**The Eight Essential Qualities of Liberating Structure**

*One quality of liberating structure is deliberate irony.* The leadership (at whatever level) recognizes that most subordinates will initially interpret the organizational structure and particular events based on a different model of reality (a different stage of development) from the one inspiring the leadership. Moreover, subordinates will not tend to interpret the resulting conflicts as caused by the different developmental frames, nor will they be inclined to examine or test their own frame. The leadership must at one and the same time succeed in “speaking the subordinates' (developmental) language” and introducing them to a “new language” (e.g., the theory and practice of mutuality-enhancing power).

The new “language” will motivate exploration of basic assumptions about reality by constructing tasks wherein members feel the limitations and self-contradictions inherent in their, relatively self-restricting view of reality. Organizational structures and leadership actions that meet these demands are deliberately ironic: they both acknowledge and bridge a gap in developmental stages and worldviews.

*A second quality of liberating structure is the definition of tasks that are incomprehensible and undoable without reference to accompanying processes and purposes.* Ordinarily employees or students treat tasks as meaningful in themselves or as meaningless except in terms of external rewards, masking the operation of their own interpretive scheme (at whatever their stage of development) as the source of meaning. By contrast, liberating tasks are epistemologically transparent: the product and the process congruently embody and reflect the purpose. Members cannot successfully complete liberating tasks unless they challenge their usual ways of doing these tasks without awareness of process and purpose. Consequently, and ironically, liberating tasks will initially seem opaque, strange, and disquieting to many organizational members since they are unaccustomed to such tasks, even though what is strange about them is that they are actually epistemologically transparent and that they encourage awareness of this fact.
A third quality of liberating structure is premeditated and precommunicated structural evolution over time. Such evolution reflects the movement by organizational members as they move toward conscious appropriation of the process and purpose territories of reality and thus toward the possibility of collaboration in the search for shared purpose, self-direction, and quality work. Such pre-communicated structural evolution also counters the tendency to treat a given structure as the ultimate substance of an organization and encourages the search for a continuing thread of meaning—for a shared purpose beyond structure. The premeditated and precommunicated phasing of this evolution helps to persuade members that some discoverable rhythms underlie even the most fundamental transformations.

A fourth quality of liberating structure is that its tasks are so structured and its leadership so functions as to provide a constant cycle of experiential and empirical research and feedback on participants' different ways of constructing reality, on their changing relations to one another, and on the quality of their work.

A fifth quality of liberating structure is the use of all available forms of power by the leadership to support the first four projects. Instead of attempting either to hoard power or to give it away, the leadership uses the logistical, diplomatic, and unilateral powers granted it by its institutional status and by its members, as well as the transforming power granted by its own experiential authority. It uses all these powers to perform a kind of psycho-social jiu-jitsu whereby the members experience both more discretion and more direction than usual. These conditions can lead the members gradually to question their own assumptions about the nature of power and begin to experiment with the creative power to constitute a new world. In so doing, the members increasingly join the leadership in a community of inquiry. The leadership does not use power manipulatively—that is, covertly and in order to maintain unilateral, exploitative structures. Instead, it uses power openly to create increasingly collaborative conditions.

A sixth quality of liberating structure is that the structure at any given time is open, in principle, to inspection and challenge by organization members. The organization requires the vigilance of all its members to determine whether its purposes are hazy and whether its specific structure, implementing behaviors, and products or services are congruent with its purposes. But members' charges of organizational incongruities may well be untrustworthy so long as the members themselves are unaccustomed to searching for incongruities among their own presuppositions, strategies, practices, and effects. Thus, especially initially, charges of organizational incongruity by subordinates may mask an unwillingness to face personal incongruities. The attentive leadership will turn such conflicts into educational opportunities. To state this idea another way, the openness of the leadership is made possible by, and is limited to the service of, a principle of inquiry more fundamental than any particular structure.

A seventh quality of liberating structure is that the leadership becomes vulnerable, in practice, to attack and public failure as soon as it behaves inauthentically when its tasks, processes, and purposes become incongruent and it refuses to acknowledge and correct such incongruities. By promising much, designing unconventional (and therefore often uncomfortable) tasks, and inviting full inspection, a liberating structure sets the stage for members' disillusionment. If the leadership exerts power in manipulative and defensive ways, members will become disillusioned with the leadership. If the leadership shows appropriate
strength, vulnerability, and integrity from moment to moment, members will shed various illusions about themselves, about organizing work, and about the nature of reality, and will develop toward later stages.

A final quality of liberating structure, implicit throughout the foregoing discussion, is a leadership committed to, and practiced in, seeking, recognizing, and righting personal and organizational incongruities. The leadership leads other organizational members in learning while improving quality and in creating social settings that encourage simultaneous learning and quality work.

Chapter 13: The Vision of Action Inquiry

The Hierarchy of Political Principles in the Action Inquiry Paradigm

Because action inquiry is simultaneously a type of inquiry and a type of action—a type of science and a type of politics—it is appropriate to end this chapter with a consideration of its ordering of political principles. The action inquiry paradigm embraces and orders the three traditional political principles—Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity—and adds two more principles that have not heretofore been treated as political—Quality and Inquiry.

- Inquiry—the aim of creating existential communities of inquiry—is the primary political principle.
- Peerdom (Fraternity and Equality, without the sexist connotation of Fraternity) is the secondary political principle. True Peerdom is only approached as a peer culture or community of inquiry is created.
- Liberty is the tertiary political principle. Liberty is only approached in the context of a system, community, or culture that encourages peerlike inquiry and that grants equal rights—only in the context of Peerdom.
- And Quality is the quarternary political principle, approached only in the context of the commitment, attention, and skill cultivated through ongoing practice of the first three principles.

Presented so briefly and so abstractly, the interdependencies among these four political principles are hardly obvious. I attempted to state these principles and their interrelations for myself fifteen years ago. Although the language remains abstract and the tone of voice comes out more missionary, as a public utterance, than I am altogether comfortable with, I share it here:

The Politics of Inquiry

If I am to inquire into the meaning of human being as I act—if I am to act humanly and not automatically—I wish immediately to share this inquiry with all human beings. The meaning of human being is not some answer worked out by one for many. The meaning of human being is revealed in the response of each to each as we engage together in world transforming inquiry-in-action. There is no genuine community of inquiry that does not include the entire species because no one's imagination can encompass another's reality—can encompass the full meaning of
human being. As one wishing to inquire, I speak of my respect for you, of my esteem for you, yes, even of my love for you, when I address you as a stranger. As I address you in this way, and you reply, and our familiarity grows, you become stranger and stranger, until at moments I come to appreciate your Infinite Strangeness (my Infinite Strangeness), your individuality (my individuality), your craftiness (my craftiness).

As our mutual value thus appreciates through fraternal inquiry, so does the value of our works. Indeed, as we come to appreciate the full mystery and majesty of human being, we begin for the first time wholeheartedly to seek to craft goods—products, services, and celebrations in—formed by the openness, discipline, and inspiration of living inquiry. All craft—whether verbal or manual—requires an inquiry-in-action repeatedly reawakening us to the matter and the moment at hand. As initial author of the words above and below, I can say, after thirteen years of increasingly independent questioning, that I experience their truth. I experience how these ideas found my questioning. I experience how they sculpt me. The call of these ideas so obviously animates, interpenetrates, and illuminates my daily life alone and with others (to the small degree that I can bear illumination) that I feel increasingly as though they are staking their life in me. (To say that I am willing to stake my life in them would be to treat them as contingent and myself as capable of choosing other foundations—which is not how I experience the situation.)

I believe these ideas are fundamental to a just and inclusive world community and I believe that all persons can come to experience their truth through inquiry. Thus, I do not urge anyone to believe what I say, but rather to join in the inquiry. Yet so few find their way even that far: to join in the inquiry. Indeed, this is the great mystery: how to generate a politics of inquiry. In the past, three great political principles have been propounded—liberty, equality, and fraternity. No state has ever attained all three. Indeed, none of the three has ever been attained alone, though some states have approached one and some another.

What some persons regard as the path toward just practice, other persons regard, equally assuredly, as the path toward hell. We are missing a fourth political principle—a principle never before recognized as political—the principle of inquiry. The only political principle that invites the potential transformation of everyone's perspective is the principle of inquiry.

Quality results can never occur so long as persons have no genuine felt sense of individual liberty—so long as persons do not experience their visceral power to craft. In the absence of the voluntarily-assumed, empowering discipline of craft, people are reduced to the status of consumers, requiring more of the same thing than another in order to imagine themselves better than the other, since they cannot really feel good about themselves. A positively empowering sense of individual liberty can only rarely occur, in turn, so long as groups, organizations, and nations do not create equality of opportunity, equality before the law, as well as genuinely friendly atmospheres where each seeks to meet the otherness of others. Only meetings under such conditions encourage and challenge persons to set their own goals, to risk for the sake of quality, and to grow in response-ability, rather than simply to conform externally to narrow norms of appropriate behavior.
But such a genuine peer culture—an inclusive atmosphere that actively encourages quality, liberty, and equality can, in its turn, never develop except in the service of the questions and dilemmas which face the human species as a whole. Any sense of fraternity rooted in specific answers must be implicitly, if not explicitly, elitist and imperialistic. (Which is not to say that a community of inquiry has no place whatsoever for answers: the strong declarative quality of the foregoing paragraphs may illustrate that foundational questions generate many answers in time, but answers that are rooted in and enliven inquiry rather than ending it.)

Not only is the development of a worldwide community of inquiry unlikely (all organization is, after all, improbable by definition), but the process by which it develops must be doubly unknown. If achievement of the community of inquiry comprising the species as a whole is the condition for full appreciation of the unknowns at the center of human being, then the fact of the unknown itself remains largely unknown during the process by which some promote evolution toward the community of all. Doubly unknown, this process of introducing the unknown can nonetheless certainly be characterized as ironic and as unlike any political process we have witnessed heretofore.

That I wish to share the inquiry into the meaning of human being with all human beings and that a liberating peer culture requires such shared inquiry—these facts do not, of course, imply that anyone else in the world, much less everyone else, wishes to join in such inquiry at the outset. Indeed, the very glory of our civilization—its development of production technologies and information systems that make global material welfare feasible—distracts our attention from the less tangible realms of liberty, peerdom, and inquiry, making the development of a community of inquiry all the more unlikely.

[Chapter 13’s] Conclusion

Modern science is characteristic of a prolonged era of human history during which the principle dynamic has been the effort to elevate human communities from a reliance on custom to a reliance on reason. As custom ceases to glue people’s interactions as reliably, their behavior oscillates between guidance by reason, by custom, and by market exchange or terror. Such is our world today.

On the brink of the twenty-first century, the United Nations struggles to find some principle and practice that can, without destroying local initiative, supercede national law in weaving a global community. It has yet to discover the primary potential source of its power. Not arms and unilateral force; not diplomacy; nor law will be its primary instruments of power, if it is indeed to contribute significantly to global development, global productivity, and global justice. Cross-cultural, cross-paradigmatic, transforming inquiry in the midst of ongoing practice must be the kind of power that the United Nations cultivates, if it is to play a truly constructive leadership role in the coming centuries. An Inter-Cultural Inquiry Corps could dispatch multi-professional, six-person teams throughout the world to relate to specific organizations and communities, to provide leadership training to individuals, and, on behalf of a not-for-profit investment consortium, to identify businesses that deserve micro-development capital investments. The degree to which nations contributed to and invited the presence of such an Inter-cultural Inquiry
Corps would provide an immediate measure of their openness as a polity to inquiry and self-transformation.

Such experiments in personal and social transformation will be fraught with risk and difficulty, as have been the ones described earlier in this book and in the next chapter. Everyone will be reaching beyond themselves at the same time, for few are now dedicated to questioning their own assumptions in the midst of action by widening their attention, while continuing to act. Few explicate the frames they are assuming, the advocacies they mean to make, the illustrations that influence them, and the inquiries that would test and validate or invalidate their current direction of action. Still fewer are prepared to create, implement, and recreate liberating structures. And fewer yet are prepared to joust creatively and non-violently with deeply ambivalent and at least semi-hostile superior cultures as they do so.

Notes:

Chapter 1


3. This is not strictly true, for Hobbes bases the sovereign's claim to absolute power on the prior social contract by which he claims citizens can be supposed to have granted the sovereign such power as the only sure means to preserve peace and hence life. In the strict sense, then, Hobbes argues that right makes might, and so begins a process in Western political philosophy and political history whereby sovereign power is seen to emanate from below - from the citizen - rather than from above - from God.


6. Smith, A. 1969, reprinted from 1759, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Indianapolis IN: Liberty Classics. “The man of real constancy and firmness who has been bred in the bustle and business of the world has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment which the impartial spectator would pass upon his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to suffer the man within the breast to be absent one moment from his attention. With the eyes of this great inmate he has always been accustomed to regard whatever related to himself (p 246).” These powerful lines argue that particularly people bred in “bustle and business” are ethically self-regulating - an argument particularly difficult to accept uncritically in the post-Boesky, post-Bakker, post-North era. In another place, Smith offers a quite different sense of our relation to the impartial spectator. He acknowledges, for example, that practice under conditions of hardship is necessary
to awaken the man within the breast, and that no one willingly undergoes such hardship (255-256). At still another point, Smith acknowledges the almost superhuman difficulty of operating amidst passions and hardships while remaining awake to the impartial observer within the breast; to become impartial in reflection is a wholly different challenge from being impartial in the midst of action: “When the action is over... and the passions which prompted it have subsided, we can enter more coolly into the sentiments of the indifferent spectator... But our judgments now are often of little importance in comparison of what they were before, and can frequently produce nothing but vain regret and unavailing repentance, without always securing us from like errors in time to come. It is seldom, however, that they are quite candid even in this case... He is a bold surgeon, they say, whose hand does not tremble when he performs an operation on his own person; and he is often equally bold who does not hesitate to pull off the mysterious veil of self-delusion which covers from his view the deformities of his own conduct (262).”

Obviously, there is considerable tension between Smith's two views: the one of an impartial, omnimintent spectator who, almost by birthright, dwells within our breast and whom we never dare to forget for one moment; the second of an impartial spectator to whom even the most capable of us may never awaken at the crucially decisive moments of our lives. As the foregoing quotations show, Smith gives ample attention to each of these dichotomous perspectives. Yet, surprisingly, he never directly acknowledges the tension he illustrates. Instead, the main line of his argument is based upon the powerful presence of “the man within the breast” as an ethical regulator of conduct. Recently, Amartya Sen has shown that the rationality construct within utilitarian theory is itself not unitary, that it in fact is open to multiple interpretations of what self-interest in fact is. This brilliant opening of economic theory from the inside indicates a path along which modern economic theory may be reconciled with the developmental theory presented in this book, which emphasizes the enormous significance of just these different interpretations of what is in one's self-interest. See Sen, A. 1982. Choice, Welfare and Measurement. Cambridge MA: MIT Press; Sen, A. 1987. On Ethics and Economics. London, England: Basil Blackwell; Klamer, A. 1989. A conversation with Amartya Sen. Journal of Economic Perspectives 3, 1:135-150.

7. Smith was quite explicit, in passing, in The Theory of Moral Sentiments that the invisible hand can be interpreted as a form of deception. Our attraction to wealth and to utility as means to happiness, Smith tells us, is not really due so much to: “the superior ease or pleasure which (the rich) are supposed to enjoy, as of the numberless artificial and elegant contrivances for promoting this ease or pleasure (p. 302)... From a certain spirit of system... from a certain love of art and contrivance, we sometimes seem to value the means more than the end (p. 306)... If we consider the real satisfaction which all these things are capable of affording, by itself and separate from the arrangement which is fitted to promote it, it will always appear in the highest degree contemptible and trifling. But we rarely view it in this abstract and philosophical light. We naturally confound it in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine or the economy by means of which it is produced. The pleasures of wealth and greatness, when considered in this complex view, strike the imagination as something grand, and beautiful, and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it. And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which arouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind (p. 303).”


11. Rousseau, J. *The Social Contract* Bk I, Ch 312. Barnard, C. 1938. *The Functions of the Executive* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. p. 167. Barnard's reference to “authority” and the frequent reference to legitimate power as authority together raise the question why I am here calling this phenomenon “diplomatic power” rather than “authority.” Chapters 2 and 3 will discuss the relationship between power and authority, so the full answer will come then, but, briefly, consent alone does not assure legitimacy and authoritativeness. To be truly authoritative, I will argue in Chapters 2 and 3, requires that power—whether diplomatic, unilateral, or otherwise—be exercised in a fashion that is rational, timely, and conducive to the development of those affected.


15. ibid.

16. ibid. p. 22. At certain “teachable moments,” Kant's educational advice is no doubt true. Influenced by him, I have sought moments to present duties to my children in this stern and confronting manner. But at other times I explicitly bribe my children to do something good (and once one of them refused the bribe!). For there are times when austere rationality makes no contact with our attention; a humorous exaggeration may awaken a corresponding gleam in the child's eye, wherein the parent may imagine lurking an appreciation of the rational. And it is not only children who fall away from the rational from time to time. Some readers have no doubt fallen to sleep at some point during their attempt to read the previous pages, rather than finding themselves elevated to a higher wakefulness. I myself could not even bring myself to read an entire book of Kant's until my forty-fourth year.

17. Bowers v Hardwick 106 S. Ct. 2841 (1986). Justice Blackmun's dissent in the 5-4 decision best articulates the right of privacy doctrine that had been evolving over the previous twenty years, since the contraception decision in Griswold v Connecticut 381 US 479 (1965). Patrick Devlin propounds the 'Will of All' perspective that what disgusts 'the man in the street' may be criminalized in The Enforcement of Morals. H.L.A. Hart responds from a 'General Will' perspective in *Law, Liberty, and Morality*. I am indebted to Morris Kaplan for organizing these arguments in his March 5, 1990 address at M.I.T. on “Lesbian and Gay Rights: Privacy, Equality, and Community.”

18. Some familiar with Kant may object that his approach was “legislative” rather than “judicial” because he spoke of persons as ideally legislators in a Kingdom of Ends (indeed, since every citizen is, presumably, King in a Kingdom of Ends, one might argue that Kant's vision was “executive”). This confusion of the three branches is to be expected in a theory that sees all human action as subordinated to reason, but since he himself recognizes his discussion of the Kingdom of Ends as idealistic, and since relations among the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court...
may come as close to instantiating this ideal as those of any other historical governing body, it seems to me fair to summarize his thought as judicial and aristocratic in nature.


Chapter 2

1. Pitkin, H. 1972, Wittgenstein and Justice, Berkeley: University of California Press. As Pitkin has so carefully argued, the very structure of The Republic wherein Plato assumes a fixed class structure and a need for a 'noble lie' (rather than a direct explanation) to 'keep people in their proper place,' in effect provides a very tough test of whether one can generate justice in unpropitious conditions—conditions in which few are, by the nature of their relatively fixed worldview, prone to seeking out and enacting justice (the dialogue does not assume an altogether fixed class structure; indeed, parents and leaders are specifically prompted to be on the lookout for youths who ought to be in a different class from that into which they are born).

Chapter 3

8. For example, Chris Argyris has, over the past quarter century, devised a variety of techniques for publicly testing the validity of social observations and inferences among the very participants in a social situation where there are different and conflicting perspectives. His most recent publication on this topic is Argyris, C., Putnam, R., & Smith, D., 1985, Action Science: Concepts, Methods, and Skills for Research and Intervention, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass


34. Nielsen, R. 1990. “Dialogic leadership as ethics action (praxis) method,” Journal of Business Ethics, 9: 25-43. In this article, Nielsen offers an unusually rich synthesis of theory and actual leadership cases that demonstrate these characteristics of transforming power, and the other characteristics mentioned earlier in the chapter.
Lessons from a Pluralist Approach to a Wicked Policy Issue

Jake Chapman

Abstract: The most difficult policy issues are those where there are profound disagreements about what is wrong, what should be done, and how things work. This paper describes a pluralist approach, based on the soft systems methodology, to youth nuisance on deprived estates in Manchester, UK, where there were profound disagreements between the agencies involved. When there are disagreements about the nature of the problem, its causes, or about how the system of interest actually functioned, a pluralist approach is required, and this is provided by Checkland’s soft systems approach. When the disagreements involve conflicts of value, it is necessary to adopt an adaptive approach that fosters change in the values, beliefs or behaviour of those involved. In the spectrum of public sector agencies involved, five different perspectives of agencies were identified, their descriptions indicating the need for the pluralist approach taken. The project was an experiment in using systemic approaches in public policy and the paper describes the learning associated with impacting outcomes. Processes used in the project included a “soft systems” workshop, which is described along with some effects on both the project participants and overall outcomes. The overall aim is to share the experience of this project so that it may inform those working with systemic approaches and other pluralist methods on wicked problems in the public sector.

Keywords: Pluralist policy making, soft systems methodology, systems thinking, wicked problems, youth nuisance.

Introduction

In this paper I describe the application of a soft systems approach to a contentious policy issue that involves a spectrum of public sector bodies in the UK. The project was conceived by the sponsors (see below) as an experiment in using systemic approaches in public policy and the paper describes the learning associated with impacting outcomes.

There have been many attempts to make use of the ideas involved in systems thinking to make progress in areas of public policy, with varying degrees of success. Many of the methods and their application have been reviewed comprehensively by Jackson (2003), though this does not cover the more recent work by Seddon (2008, 2010). In a review of the relevance of systems

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thinking to policy and government Mulgan (2001) identified seven factors that required a systemic approach:

- The ubiquity of information flows, especially within government itself
- Pressure on social policy to be more holistic
- The growing importance of the environment, especially climate change
- Connectedness of systems brings new vulnerabilities
- Globalisation and the ways in which this integrates previously discrete systems
- Need for ability to cope with ambiguity and non-linearity
- Planning and rational strategy often lead to unintended consequences.

These characteristics all play into the holistic nature of systems thinking and systemic approaches. However, many of the early attempts to use systems approaches failed because there was no agreement about the nature of the problem, its causes, nor about how the system of interest actually functioned. Where such disagreements exist a pluralist approach is required, and this is provided by the soft systems approach introduced by Checkland (1981). Checkland’s approach has been extensively used within organisations in both the public and private sectors in the UK (Checkland 1999; Morcos, 2009; Wilson, 2001) where the scope of disagreements is limited.

Most public policy issues involve disagreements about how to proceed and such disagreements are the “bread and butter” of politics. In most situations, policy makers and politicians establish policy according to their own preferences and positions in relation to the disagreements; that is, they adopt or champion one of the contested positions. However, depending upon the nature of the disagreements, this may not be the most productive way to proceed.

When the disagreements involve conflicts of value, either between groups or between the values people stand for and the reality they face, then, in Heifetz’s terminology (Heifetz, 1994, 2002, 2009), it is necessary to adopt an “adaptive” approach that fosters change in the values, beliefs or behaviour of those involved. A key feature of the strategy he proposes is that the leader does not seek to resolve the value conflict but instead gives the work back to the people—those who have to adapt. No amount of legislation, no law or policy, will cause individuals to change their values. Those changes have to arise as a result of the individuals facing reality, becoming aware of conflicting perspectives, and choosing to change. Heifetz and collaborators describe in some detail the difficulties in implementing such an approach and strategies that can be adopted.

In this article, I describe an approach that is suited to another context, namely one where the disagreements are not between groups of citizens or politicians, but between agencies responsible for the implementation of any policy initiative in a specific domain. The disagreements may involve conflicts of value, but more normally they are based upon different perspectives (or paradigms or frames) that cause those involved to interpret the situation differently and hence advocate different policies or strategies. These disagreements are characteristic of “wicked issues” and, it is argued, require a systems approach that encompasses the existing pluralism, as opposed to systems approaches that presume agreement on objectives.
or desired outcomes. Failure to embrace the pluralism will ensure that most energy is directed to the contests between agencies and not toward implementing any policy or action plan.

The issues and the proposed approach are illustrated by its application to the issue of Youth Nuisance in Manchester in the United Kingdom. The work described here formed part of a Demos project funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and Manchester City Council (MCC) in 2005-2006. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit was established in 2001 to coordinate government initiatives to tackle the most deprived neighbourhoods, some of which are located in Manchester. The next section describes the context of the project that includes the different perspectives held by agencies working in Manchester. This is followed by a description of the “soft systems” workshop run in Manchester in December 2005 and the immediate outcomes. The final section reflects on the impact of the workshop and project and draws lessons for interventions of this type in the future. The overall aim is to share the experience of this project so that it may inform those working with systemic approaches and other pluralist methods on wicked problems in the public sector.

Youth Nuisance in Manchester

Youth nuisance is part of the wider problem of anti-social behaviour (ASB) that became an important political issue during the 1990s in the UK. Typical examples of youth nuisance include graffiti, groups of youths harassing elderly pedestrians or playing music very loudly in public places. The youths involved ranged in age from 10 to 15, most of who should have been in school during the day. In order to “be tough on crime and on the causes of crime,” in 1999 the government introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO). An ASBO is a community-based order that can be applied for by the police or local authorities in consultation with each other against an individual, or several individuals, whose behaviour is anti-social. The behaviour must cause alarm, distress, or harassment to one or more people not in the same household as the offender. Applications are made to the Magistrates Court acting in a civil capacity. An ASBO might ban an individual from an area, such as a park or shopping centre, or require the recipient to cease certain behaviours. However, controversially, breach of an ASBO without reasonable excuse is a criminal offence with a maximum penalty of five years in prison. Where ASBOs have been issued for nuisance, but not criminal, offences, the effect has been to criminalise those subject to the orders. By 2005, Manchester was known as the “ASBO Capital” of the UK due to its extensive use of the orders; however the problem of youth nuisance was not improving significantly. The incidence of youth nuisance was higher in deprived neighbourhoods and it was Manchester’s inability to meet its nuisance targets in these areas that prompted the NRU to initiate the project.

One of the disagreements brought into focus by Manchester’s use of ASBOs as whether or not they were an effective deterrent for youths. There were reports in the press of youths being proud of having “scored” six ASBOs, with the implication that it added to their “street cred.” This exacerbated the disagreements between those who wanted to eliminate youth nuisance by being tough and those who regarded the root of the problem as lying elsewhere. The various positions adopted by different agencies can be summarised as follows:
Enforcers:
This is the group that wants to adopt a zero tolerance approach to ASB in general and youth nuisance in particular. They want to establish very clear boundaries of what is acceptable and to enforce those boundaries with the force of law as necessary. Youths who, in their view terrorise old women, should not be exempt from the use of criminal sanctions. They regard those who object to ASBOs and criminal sentences as part of the problem – it is their liberal attitudes and failure to impose boundaries on children that has lead to the current problem.

Distracters:
According to this group, youth have always been mischievous, and probably always will be. The root of the problem is that now they do not have safe ways to let off steam. This group argues that what are needed are supervised activities and channels where the youngsters can channel their energy creatively. They see a large part of the problem stemming from general lack of youth facilities and the early closure of those that do exist. They also regard demonising and criminalising children as the worst possible response to the problem.

Parenters:
This group maintains that it is wrong to blame or punish the children who cause trouble because the people who are really at fault are the parents. They see the problems stemming from poor parenting, in particular a failure to impose and enforce normal boundaries of acceptable behaviour. For this group, the way forward is to hold parents more accountable for the behaviour of their children. They support the use of tenancy agreements and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) which, if breached, mean that the entire family is evicted. For this group, focussing on the children is letting the real villains get away.

Deprivation:
This group points out that the problem of youth nuisance occurs on deprived estates. Middle class suburbs are largely free of the problem, and this is regarded as highly significant. This group maintains that the real problem is families living in poverty, often dire poverty. This means that there is often insufficient space in the home for the children to play or study, there are not the usual resources of books and games available, and so it is not surprising that the children are out on the street causing mischief. All this is aggravated by the poor condition of the deprived estate, the poor quality school, the widespread use of drugs and incidence of criminality in the impoverished community. This group regards punishing the children of these impoverished families as inappropriate and as being advocated by people who do not want to see or address the underlying cause of extreme poverty. The solution they propose is to take measures to address the poverty.

Cultural breakdown:
This group regards youth nuisance and the whole spectrum of anti-social behaviour as symptomatic of the loss of value and respect in modern culture, a trend they see reinforced by the media, TV, computer games, rap songs and celebrities behaving badly. They point out that many of the youth involved in nuisances do not have a father at home; indeed the only male role models they see are drug dealers. They do not see how we can expect young
children to behave appropriately when their parents fight and divorce, when common courtesies are regarded as antiquated, and crime and violence is glorified. For this group youth nuisance is a symptom of cultural breakdown and as such is a distraction from the core issue, which is finding ways to reinstate traditional values of respect.

These short descriptions do not do justice to either the strength of feelings involved, or the more subtle aspects of the perspectives involved. However, they are sufficient to demonstrate that each perspective is well articulated and clearly has some supporting evidence. Further, it is fairly easy to see how from each perspective those adopting one of the other perspectives are contributing to the problem. It is not just that these other people disagree about what should be done: what they are doing and saying is making matters worse. It is this antagonism between the perspectives that explains why so much energy is directed toward winning policy arguments—and stopping opponents—rather than addressing some aspect of the problem. Under these conditions, all policy initiatives based in a single perspective will fail. They will fail for a number of reasons because a policy based on one perspective will:

- excite intense opposition from all those holding different perspectives
- not address the complexity of the situation
- presume a homogeneity in the situation that does not exist.

Wicked Problems

Earlier it was asserted that this type of disagreement was a characteristic of a “wicked problem.” This terminology was first introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973/1984). The abstract to their paper, originally written in 1973, remains cogent:

The search for scientific bases for confronting problems of social policy is bound to fail, because of the nature of these problems. They are “wicked” problems, whereas science has developed to deal with ‘tame’ problems. Policy problems cannot be definitively described. Moreover, in pluralistic society there is nothing like the undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about optimal solutions to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no “solutions” in the sense of definitive and objective answers. (Rittel & Webber, 1984, p. 135)

A recent review (Chapman, Edwards, & Hampson, 2009) of the features of wicked problems and how these impact policy, identified the following five key characteristics:

1. The issue had defied previous attempts to “solve” it, i.e., there was a history of repeated policy failure. This is indicative that the normal reductionist and positivist approaches may not be appropriate.
2. There is profound disagreement on both the causes of the problem and the best ways to address it. As the above summaries indicate there are several different perspectives claiming priority in the case of youth nuisance.
3. The issue is unbounded in scope. This arises because it is connected with other issues that are also “wicked.” In the case of youth nuisance, there are obvious links to poverty, family breakdown and the persistence of deprived neighbourhoods all of which are also “wicked” issues.

4. The issue is resistant to completion, i.e., there is no sense in which one can ever claim that the “problem is solved.”

5. There is a high level of complexity involved, which means that aspects of the behaviour of the system of interest are in principle unpredictable.

These characteristics challenge the conventional approach to policy making which usually starts with a stage labelled “problem definition” (Strategy Unit, 2004). However, this is precisely the area in which the disagreements exist. Is youth nuisance a problem of poor parenting? Poor facilities? Poverty? Misbehaviour or cultural breakdown? Without an agreed definition of the problem, the conventional policy process cannot even begin. The alternative, proposed by Chapman (2002) is to adopt a systemic approach that is both holistic and pluralist, in particular, a soft systems approach.

As well as addressing the issue of youth nuisance, the Manchester project also had the aim of demonstrating the utility of systemic methods in addressing complex issues in deprived areas. The project involved three distinct phases. The first involved a series of interviews with a large number of individuals working in different agencies so as to appreciate the scope of the problem, initiatives that had been tried, and the different perspectives operating. The second phase involved a soft systems workshop, described in detail in the next section. The final phase involved constructing a system dynamics model of an aspect of the issue. This was undertaken by Lane (2007) and is discussed further below.

The Soft Systems Workshop

One of the roots of systems thinking lies in cybernetics and its application to engineering systems. In this domain, the development of computerised system dynamics models proved a powerful tool for analysis of industrial processes. Stafford Beer (2002) extended the domain to include broader organisational processes. Known as “hard systems,” these methods continue to find wide application today as demonstrated by the system dynamics literature and the use of “lean systems” (see, for example, Seddon, 2008) to improve the efficiency of operations in both the public and private sectors. In the 1970s it was anticipated that these approaches, coupled with the deployment of multidisciplinary teams, could be used to address a broad spectrum of social problems. These hopes were not realised in those domains where there were profound disagreements about how the system functioned. These disagreements, as described in the youth nuisance case earlier, mean that a model constructed using one perspective will be contested from the other perspectives, and will simply become another domain of disagreement and contest.

The “soft systems” approach was pioneered by Checkland (1981), who emphasises that what distinguishes his approach from “hard systems” is the way that systemicity is attributed. In hard systems, the observer or analyst perceives systems in the external world, systems that can be modelled and improved. In soft systems, the observer or analyst perceives complexity in the
external world and organises the exploration as a learning system: thus, it is the *process of enquiry that is systemic* (Checkland, 1999). However, for the purpose of this project the main attraction of adopting Checkland’s soft systems methodology (SSM) was that it explicitly surfaces the differences in perspective and uses a learning approach to devise *improvements* agreed by all the participants.

The Manchester project made use of a whole day soft systems workshop with about ten participants. The aim was to have representatives from all the different agencies and departments that were involved in addressing the youth nuisance issue in Manchester, including relevant central government departments. There were representatives from the NRU, The Home Office, The Government Office NW, Greater Manchester Police, several departments within Manchester City Council, a local resident, a youth project leader and the manager of a facility for dysfunctional families (the “Foundations project” described later).

The briefing for the workshop made it clear to the participants that they were to present their perspective on the issue as fully as possible, not with a view to changing other people’s minds, but so that their perspective was understood by the other participants. Everyone was also asked to be open to hearing the perspectives of the other participants and to be willing to engage with a process that might strike them as strange, but which, in the end, would make sense. The group participants were seated at tables arranged in a large square with everyone looking toward the middle so everyone could see all the other participants. At each person’s place, there was a stack of A3 paper and a large number of coloured pens available to share. The workshop was briefly introduced and then the participants invited to spend 10-15 minutes drawing a *rich picture* of how they perceived youth nuisance in Manchester. They were shown examples of pictures from other soft systems workshops to make it clear that drawing skills were not required but it was a real picture, not a diagram or flow chart, that was expected. An example of one of the rich pictures completed at the workshop is shown in Figure 1 below.

Once everyone had completed their rich picture, participants took a turn to introduce themselves to the group and to then show and explain their picture. After showing and explaining their picture, other members of the group could ask questions for clarification and there would sometimes be a short discussion of some of the issues raised. As the workshop facilitator, my role was to make notes on a flip chart of the key issues and themes that emerged from each picture, and to limit these initial discussions so that the main discussion could take place after all the pictures had been seen. The pictures were a powerful adjunct to each person’s exposition of his or her perspective on the issue, because the visual element would often convey emotion, emphasis, and qualities that would be missed from a simple description.
This can be illustrated by particular picture, drawn by a woman who was a senior manager of the MCC anti-social behaviour programme. She concealed her picture after drawing it. When it was her turn to present she said who she was and her role and then held up her picture. She had filled the A3 sheet with a large heart, coloured in a deep red colour. Across the heart was a jagged black crack. She said, “Youth nuisance is all about broken hearts.” The impact of her picture and words were tangible: it brought tears to my and other people’s eyes.

Once all the pictures had been presented, about an hour and a half into the workshop, the group returned to topics participants wanted to discuss further. The first was whether ASBOs were effective in addressing youth nuisance, or, as some maintained, they simply added to the reputation of the youths involved. After a few heated exchanges, the youth project worker, who ran projects with some of the youths on one of the deprived estates, intervened and drew a key distinction between gang leaders and followers. He asserted that for gang leaders ASBOs were ineffective and did indeed often enhance the leader’s reputation. However, for the “followers,” the threat of an ASBO was often sufficient to bring the youth under control. This was a significant intervention because it allowed both sides to have their position affirmed without making the other side wrong. It prompted further discussion about the gang leaders. What emerged from this debate was that the gang leaders were usually male and usually came from single parent families where the mother was in difficulties, usually with addiction or mental illness and often both. It was not unusual for the youth to have an older brother who was already in custody and for there to be several younger siblings also out of control.

At this point, the manager of the Foundations project said more about the work of his unit. He ran a facility that took in families of the “gang leader” type and provided a combination of very clear boundaries and complete support. The facility could accommodate only five families at any one time but had a very high success rate in enabling the single parent to overcome her
addiction and regain control of her family. Typically, a family would be in the facility for between 18 and 24 months and would continue to receive support through an outreach programme after returning to the wider community. The manager said there were several key features that enabled the unit to succeed:

- It was outside the MCC system (it was partly funded by a national children’s charity) and so could combine services and facilities far more easily than anyone within the council.
- It had very clear rules, and a family breaking the rules risked eviction. The key rules were to cease “using” (drugs or alcohol), to keep the home clean, and to have the children in school on time every day. These were policed and enforced by 24-hour supervision.
- It was able to offer whatever support the families needed, including treatment for addiction, assertiveness training, parenting and cookery classes and assistance dealing with MCC procedures.

He recounted examples of the work of the unit. One woman was at the point of being evicted for repeatedly being late, both for appointments and in getting her children to school, when one of the workers realised that she could not tell the time. Another woman often returned late from trips to town and sometimes had to be collected from remote places. It transpired that she did not understand the numbering of bus routes and thought that all buses would carry her to and from the city centre. At one of the early cookery classes, when asked what they wanted to learn to cook, one woman responded, “I would really like to know how to make a sandwich.”

These stories made clear the level of difficulty that the single parents experienced and that “broken hearts” were indeed a large part of the problem. Equally important, they contributed to an increased level of openness among the workshop participants. The problem was made more real by the stories and experiences of those working in the deprived neighbourhoods and with the most dysfunctional families and the workshop participants were able to let go of polarised positions and become more open to seeking ways of working together. It was important that prior to this, everyone had had the opportunity to present their perspective on the issue and to have had their concerns recognised and noted: this gave them the space to explore other perspectives and engage in a different type of debate.

**SSM Modelling**

The discussions continued for more than an hour and were brought to a conclusion by the facilitator asking the group to review the lists of topics that had emerged from both the pictures and the debate. The lists now covered half a dozen flip charts, but it was clear to the participants that there were a few obvious groups of items. These groups were identified and over the next 15 minutes condensed to four themes:

- Home and family life: role in providing boundaries, praise and respect
- Dealing with boredom and providing appropriate facilities
- MCC and other services needing to work together
- Involving the local community in addressing the issue and shifting perceptions of young people
The next stage of the soft systems methodology required the group to choose one of the themes and to then construct an ideal system that, if it existed, would address the issue encapsulated in the theme. It is important that the ideal system is not constrained by factors or issues in the real world; this is an abstract exercise with the aim of identifying a genuine ideal. The ideal system is then modelled in terms of the activities that would have to take place for the system to function effectively. It is common for the process to iterate between the definition of the ideal system and the modelling of the activities. Finally, the activities in the ideal system are compared to what is occurring in the real world with a view to developing an agenda for improvement. Undertaking these steps is actually straightforward since each logically follows from the previous step.

In the workshop, the sub-groups were formed to work on different themes. What follows is a summary of the work carried out on the ‘Home and family life’ theme. The definition of an ideal system has three components. The first is to identify what the system does, i.e., the transformation that it brings about. The second is to specify how the system achieves the transformation, i.e., the means employed. The third component is the specification of why this is being done, i.e., setting the larger context within which the system operates. Here is a definition of the “Home and family life” system used by the sub-group:

A system to improve a family’s capacity to raise children (The purpose)
by improving the parent’s self esteem, providing role models and support and engaging children with education (The means)
in order to enable young people to become fully functioning members of society (The context)

In iterating this definition the group dropped the specific reference to parent’s self esteem and subsumed this within the range of support services to be provided. It also dropped the reference to “engaging children with education” since this was regarded as separate from core purpose of improving a family’s capacity. The activities that the group identified this system would need were listed as follows:

- Identify families needs
- Develop services to meet needs
- Direct families to appropriate services
- Provide intensive care for dysfunctional families
- Give detailed guidance on parenting
- Support parents learning new skills
- Provide role models for parents and children

This list was developed into the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 2. The model organises the activities into a logical sequence and helps identify any gaps or overlaps in the activities. One of the insights that arose for the sub-group working on this system was that the best role models were likely to emerge from the support system itself, as shown in this version of the model.
Figure 2. A conceptual model of the ideal family support system

The final stage in the SSM is to compare this model of an ideal system with what occurs in the real world in order to identify the steps that would lead to an improvement. It is stressed during the workshop that the aim is not to find a solution to the issue, but simply find the steps that can be agreed that would improve the situation. Once the improvement has been made then, ideally, the process would be repeated to establish the next improvement steps.

The group working with the ideal system shown in Figure 2 concluded that there were two improvements that they could all agree to. The first was to increase the capacity for handling dysfunctional families (the Foundations project). The second was to introduce parenting courses for parents of children over eight years of age. Up to that point, the parenting courses in Manchester had focussed on very young children whereas the youth nuisance issue only arose for children over eight! These are very practical steps, but the most significant feature of the conclusions was that all those involved agreed that they would support them. This is in sharp contrast to the competing perspectives and hostility present at the beginning of the workshop.

Workshop Outcomes

The aim of this section is to reflect on the shifts that occurred for the participants as a result of the Soft Systems workshop for the project. The previous section has described the workshop in some detail to illuminate these shifts because they are a crucial component of any pluralist approach to contentious policy areas.

During the pre-workshop interviews it became clear that most of those engaged with youth nuisance in Manchester were most interested in convincing the listener of the validity of their position and ridiculing other positions. This was reflected in the early exchanges in the workshop...
itself, particularly where the discussion entered disputed territory, for example whether or not ASBOs were an effective deterrent. It was highly significant for the workshop that this issue was resolved without making either side in the dispute wrong. Sometimes ASBOs were effective, and sometimes they were not—and the key difference was in the role of the youth in the gang. This reinforced the workshop ethos of sharing your own perspective as fully as possible and being open to hearing other peoples’ perspectives.

The rich picture process also fostered a level of openness through:
- everyone sharing a strange process to which they were all new
- discovering who the other participants were through their pictures
- having the same amount time to present each person’s picture and their perspective
- clearly conveying emotions as well as ideas via the pictures

The stories communicated to the group served two important roles. First, they were a powerful way to share people’s firsthand experience of the issue. Second, many stories conveyed the severe levels of deprivation and the tragedies in the lives of those involved—and as such, opened people’s hearts to aspects of the problem that their entrenched position had enabled them to ignore.

It was also important that the group was small, ten participants and two facilitators, since this enabled people to appreciate each other as human beings and not simply as representatives of “them.” By the end of the workshop, there was a clear sense that the group had been on a journey that had affected all those involved.

A key element of that journey was a shift in the individual’s ability to appreciate different perspectives. Achieving this shift was a significant outcome for the project (and see further below for the wider impact on outcomes) since it demonstrates the feasibility of working pluralistically using a systemic approach. It is highly likely that the shift experienced by the participants was temporary and limited to this domain; however, such experiences are the stuff from which development as an adult is constructed. It is also the case that the group participants were able to agree a number of improvements to the situation in Manchester without being seen to “win” the debate—an outcome that seemed impossible at the outset.

**System Dynamics Component**

As indicated earlier, it is only feasible to construct a system dynamics model when there is broad agreement about the way that the system of interest actually works, that is, what causes what. Whilst it remained impossible to model the issue of youth nuisance as a whole, following the SSM workshop there was agreement about the role of dysfunctional families and gang leaders in contributing to youth nuisance, and the treatment of this part of the problem could therefore be modelled. Although the construction of a computerised model requires the expertise of a modeller, the main contributors have to be those with knowledge and experience of working in the system. Furthermore, it is normal for the main benefits to arise as a result of the *modelling process* and not from the completed model. The benefits are realised because in the modelling process the participants have to surface their mental models of how things work and test them against the data available and the models held by others.
One of the conclusions from the SSM workshop was that dysfunctional families tended to propagate through generations. Many of the young single mothers in difficulties were themselves children of young single parent mothers with addiction or mental health problems. This process was likely to continue to produce children who would contribute to youth nuisance and eventually end in the criminal justice system. The aim of the modelling work was to explore the resources required to overcome this self-perpetuating system, and the likely impact this would have on youth nuisance.

The people involved in this modelling were deeply impressed by the process of surfacing and quantifying mental models and were able to develop a model that illustrated the scope and likely impact of targeting different interventions to families in different levels of need. Some of the data required by the process, for example the success rates of different interventions with different categories of families, were readily available. Other data, for example the number of potentially dysfunctional families with young children that was not directly measured, could be estimated. One of the strong conclusions was that without addressing the needs of the families involved, other measures such as ASBOs and tenancy contracts, could only have a limited effect on the incidence of youth nuisance. However, addressing the needs of the families would not lead to immediate large scale effects since there already existed a full pipeline of “problem families” whose children were approaching the age when they were likely to engage in anti-social behaviour. The model convinced those working on it that it would take a minimum of 20 years, and more likely twice that long, to deal satisfactorily with the core issues. The group also recognised that this was way beyond the planning or policy horizons of any of the agencies involved!

Conclusions

The soft systems workshop succeeded in identifying steps that could be taken to improve, not solve, the issue of youth nuisance in Manchester, despite the conflicting paradigms of those attending. The system dynamics model succeeded in showing those building the model the value of surfacing and quantifying their understanding of how the system worked—and also showed them the timescale for a significant improvement. However, the workshop, model, and the project as a whole had little impact on the policies and activities within Manchester. The aim of this concluding section is to explain why this was the case and to provide guidance for the future use of systemic methods in the domain of public policy. There are four main issues that have emerged from reflecting on this project.

The first is the amount of time required from the departments and agencies involved in the various strands of systems studies. Although those commissioning the work were informed that significant contributions of staff time were required, there was insufficient time available from the key individuals involved. (Ideally they were required to be available for several interviews, as participants in the SSM workshop, as advocates of the outcomes in their department and as contributors to the series of system dynamics modelling workshops.) There are several reasons for this. One is a failure of communication between the project commissioners and those required to participate. Another is the general level of overload of all public sector workers and the difficulty they have in prioritising what they see as an external project. Another was the alarmingly high number of projects being run by MCC. Indeed there were so many projects
running concurrently that it would be impossible to identify which were having positive impacts. However, probably the main reason, and of particular relevance to the systemic approaches used here, is that the bulk of the work is done, and has to be done, by those already working in the system, not by the external consultants. As consultants, our role was that of expert facilitators whereas the real work, that of thinking through how systems function and so on, had to be done by the staff. What is more, much of what we were setting out to achieve challenged the way that these people worked and thought about the issues involved.

The second issue is the level of staff that worked with us on the systemic approaches. As the description of the SSM workshop indicated, all those participating emerged from the process with a deeper understanding of both the system they were working in and the perspectives of the other agencies involved. However, the participants were not at a senior enough level to be able to carry these conclusions and the new understanding back into their departments. This is a real problem where there are departmental and agency conflicts. Inevitably, when individuals have their awareness and understanding shifted, there is a follow through problem of translating the individual shifts into cultural shifts within departments or agencies. In general, the follow through is best when those involved in the systems work are at a sufficiently senior level to be able to influence the perspective and policies of their departments and agencies. But the senior people are often those who can least afford the time required to be active participants, as identified in the first issue.

The third issue is that despite many statements making it clear that systemic approaches are largely about improvements and not solutions, most of those involved in the project in the departments and agencies were looking for a solution. As a result, many were disappointed and probably were left with a view that the project had been a waste of time. This was particularly striking in the case of the system dynamics model where one of the senior commissioners was just not interested in an “answer” that said it would take between 20 and 40 years to address the issue!

The fourth issue is one familiar with many working with systems tools and approaches and is simply that in order for them to be used effectively, it is critical that they are understood and supported by the most senior managers or executives. A previous government review of the Lean Systems method concluded that for systems projects to be successful

Managers must be supportive of the process. They need to be aware of, and understand, the work at an early stage and allow the review team unfettered access whilst carrying out ... the initial review of the service. The support of the Chief Executive and senior management is crucial in driving the changes in their organisations. (ODPM, 2005, p. 4)

These conditions were simply not in place for the Manchester project, and this author would not undertake a similar project again without ensuring a far greater level of understanding by the senior executives. Since the Manchester project there have been a wide range of systemic initiatives in the public sector in the UK that has resulted in a greater awareness of the requirements for success—and willingness for leaders to take risks.
Although the project did not have the level of impact we would have liked, it became clear in later discussion with officers in MCC that our contribution did support and foster what became known as the “twin track approach” to youth nuisance, an approach that established and enforced clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour whilst giving as much support as possible to families and children in deprived neighbourhoods where anti-social behaviour was a particular problem.

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References


Politics in a New Key: 
Breaking the Cycle of U.S. Politics with a 
Generational/Developmental Approach

Ken White1

Abstract: Some common, mental models shape how people in the US perceive political changes over time. The one-dimensional pendulum swing model and the two-dimensional cyclical model are prevalent. When generational differences are mapped onto such political change cycles, they orient to cohorts or age groups. This leads to viewing generational cohorts as experiencing one- or two-dimensional cycles without deeper scrutiny. Cohort differences that surface in the Generations Salons that I and others conducted in California suggest a different, three-dimensional model may be more representative of the potential for societal change in the US. Using a musical metaphor, that model is explained in terms of different political “keys” and the value of distinguishing among them as time passes. It also underlies a speculation about a “politics in a new key,” which might prove more useful.

Summary-level reporting of the action research conducted with the Generations Salons supports the three-dimensional model. We expect new politics to emerge from the Millennial cohort coming of age now, yet it will not be without the support and wisdom of the cohorts that came of age before it. This must be the case if the burden of expectations we place on the Millennials will indeed pave the way for transformative change in US society. Intergenerational support of Millennials is essential. This initial research and application suggests the potential for the generational/developmental approach as a wellspring for transformational—and practically successful—political work. It begs the question: What will you do to help?

Keywords: Archetypes, developmental, generational, mental models, Millennials, political change, transformational.

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1 Ken White, born in 1961, came of age straddling the uneasy divide between Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, exemplified by a high school record collection that included both the Grateful Dead and The Clash. Ken has spent the last two decades looking for—and toward—the future of democracy, a journey that has taken him down many roads less traveled, and introduced him to a host of remarkable thinkers and doers at groups like Oxfam America, Common Cause, Post Carbon Institute, Chaordic Commons, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Coalition of Essential Schools, and Institute for Defense & Disarmament Studies. He is indebted to them all. A graduate of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government's mid-career program, Ken has been privileged to have spent much of his career enhancing opportunities for citizens and communities. Contact: http://kenwhite.us/contact.htm.
Stuck in Time

“Why are there no young people in the room?”

Like many activists, I’ve heard that cri de coeur (and its companion questions about women and people of color) many times—too many times—at political events. Looking around at this gathering of mostly earnest, progressive Baby Boomers, there seemed to me a blindingly obvious rejoinder: “Because they have a different model of political action!”

I fell into a conversation with the fellow sitting next to me about the apparent age divide, and he invited me to join a group of theorists and activists exploring ideas for “changing the political conversation.” Over the next several years, as part of a series of “Political Salons,” this group explored (among other things) whether a generationally-based conversation could help point us toward a transformation in our political advocacy efforts…and in US political culture.

My interest in the potential for generational and developmental theory to make practical contributions to political action (and to help us improve the quality of our civic environment) grows out of 15 years as a professional political advocate, working almost entirely in the US. I have worked with a political group whose average member age was over 70, as well as with high school and college organizing efforts, and with every age group in between. Not surprisingly, I have observed obvious differences in the “mental models” the various age groups bring to politics, based simply on their respective stages in life. But there also seem to be differences based on “generational cohort”—the group of peers you travel through life with, and with whom you share a broad range of experiences and perspectives.

2 This San Francisco Bay Area group (called the Praxis Tank for Progressives) grew out of a 2002 conversation initiated by Dean Elias, Kathleen Taylor, and Peter Dunlap (among others), driven by the question: “How can we change political culture?” In the years since, the group has hosted more than a dozen “Salons” where practical approaches to political work are “tried out” by a wonderful group of engaged (and engaging) political activists and activists-to-be from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and perspectives. The group was an essential proving ground for some of the concepts explored in this article, as well as in Peter T. Dunlap’s book, Awakening Our Faith in the Future: The Advent of Psychological Liberalism (Routledge, 2008).

3 This article draws specifically on US examples and theory—the only political culture I know well enough to write about. The specifics of both the theory and practice may not apply to any other culture or nation. However, it would be fascinating to learn if the general idea (and similar practices) of generational difference and potential alignment could be helpful elsewhere.

4 A “generational cohort” is an often-self-defined group of peers with whom you identify, and with whom you move through various stages of life. Perhaps the most famous of these cohorts is the Baby Boomers, now in their mid-40s through mid-60s. In their youth, the Boomers catalyzed one of the most turbulent periods in American history, and now in their generative years they are trying to redefine aging. The difference between a “cohort” and an age group is that cohorts move together through time, while age groups are defined by characteristics that are common to a certain stage in life. For example, the basic characteristics of age groups like teens and 20s are intuitively obvious. It seems most everyone goes through adolescent turbulence in their teens; most everyone begins to take the future more seriously when they reach their 20s. Similarly, most everyone, upon reaching their 40s, begins to take dietary fiber more seriously; most everyone who enters their 60s begins to take their legacy more seriously; and so on. It is perhaps less obvious that different generational cohorts, as they move through these stages of life, will
I have also seen—and experienced—the suffering that comes with putting oneself into the political arena, and the chronic pain that can arise from confronting one of the most complex and convoluted challenges imaginable: changing the way we agree, collectively, to live together as a society. And I wondered if a generational/developmental perspective might help explain the sense of “stuckness” that so many of us experience in political involvement (as well as the sense of potential that arose from the more recent Obama campaign). It seemed worth exploring:

- If each of the generational cohorts understands and engages differently with politics;
- How the older generational cohorts could better understand, engage with, and support the rising Millennials (now in their pre-teen to post-college years);
- If the Millennials (together with the other generational cohorts) can translate the potential synergies among their differences into new forms of leadership and activism.

This article documents our experience working with a generational/developmental approach toward that goal. It begins with an introduction to the theory and “mental models” of political action, followed by a brief overview of the “Generations Salons” and how those events played out, and concludes with reflections and implications. This initial research and application suggests the potential for the generational/developmental approach as a wellspring for transformational—and practically successful—political work.

### Political Mental Models

The Millennials, often touted as the next “Greatest Generation,” may actually have the potential to be that…and more. But if we simply slot them into a Greatest Generation role, and if we assume that the best way to develop their potential is to set them on well-worn political pathways—defined (and confined) by the “mental models” we bring to political activism—they may not have the oft-touted, but rarely-defined “transformative” effect. The limiting factor may not be the Millennials; instead, it could be the mental models we all use (mostly unconsciously) to help us make sense of the world.

In politics, American mental models tend to involve defined movement within clearly delineated boundaries. We often describe our experience of social and political change over time using metaphors that imply regular, rhythmic motions, such as ebbs and flows, or cycles, where lasting change occurs at a slow pace, if at all. Although these “back and forth/round and round” metaphors are not the only ones we use when thinking about politics, they are embedded in the language of political discourse as “pendulum swings” and the like. Beneath these descriptions are “mental models”—conscious or unconscious shorthand representations of reality that help us orient ourselves, make sense of reality, take action, interpret outcomes, and plan for the future.

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5 The “Greatest Generation” refers to Americans who came of age in the Great Depression and World War II years, and reinvigorated the US democracy and economy in a time of peril.

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have different perspectives and worldviews from other cohorts that have moved through these same life stages. So, for example, although the Baby Boomers will experience many of the same life stage changes in their 60s that members of the “Greatest Generation” experienced in their 60s, the Boomers will also have some unique perspectives and experiences based on their shared history as a cohort.
One Dimension: The “Pendulum Swings Both Ways” Model

One simple but powerfully attractive way of thinking about American politics describes change as something that happens in a single dimension (Figure 1). Trends and preferences swing back and forth along a single straight line with more-or-less metronomic cadence: Democratic-Republican, liberal-conservative, etc. Beyond providing a pleasing sense of continuity and predictability, the one-dimensional model provides the comfort of boundaries and limits to extremism.

![Figure 1. One Dimensional “Pendulum” Mental Model of US Politics](image)

In this model, the length of the line—the total distance between the poles of “right” and “left” or “Democratic” and “Republican”—is fairly short, and the gravitational pull of the center is assumed to be quite strong. Extremists can never force things too far out of balance, and good old common sense keeps the majority opinion clustered around the midpoint…and along the line itself. Political action in this model consists of trying to get enough people and power to move, for as long as possible, toward your preferred end of the line.

More durable progress, in this model, comes only through slow, gradual migrations of the widely accepted midpoint itself along the line. Of course, the migration can go in either direction. So, from a one-dimensional perspective, “progress” can be defined as movement of the center toward either the “liberal” or “conservative” pole (or whatever terminology is used). Those on either side of a debate (and in this model, there is really only room for two sides of any debate) can always identify opportunities for what each perceives as the potential for long-term gains, achievable by moving the middle in their preferred direction.

Presumably, this combination of predictability, “boundedness,” and possibility of gradual progress makes the linear model acceptable to people and groups pulled toward the poles, as well as comforting to those drawn to the middle. The model “works” because it provides a stable framework for political activism. At the same time, it offers a sense of safety from erratic or dramatic shifts that might go “too far” in either direction along the line. In this model, the pendulum does not swing so far in one direction or the other that it can “break the frame” of the accepted consensus, and the majority of Americans can imagine themselves and their compatriots as clustered somewhere close to the center. Thus, this model generally “makes sense” to those who favor the relative security of slow, ordered change (or little change), as well as those pushing for relatively modest, incremental improvements.

Further, there is no need to make real distinctions among different generations, or among generational cohorts moving through time: although “young lions” eventually replace “old bulls,” the lions and bulls share fundamentally the same viewpoints at their respective ages. Both the model and the basic methods of political change hold constant, even if the personalities, parties, etc., shift over time. Political advocates need not look for and use differences among
generations or cohorts, but simply “train up” rising young leaders in the received wisdom of the particular political viewpoint. This model seems to fit quite nicely with the recent spate of “Generation X” Fundamentalist Christian parents sending their kids to summer camps that inculcate the 1980-90s Evangelical model of public activism, as well as the tendency among “Baby Boomer” Progressives to want young people to re-create the 1960s political culture and organizing methods. And, perhaps, the not-so-surprising outcome of many of the Millennial young people (politely) rejecting both of those models.

Two Dimensions: The “What Goes Around, Comes Around” Model

A more complex version of the linear view uses a two-dimensional cycle (Figure 2) as a metaphor. In this model, “everything has its season,” and every action leads—eventually—to an opposite reaction. Political trends and preferences may seem to come and go, but underneath it all, there is a predictable rhythm. This is roughly the political equivalent of “just stick around, bell bottoms will be back in style again in 30 years or so.”

As an example, the excesses of a Republican Congress give way to a rebirth of liberal activism, which then leads to the election of a Democratic President, who joins with a Democratic Congress to implement activist policies, which in turn triggers a conservative backlash, and so on and so on through time.

Like its one-dimensional cousin, this model has an appealing sense of stability, and even order. The downside of predictability is (seeming) inevitability: A causes B, which leads to C, and then on to D, which brings us back to A. Although there is room in this model for some gradual “progress,” the opportunities for enduring change in this cyclical model may seem in some ways more limited than in the linear world. Unintended consequences are not only unavoidable, they are expected.

Carrying around this rather grim, Sisyphusian sense of how politics works may contribute to the burnout and disenchantment that so often claims political activists. Since you can’t freeze time, whatever progress you make is subject to—at best—only partial reverses as the wheel turns. And since the wheel won’t rotate all the way back for a couple of generations, well, political activism might seem pretty disheartening. However, this model does offer opportunities for some forms of progress, in three ways:

1. “Move the center.” As in the linear model, the center can and does gradually shift over time, taking the entire “cycle” along with it. And, as in the linear model, different people can and do define “progress” as movement in any direction, so change can and does happen—but so, of course, can reversion.

2. “Get what you can get, and then fight a rear-guard action against revanchism.” Most relatively mainstream groups profess to believe that their time will eventually come. And when
their moment arrives, they’ll struggle to implement as many legal, structural, and procedural modifications as they can, and to make their moment last. This mental model might help explain some of the excesses that inevitably occur when an ideology, party, or generational cohort takes power: if a group’s members believe (consciously or not) that their time in power will be brief and their gains reversible, it seems sensible to push their agenda as hard as possible for as long as possible. When their opponents retake power, they would quite logically fight to prevent their changes from being dismantled, while rebuilding their team and re-tooling for the moment when they can (finally!) reclaim power.

3. “Plan for the next war.” From a cyclical viewpoint, progress can be made if groups avoid getting caught in the one-dimensional trap of building a Maginot Line to fight the last war. Instead, there is potential to create an insurgency that will replace the current order more quickly and more effectively this time around. This leads to strategies like “working smarter” and developing new, more conditions-sensitive leadership.

Although this model and its methods are not incompatible with the language of transformation, paradigm shifts, etc., the reality of using this mental model may well be (for very good and compelling reasons) that truly transformational change hovers chimerically on the horizon, while the stern tasks of grinding out progress and preventing losses predominate.

Two Dimensions: The Strauss & Howe Model of American Political Cycles

One of the most compelling examples of the cyclical model of American democracy comes from William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991, 1997). In Generations, Fourth Turning, and subsequent writings, they posited that four generational archetypes (Heroes, Artists, Prophets, and Nomads—see Figure 3 for details) recur over and over in the US, in predictable generational cycles of roughly 20 years. They assert that each of these generational cohorts reacts both to the cultural climate created by the preceding generations, and to the larger climate (e.g., global, technological, etc.) in ways that are broadly predictable, based on their place in the generational archetype cycle.

Further, Strauss and Howe posit that there are also cycles in the types of challenges facing American society, which correspond to the archetypes of the generational cohorts leading the response to these circumstances. So, they argue, a “Hero” cohort like the Greatest Generation faces (or raises up) a “Secular Crisis” like WWII, during which Americans must band together to overcome. The resolution of the “Crisis” Era leads to a “High” Era of broad consensus and repressed conflict dominated by “Artists,” such as the late 1940s through the early 1960s when the Silent Generation came of age in the time of the GI Bill and Father Knows Best. Following this, the rising “Prophet” generation then initiates a “Spiritual Crisis” that leads to an “Awakening” Era, as the Baby Boomers did when they called into question the core values of American society during the 1960s and 1970s. In turn, “Nomads” like “Generation X” endure an “Unraveling” Era, like the crime-obsessed, me-first, “Greed is Good” era of the 1980-1990s, which leads to the next “Secular Crisis” and “Crisis” Era, and the rise of another “Hero” cohort.

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6 For example, see www.fourthturning.com.
“Artists”

**Example:** Silent Generation, b. 1925 – 1942
**Current ages:** 68 - 85

We know Artists best for their quiet years of rising adulthood and during their midlife years of flexible, consensus-building leadership. Overprotected as children, they become underprotective parents. Their principal endowment activities are in the domain of pluralism, expertise, and due process. These have been sensitive and complex social technicians, advocates of fair play and the politics of inclusion. With the single exception of Andrew Jackson, they rank as the most expert and credentialed of American political leaders.

“Prophets”

**Example:** Baby Boomers, b. 1943 – 1960
**Current ages:** 50 - 67

We know Prophets for their coming-of-age passion and for their principled elder stewardship. Increasingly indulged as children, they become increasingly protective as parents. Their principal endowments are in the domain of vision, values, and religion. These have been principled moralists, summoners of human sacrifice, wagers of righteous wars. Early in life, few saw combat in uniform; late in life, most came to be revered more for their inspiring words than for their grand deeds.

“Nomads”

**Example:** Generation X, b. 1961 – 1984
**Current ages:** 26 - 49

We know Nomads best for their rising-adult years of hell-raising and for their midlife years of hands-on, get-it-done leadership. Underprotected as children, they become overprotective parents. Their principal endowments are in the domains of liberty, survival, and honor. These have been cunning, hard-to-fool realists—taciturn warriors who prefer to meet problems and adversaries one-on-one.

“Heroes”

**Examples:** Greatest Generation, b. 1901 – 1924; Millennials, b. 1984 – 2003
**Current ages:** 7 - 26, 86+

We know Heroes best for their collective coming-of-age triumphs and for their hubristic elder achievements. Increasingly protected as children, they become increasingly indulgent as parents. Their principal endowment activities are in the domain of community, affluence, and technology. They have been vigorous and rational institution builders. All have been aggressive advocates of economic prosperity and public optimism in midlife; and all have maintained a reputation for civic energy and competence even deep into old age.

Figure 3. Two-Dimensional Generational Archetypes in Current American Life
(from Strauss & Howe’s *Fourth Turning*, (1997, pp. 95-97) and other sources)
Era: “High”
Archetype: Artist
Cohort coming of age: Silent Generation,
b. 1925 – 1942
Current ages: 68 - 85
Orientation: Collective
Focus: Outer Opportunity
Dynamic: Reactive
Mindset: Verities
Realm of action: Civic groups
Stance toward government: Reform
Experience: Prosperity, harmony, education
Purpose: “The society must prosper”

Era: “Awakening”
Archetype: Prophet
Cohort coming of age: Baby Boomers,
b. 1943 – 1960
Current ages: 50 - 67
Orientation: Individual
Focus: Inner Opportunity
Dynamic: Active
Mindset: Possibilities
Realm of action: The personal is political
Stance toward government: Resent
Experience: Diversity, liberation, expansion
Purpose: “The society must explore”

Era: “Unraveling”
Archetype: Nomad
Cohort coming of age: Generation X,
b. 1961 - 1984
Current ages: 26 - 49
Orientation: Individual
Focus: Inner Threat
Dynamic: Reactive
Mindset: Possibilities
Realm of action: Private sector
Stance toward government: Replace
Experience: Consolidation, individuation, protection
Purpose: “The society must cope”

Era: “Crisis”
Archetype: Hero
Cohorts coming of age: Greatest Generation,
b. 1901 – 1924;
Millennials,
b. 1984 - 2003
Current ages: 86+; 7 -26
Orientation: Collective
Focus: Outer Threat
Dynamic: Active
Mindset: Verities
Realm of action: Government
Stance toward government: Rebuild
Experience: Unity, collective action
Purpose: “The society must survive”

Figure 4. Characteristics of Generational Archetypes and Corresponding Eras Leading up to the Present, and Projected into the Future
(extrapolated from Strauss & Howe’s Fourth Turning and other sources)
projected to be the Millennials. Figure 4 extrapolates further from the basic Strauss and Howe model, suggesting ways that generational cohorts and the corresponding eras might be distinguished.

As these cohorts move through time, each appears to have quite distinctive ways of expressing values and principles, favored forms of action, preferred realms for intervention, etc. For example, the Silent Generation populated many of the large national civic groups like the ACLU and the League of Women Voters; whereas many Gen Xers have turned their successful private sector experiences to re-tooling the nonprofit world.

Although careful to avoid determinism, Strauss and Howe suggest that there is some predictability in the general contours and broad trends of American life. Quite wisely, they do not say how these trends will actually play out in each generational cohort or particular period in the future, just that certain patterns will reappear, predictably, time and again. The Strauss and Howe model picks out of the seemingly chaotic noise of the American Experience an underlying rhythm and a simple melody. The task of political advocates, it follows, is to dance to the pulse of the times by understanding the characteristics and configurations of both the rising generation and the generations currently in power, as well as the prevailing—and rising—mood of the country. A kind of “musical sensitivity” helps political advocates get ahead of trends by getting a feel for the (approximate) future, and gives them an edge in the three core political activities of the two-dimensional, cyclical model: shifting the center; fighting rear-guard actions; and building for the next war.

Of course, this model has its weaknesses. Beyond its limitations as a hugely broad-brush approach, the Strauss and Howe model begins to show cracks when the authors extend it back into pre-American Revolution “Anglo-American” history. Although on the surface their evidence seems intriguing, this reach into history may be more confusing than illuminating, for reasons outlined later in this article. Similarly, any attempt to project this kind of American particularism too far into a future seems unwise. We appear headed toward an era of greater interdependence, and we may be poised for some unimagined leaps forward (or backward) into dramatically different ways of life.

Finally, the reference to “Anglo-American” history points to the absence, in Strauss and Howe’s theory, of the experiences and impact of the many immigrants not “assimilated” into Anglo-American history and culture, as well the many people in the US who do not conform to the majority culture. But although Strauss and Howe look primarily at “Anglo-American” culture, similar distinctions seem to crop up outside of the mainstream culture as well. For example, some commentators have suggested familiar-sounding contrasts between the “Civil Rights Generation” (Baby Boomer) and the “Hip-Hop Generation” (Gen X) among African-Americans (see, for example, Goff, 2008; Kitwana, 2003), and interesting differences among different generations of gay men have also been proposed. Their theory does not address at all recent immigrants and their families (about 10 percent of the US population), who seem likely to be influenced as much (if not more) by their experiences outside of American culture as by their US-born generational cohorts.
Three Dimensions: The “Singing in a Higher Key” Model

The “cyclical model” above has both a stable rhythm (a new generational cohort appears every 20-25 years) and a predictable, repetitive melody. Viewed from above (as in the two-dimensional model shown in Figure 2), it portrays a harmonious repeating cycle over time.

But what if those patterns that Strauss and Howe observed were plotted in three dimensions, adding a developmental axis (Figure 5)? Would the American historical cycles (and the cycles in “Anglo-American” history before them, and those of the potential future beyond) reveal a different kind of pattern? Would this perspective suggest the potential for more enduring change, perhaps even societal transformation? Could this kind of “perspective shift” help us imagine politics being sung in a “higher key?”

Imagine trying to record on paper the output of a musician playing four notes over and over again, but without using the standard musical staff (the grid of lines used for writing music). Even if the musician changed to a different key, the pattern of the written notes would look the same, without the context of a grid to indicate pitch and direction. From this sort of two-dimensional perspective, a “do-re-mi-fa-do-re-mi-fa” melody would look just like an “mi-fa-la-ti-mi-fa-la-ti” melody or a “la-ti-do-re-la-ti-re-do” melody.

Add the staff, however, and the notes from the different melodies would appear in different places, making changes in key obvious, as well as any differences in the notes and patterns, and the direction of the music. From this three-dimensional vantage point, a similar quantitative melody (four notes in a repeating, cyclical pattern) would have a large qualitative difference.

In the first iteration of their theory, Strauss and Howe suggested a timeline of “cycles” that began around the time of the exploration and colonization of North America—a time of tremendous religious, political, scientific, philosophical, psychological, and societal upheaval. The Scientific Revolution, the Reformation, the American Revolution, all created conditions that made possible profound, fundamental changes in how individuals and societies perceived themselves and their relationships to each other.

Arguably, these were times of developmental shifts in both individuals and societies (and the governments created by these people, as in the emergence of American democracy). In these conditions, it seems plausible that a new societal “cycle” (like the melody in the example above) might have begun, perhaps replacing an earlier one, or—more probably—overlaying and building upon an earlier one. So, although the basic pattern of the cycle could appear to remain the same, the new cycle might instead be repeating in ways that corresponded with the new, more complex challenges that people and the society were experiencing. The cycle may have “changed keys” from the previous one, even though the basic patterns may have remained similar. In this way, although the cyclical patterns the American colonists inherited from the generational cohorts of medieval England (and Europe) might appear to roughly correspond in archetypal form, the old and new patterns might, upon closer examination, have a very different context and content.
However, trying to capture that difference in a two-dimensional model would probably result in these quite different cycles looking—and being represented—much the same. Even though a profound change may have shifted the society from an older, stable, medieval, monarchic “A-B-C-D-A-B-C-D” cycle to a newly stable, modern, democratic “C-D-E-F-C-D-E-F” cycle, the two-dimensional Strauss and Howe perspective would not capture this upheaval (e.g., compare the “Two Dimensional” model of Figure 2 with the “Three Dimensional” model shown in Figure 5). That type of “developmental shift” might best be represented in the “widening spiral” model shown in Figure 5, where although the cyclical pattern is repeated, it repeats at a level that encompasses a wider range of experience, and a greater degree of complexity and challenge.

Although it required a dramatic shift in individual and collective perspective to move from living as monarchic subjects whose sole duties were fealty, to becoming democratic citizens facing far more complex demands, a “two-dimensional” model cannot and does not account for this kind of change. In the Strauss and Howe world, a cohort of medieval serfs in 16th century England are of the same “archetype” as Internet-buzzing Americans of the 21st century—and that same archetype is projected to return again in the 23rd century. Although it is true we still read Shakespeare and the Bhagavad Gita because some aspects of human nature and experience remain timeless, in many other important ways, people and the societies we create have evolved to levels of far greater complexity.

![Figure 5. Three-Dimensional “Spiral” Mental Model of U.S. Politics](image-url)
This, it seems, highlights the weaknesses of employing just a two-dimensional representation of both "Anglo-American" and American historical cycles, and of projecting too far forward into the future. First, as many have argued, the American Revolutionary period corresponded with a (however imperfectly realized) developmental shift for individuals, societies, and governments. So whatever relationship there may be among generational cycles going back into “Anglo-American” history and forward into the future, although the “melodies and rhythms” may be similar, they may actually be “played” in different developmental “keys.” That is, a Hero generation might have appeared every 80 years or so in Medieval England, just as a Hero generation might have appeared every 80 years in the post-Revolutionary US. However, the US Heroes of the 18th-20th centuries would face much denser (intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, etc.) challenges than those that faced their 14th-17th century English counterparts. The modern, US Heroes (or any other generational cohort of the modern United States) would have to “sing” a similar song, but in a “higher key” that corresponded to the greater level of complexity and challenge in the world around them.

Second, viewing the generational cycles through a two-dimensional lens limits the potential for imagining a developmental shift upward (as well as the tragic possibility of a developmental shift downward). Lasting change, in this view, can only occur by “moving the center.” Third, understanding the generational cycles as two-dimensional limits considering the potential for developmental growth within the cohorts and cycles, where each cohort might attempt to build on the advancements of previous cohorts, without falling prey to the pitfalls created by the previous generations’ efforts—and thereby repeating the inevitable cycle.

Three Dimensions: Accounting for Generational Cohorts

So, then, what advantages would a three-dimensional model offer (Figure 5)? First of all, as George Box famously noted, all models are wrong, but some models are useful. The three-dimensional model’s usefulness lies not in how well it corresponds to reality (like the other models, probably not so accurately), but in whether it enables us to think differently about the potential for political change, and our ability to help catalyze that change.

In political advocacy, the three-dimensional model has the obvious appeal of allowing a greater amount of progress in more dimensions—people and cohorts (as well as movements and political parties) can grow not only within their existing contexts, but also grow into more complex, nuanced modes of understanding and acting. The three-dimensional model suggests a more open pathway of possibility.

At the same time, it does not completely break with the one- or two-dimensional models. Instead, it builds on the familiar “moving along the line” and “things go in cycles” orientations, by adding another dimension. As an extension of already-established patterns in the political culture, the three-dimensional model offers a progressive, logical pathway to a different way of

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7 There are, of course, other “three-dimensional” models of politics. Most, however, are static, and simply create models with two (or sometimes more) axes that locate political opinions, parties, and ideologies in spatial relationship to each other. Some of these axes include “liberal-conservative,” “libertarian-communitarian,” “cosmopolitan-nationalist,” “individual-group,” etc. Although useful for mapping, these essentially static models alone offer little insight on pathways toward change and progress over time.
understanding politics, which (seemingly) could be quite accessible to those comfortable with the one- and two-dimensional models. The changes in this model grow out of the received tradition of values, patterns, and structures, and continue along a roughly similar (although widening and rising) circular pathway. The model has the added advantage of not requiring everyone to rise to some new level; it also suggests that simply changing and growing within a generational cohort (or party, ideology, etc.), can also contribute to the general progress.8

Exactly what all these changes might look like, and how it would happen, of course, are at this point speculative. Of course, it’s tremendously tempting to load up the rising generation with a wheelbarrow-full of familiar issues, policies, and positions. However, assuming that “the future will be just like the present, only more so,” would be more in line with the one- and two-dimensional models, and might close out the range of possibilities by focusing on the content before first understanding the context. And the context that came to light through working firsthand with members of the various generational cohorts revealed some unexpected information to me and my colleagues.

Action Research: The Generations Map Themselves

At first, I was tempted to “map” various developmental theories and stages onto Strauss and Howe’s archetypes and cycles. This yielded some intriguing possibilities, but it seemed unwise to force too much of an “apples and oranges” comparison. Although (for example) the Greatest Generation and the “Secular Crisis” it survived in some ways appear to match the characteristics of a “Red/BLUE” (“Spiral Dynamics”) or “Imperial II” (Kegan) orientation, the nuances of reality cautioned against simply slapping a developmental stage label onto an entire generational cohort and/or moment in history.9

Besides, each generational cohort, in conjunction with the other generational cohorts alive at the time, will face challenges at a multitude of developmental levels, and each has the option of responding at a multitude of levels. For example, the Depression and WWII presented both a survival threat (severe poverty and world war) and an existential threat (responding to the Fascist manifestation of evil) to the Greatest Generation. For very good reasons, most Americans chose to subsume the latter in the interest of solving the former, and focused on the formidable challenges of rebalancing the economy and “making the world safe for democracy.” The Cold

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8 This explicitly developmental perspective on change is quite often absent from existing political advocacy efforts. Some advocates measure effectiveness by results, regardless of motivations; support for a goal is their desired outcome, not necessarily transformation. Other political advocates see success as changing the perspectives and worldviews of others, leading to alignment in both philosophy and action. The three-dimensional model opens the possibility for a “both/and” approach, where both growth within an existing worldview and a movement to a new worldview can support a political development process.

9 Many different developmental models appear, at least on the surface, to share similarities with the generational cohort cycles outlined by Strauss and Howe. Some of the most familiar, like those created by Robert Kegan (1991) and Clare Graves (whose model was extended and popularized by Beck and Cowan’s (1996) Spiral Dynamics), have been applied in circumstances like this, as interest in adult development has increased. However, as Sara Ross (2008), among others, suggested, similarity on the surface often masks great difference at the core, and cross-comparisons often decrease specificity and increase the potential for misunderstandings.
War presented similar developmental challenges, but the Silent Generation, for both practical and preferential reasons, focused more intently on the existential threat of competing ideologies and the very real possibility of global annihilation.

Therefore, instead of creating a complex theoretical framework for our work with the “Generations Salons,” I decided to focus first on what was fairly obvious: people could self-identify easily into generational cohorts like “Baby Boomers” and “Gen Xers.” In our first attempts to use this conceptual framework with a group of politically engaged people, we chose not to present a theory to the group and then ask them to discuss the implications. Instead, we asked people, together, as generational cohorts, to create and weave together their own developmental narrative out of their individual and combined “political coming of age stories.” By sharing these stories across the generational cohorts, we hoped the developmental challenges and opportunities might become apparent.

Our intent was to create an opportunity for each generational cohort to claim its unique identity, and then encourage all the generational cohorts to fit their experiences into a larger story that defined “how we got here,” which would then imply the possibility of creating a different way of imagining “where we want to go next.”

Our hope was that a sense of the possibility for enduring change offered by the three-dimensional model would emerge as the groups created open-ended narratives of their own development as individuals, as generational cohorts, and as members of a larger society. Rather than seeing their primary tasks as “moving the center” or “holding the line,” we hoped they could discover a sense of progress, possibility, and opportunity. In particular, we hoped that by placing the Millennials at the “open end” of the narrative, the potential for leadership by this generational cohort (and the need for support from the other cohorts) might become a focal point of the conversation.

**Theory in Action: A Conversation among the Generations**

The “Generations Salons” we hosted are part of an ongoing series of events developed by a San Francisco Bay Area group that formed in 2002 around the question: “How can we change political culture?” In the years since, the group has hosted more than a dozen Salons and workshops where practical approaches to political work are “tried out” by a wonderful group of engaged (and engaging) political activists and activists-to-be from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and perspectives. For these Salons, we tried to have at least three or more members of each current generational cohort (Silent, Boomer, Gen Xers, and Millennials) participating. We asked participants to gather in their generational cohorts and create a narrative of their individual and combined “political coming of age stories.” We then shared these stories among the generational cohorts, beginning with the oldest and moving thorough time to the Millennials, telling a collective story of “how we got here,” with the implied possibility of imagining “where we want to go next.” The general format follows.

1. A brief introduction of the context, the topic, the format, and the people.

2. Divide into four groups by generational cohort.
3. Ask each individual, and each cohort, to come back to the large group prepared to tell a story about some combination of these items (different variations of the below were tried at different Salons):

− Your experience when you felt your cohort “came of age” politically.
− Your generational cohort’s landmarks (events, people, milestones, reference points, zeitgeist, metaphors, etc.).
− What your generational cohort is passionate about.
− What you inherited from previous cohorts, both with gratitude and with regret.
− What you hope to pass on to the next cohort(s), and what you hope they will not inherit from you.
− Your best advice for the next generational cohorts(s).
− Your generational cohort’s task…and its burden.

4. Bring the separate cohorts together into a large group again, and ask the oldest (Silent) cohort to begin by telling their story. When the Silent Generation’s story reaches their “political coming of age moment,” they pass the narrative thread to the next-oldest cohort (Boomers), who repeat the process. The thread passes through the Gen Xers, and on to the Millennials, who are just now experiencing their “political coming of age,” and are only beginning to project themselves and our society into a possible future.

5. Invite reflection and conversation on what this experience evoked. For example:

− For the older cohorts, reflect on how the younger cohorts unfolded what you helped create, and your own role in that unfolding.
− For the younger cohorts, reflect on how the world created by the older cohorts influenced your own choices.
− How could we use this experience to change our political culture?
− What can the generational cohorts individually and collectively contribute to the rising Millennials and their potential for leadership?
− Do we want to help the rising cohort of Millennials repeat familiar patterns, or is there potential to move up to a higher level of development?

6. Invite actions to help “step into the future.”

From these Salons emerged dramatically different stories than those so often told at political gatherings based on ideology, issue, or political party. As the narration passed from one generational cohort to the next, we experienced the historical forces that had shaped us, and how our actions had shaped history, other generational cohorts, and our shared culture. This illuminated how differences and commonalities had emerged, and why they matter. This new perspective revealed the development of individuals and generational cohorts moving through time—and showed that political identities and worldviews are neither as fixed nor as exclusive as conventional political labels suggest.

The Millennials, in their turn, revealed their potential to shift toward a new and quite compelling future. We also saw how all the cohorts may have misunderstood what each could offer to help the Millennials seize this opportunity, and gained a quite different perspective on their capacity to re-think some aspects of their political identities and strategies.
The Generations in Action and Reflection

At each of the Salons, the participants identified the need for more opportunities for members of all generational cohorts to experience their potential for growth and leadership, and particularly for engaging with the Millennial Generation. Each of the older cohorts—Silent, Boomer, and Gen X—recognized that they possess unique insights, knowledge, experience, as well as blind spots, all of which will influence the emergence of the Millennials. The older generations expressed an intense yearning for the younger generations to build on their triumphs. But the younger generations seemed to have more interest in learning from what the members of each cohort have learned in their passages through fire and from confronting their shadows.

Although common sense dictates that each generational cohort should pass on both values and lessons learned, the very human tendency is to emphasize hard-won victories and ignore difficult, unresolved issues. In turn, although successive cohorts ought to incorporate the wisdom proffered by their elders, they have often learned as much from what was kept in the dark as they did from what was held up to the light. This—along with the mental models that limit options for growth and development—may well contribute to our political system’s continual recycling of past mistakes, and the experience so many political activists have of “beating our heads against the wall” with familiar yet often-ineffective strategies. Our political development may be stunted and our options for action limited—in stark contrast with the perspective shifts and methodology changes (reflecting greater complexity and developmental growth) that have propelled advances in so many other areas like science, business, and technology, for example.

Since our political approaches rarely match the overt rhetorical language of politics (e.g., “New Ideas!”, “Moving Forward!”, “A Brighter Future!”), there must be some significant obstacles to developing alternative mental models and using a generational cycle of learning and growth as a springboard to political development outside of fora like our Salons. No doubt, many of those obstacles are “external,” perhaps the most significant being existential threats to security and prosperity (like the reaction to 9/11, the growing economic stratification/instability, and potential catastrophes from global climate change). Some of the “internal” ones seem equally intractable, like the re-emergence of right-wing extremism and religious beliefs that reject modernity (let alone postmodernity!) out of hand. And, of course, the existing mental models for political change (as described earlier), are difficult to supplant, if for no other reason than that they are familiar, and we seem to have constructed an entire political system on their basis.

Emerging from these Salons, however, is the potential for a new generational cycle, led by the Millennials, with the support and guidance of the older cohorts. As in the three-dimensional model shown in Figure 5, however, generational cohorts may have to learn to “sing” their particular notes in “higher keys,” replacing, for example, the expected “C” in the two-dimensional “C-D-E-F” cycle with a new, “G” note. Exactly what a “G” note might sound like, and how it would be “sung” are beyond the scope of this article. However, Table 1 lays out some speculative characteristics of a possible new kind of “Hero” archetype compared to that shown in Figure 4. Its members might “sing” this new note, if offered the right kind of support, and the freedom to express themselves.
After all, one cohort, acting alone (as the participants in the Salons pointed out), does not possess the capacity to undertake that kind of transformation. A generational cohort only just coming of age, like the Millennials, needs the received wisdom, values, and traditions of the previous generations to build upon, as well as the opportunity and resources to generate alternatives. The Millennials need members of the other generational cohorts to break out of the one- and two-dimensional models, and offer the rising generation a context in which a “higher key” becomes a real option.

From the evidence of these Salons, it appears that multi-generational, multi-perspective experiences could become the basis for long-term constituency building, as well as a platform for helping older generational cohorts find truly useful ways to participate in a different kind of political environment. We especially need to explore if and how this framework applies among a variety of people and communities, with particular attention to recent immigrants and their children.

Table 1. New Hero Archetype Response in a New Key to a “Crisis” Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>“Old Key” Response to Secular Crisis (Figure 4)</th>
<th>“New Key” Response to Secular Crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Era</td>
<td>“Crisis”</td>
<td>“Crisis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archetype</td>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>New Hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort(s) coming of age</td>
<td>Greatest Generation, b. 1901 – 1924</td>
<td>Millennials, b. 1984 – 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current ages</td>
<td>86+</td>
<td>7-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Transpersonal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Outer Threat</td>
<td>Integration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Reflective Action?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindset</td>
<td>Verities</td>
<td>New Verities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realm of action</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>New forms of governance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stance toward government</td>
<td>Rebuild</td>
<td>Reimagine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Unity, collective action</td>
<td>Integration, interdependence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>complexity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>“The society must survive”</td>
<td>“The society must evolve”?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It also appears there may be some “generational tasks” appropriate for each of the generational cohorts (as sketched out speculatively in Figure 6) that can help to create this kind of context. It may be that the overarching purpose of these tasks is to support the Millennials in their potential to become transformational leaders. Obviously, the Millennials cannot accomplish this alone—they need to find ways to engage the entire society. So each cohort must embrace a leadership role. However, those leadership roles might be quite different from those we often assume—in particular those roles that have become associated with our cohort’s place in the generational cycle (as outlined in Strauss and Howe’s research).
Supporting the Generational Leadership of the Millennials

So why are there no young people in the room? It may have something to do with the mental models employed—consciously or unconsciously—by whatever generational cohort(s) dominates a given political organizing effort.

If the older organizers of political activism hold the one-dimensional model, the only advice they can offer young people is: “Do what we did, but more effectively.” Since there are no essential differences among the generational cohorts in the one-dimensional view, the only changes that matter are the changes that happen to “it” (where “it” is a political party, Congress, society, etc.). So, although there may be some “fixes” that can be implemented that differ from the “fixes” of previous generations, these differ mostly at the level of tactics, rather than strategy. Certainly, these “fixes” don’t require much of a shift in our understanding of public life, and don’t offer much beyond the potential for incremental change.10

If the older generational cohorts—unconsciously or consciously—are using a two-dimensional model, they are likely conveying to the rising generation: “Here, kid—it’s your turn to push this rock uphill. It’s gonna run over you its way back downhill soon enough. But hopefully it will come to rest a little higher up the hill than the last time, so the next generation will have a slight head start compared to you and me.” As in the one-dimensional model the underlying “game” rarely changes, and the players themselves never have to change internally—they simply have to adapt to new circumstances. Working harder or smarter suffices for a strategy. Rethinking the premises, or “coloring outside the lines” (or even re-drawing the lines) are not really options. Everyone’s too busy trying to recapture the moment when the rock reached its apex, and then push as far beyond that point as is possible before gravity takes its toll.

Either (or both) of these models might seem more “realistic” than a three-dimensional model that imagines political work shifting to a “higher key” in keeping with a higher level of complexity and challenge. But is it realistic to imagine that our political challenges can be solved, to paraphrase Einstein, from the same level of consciousness that created them?

Perhaps this is one of the reasons there are no young people in the room. With the heightened sensitivity and decreased habituation of youth, the Millennials may well sense the inadequacy of the political models proffered by their elders, even if they may not be able to articulate this directly. It could be that the rising generation’s experience of an ever-more complex world, demanding a “higher order” response, has attuned them to listen for a political melody in a “higher key.”

A column by Baby Boomer Thomas Friedman (2007, p. A23) epitomizes one of these generational disconnects. On a tour of colleges, Friedman found students “more optimistic and idealistic than they should be… [and] much less radical and politically engaged than they need to be.” After a few backhanded compliments about Millennial engagement with public service,

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10 The term “fixes” draws from Ron Heifetz’s (1994) distinction between technical challenges that require “fixes” (where “we” have the capacity to fix “it” without actually changing ourselves), and adaptive challenges (where “we” need to change ourselves, our perspective, our worldview, and our behaviors in order to have the capacity to meet the challenge).
Silent Generation  
b. 1925 – 1942  
*Current ages:* 68 - 88  
Created the Great Society and the vast middle class that stabilized a nation built on shared endeavor and communal sacrifice. After watching what they believed was a carefully constructed consensus rent asunder by the Boomers, they see the Millennials' interest in community as an opportunity to revive that spirit. But it seems more likely the Millennials will need to tap into the Silent Generation's capacity for suffering, endurance, and confrontation with raw, malevolent power.

Baby Boomers  
b. 1943 – 1960  
*Current ages:* 50 - 67  
Ruptured and then transformed society with their political and social movements. Now, after a period of withdrawal and introspection (and parenting and earning!), the Boomers suppose their contribution to the Millennials' development will be the 1960s model of political and social organizing. But the Millennials seem to understand the power and the limitations of collective non-conformism; it is the Boomer's spiritual growth and self-knowing that the Millennials are more likely to need.

Generation X  
b. 1961 – 1984  
*Current ages:* 26 - 49  
Came of age when greed was good, and pursued private innovation and lives. They transformed the ways we use information and communicate. They helped make America the sole superpower. And they watched in horror on 9/11 as that power was undercut. The Millennials want to use Gen X's tools and relentless energy, but for their own purposes, and will not follow Gen X's hard-bitten individualism.

Millennials  
b. 1984 – 2003  
*Current ages:* 7 - 26  
Just now coming of age, they resemble, in many ways, the vaunted Greatest Generation. They share the Greatest Generation's sense of destiny, communal sacrifice, civic purpose, and distributed leadership. But the Millennials face very different challenges than the Depression and World War II. As much as Milenials respect the Greatest Generation, simply re-creating them would lead to stagnation, not growth.

Figure 6. “Generational Tasks” to Support Millennial Transformational Leadership  
(from the “Generations Salons” and other sources)
Friedman lowered the boom (pun intended)

Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy didn’t change the world by asking people to join their Facebook crusades or to download their platforms. Activism can only be uploaded, the old-fashioned way—by young voters speaking truth to power, face to face, in big numbers, on campuses or the Washington Mall. Virtual politics is just that—virtual. (Friedman, 2007, A23)

To which a Millennial might reasonably reply: “How do you know the world can’t be changed through virtual activism? After all, no one has really even tried yet. And how’s that whole “Fight the Power/March on the Capitol/Honk if You Oppose the War” thing working out for you guys? We respect your victories and your sacrifices, but the victories seem to get fewer and farther between, and toll more horrendous. Why are you so sure your way is the right or the only way?”

The Strauss and Howe model predicts that the current alignment of generational cohorts—if left unchanged—will contribute to the Millennials reverting to “saving the society” tasks reminiscent of the “Greatest Generation” (of course, events and circumstances may well dictate that these are exactly the kinds of tasks that need doing). Without a conscious effort, all of the generational cohorts will reinforce collectively the same patterns that have kept the US in its present cycle. For example, Baby Boomers—now peaking in terms of money, power, influence, and available time—carry a model of social change almost diametrically opposed to the emerging characteristics of the Millennials (see Figure 4 and the Friedman example above). The two cohorts agree only on an “active” orientation, but have been shaped by fundamentally different types of crises.

If the congenitally self-referential Boomers try to squeeze the Millennials into their model of political organizing, the outcome seems doomed from the start—virtually guaranteed to lead to a repetition of the “C-D-E-F-C-D-E-F” cycle. Gen Xers, raised to “just do it,” probably will want no part of mediating any dispute between the Boomers and the Millennials, but instead seem more likely to return to their private pursuits than to take public action in a divisive environment. And many members of the Silent cohort, who share the Millennials’ attraction to collective action, seem unlikely to engage with anything that risks a return to the scorched-earth “culture wars” of recent decades.

That’s the bad news. The good news?

At our Salons, the Millennials appeared to grasp that they have method, motive, and opportunity to lead in a decidedly new direction. What they lacked, it seemed, was a coherent vision, based on an understanding of how the past created the challenges they face, as well as generational, developmental, organizational, and political models appropriate for the new work they envision. They also didn’t often have the older generational cohorts engaging with them in ways that consciously supported their transformational potential. In our Generational Salons, the Millennials turned to the older cohorts and asked: “How can you help?”
Can Generational Cohorts Help Each Other…and Themselves?

In subsequent Salons, the generational experience has been raised time and again as a powerful reference point. Experiencing such stark differences among the generational cohorts confronted participants with the opportunity to uncover their unconscious mental models: the “right” way to take political action, theories of political change, even which political and non-political institutions most need “reforming.”

The disparate perspectives that emerged from each of the generational cohorts seemed to jolt many participants out of their comfort zones. Instead of seeing younger or older versions of themselves among fellow activists, and wondering why people who seemed to share their political views did such puzzling things, they began to grasp that their fellow activists neither began with the same assumptions nor arrived at the same conclusions.

As progressive, politically active folk, many of the Salon participants are accustomed to exploring differences based on culture, class, gender, etc., and even in many instances, developmental perspectives. They willingly (some even eagerly) participate in “processing” sessions, and are comfortable with group dynamics and the like. After years of reflecting on the obvious divides (e.g., class, ethnicity) , many progressives seem almost comforted by exercises that cover this by-now familiar terrain.

The generational experience, in contrast, exposed a new realm of difference. However, we have yet to explore how to turn this observation into a more effective model of action. Perhaps this is a difference without a distinction. Perhaps we have accomplished nothing more than exposing a new vein of guilt-rich ore, which progressives can mine for solipsistic indulgence. Or, perhaps, the lessons of the Obama campaign (along with other models) offer a way of joining theory and reflection with action. And with that, perhaps, we can begin to find a way to rise out of the time-worn ruts that seem only to lead us back to where we began, neither appreciably wiser nor better off for the journey.

In every generation, it seems, self-appointed spokespeople try to convince their peers that a “defining moment” is at hand; that the future of (pick one or more: our party, our country, our world) depends on our urgent action. I’m no less prone to that; in fact, I’ll go one better. We may well face a defining moment not only for our generation, but for all four generational cohorts alive in the US today (and those yet to come). It will take all of us—harmonizing and counterpointing, listening and rethinking—to support the Millennials in singing the familiar, sweet song of freedom in a new key. And so, again: “How can you help?”

References


Integral Politics as Process

Tom Atlee¹

Abstract: Using the definition proposed here, integral politics can be a process of integrating diverse perspectives into wholesome guidance for a community or society. Characteristics that follow from this definition have ramifications for understanding what such political processes involve. Politics becomes integral as it transcends partisan battle and nurtures generative conversation toward the common good. Problems, conflicts and crises become opportunities for new (or renewed) social coherence. Conversational methodologies abound that can help citizen awareness temporarily expand during policy-making, thus helping raise society’s manifested developmental stage. Convening archetypal stakeholders or randomly selected citizens in conversations designed to engage the broader public enhances democratic legitimacy. With minimal issue- and candidate-advocacy, integral political leaders would develop society’s capacity to use integral conversational tools to improve its health, resilience, and collective intelligence. This both furthers and manifests evolution becoming conscious of itself.

Keywords: Collective intelligence, conversational methodologies, democratic legitimacy, developmental stage, evolution, integral politics, integration, perspectives, process.

Of the many perspectives on integral politics, one particularly dynamic one focuses on the interactive processes through which the fulfillment of collective needs and aspirations are (and could be better) pursued. These engage the evolving, integrated sensibilities, thoughts, and actions of a whole community or society. Those of us pursuing this approach ask: What is the social systemic process dimension of transpersonal activity and development? Where might a holistic, integral perspective take us beyond the predominant battle between competing worldviews, interests, and power centers within which humanity currently suffers and is possibly generating its demise? Developing political modes beyond the current problematic process could make all the difference in the world, quite literally.

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My discussion begins by introducing the dynamics of wholeness and their relation to what I propose integral politics may be. This serves as a foundation for proposing a definition of integral politics and characteristics of integral political process that follow from that definition. I dedicate the main body of the paper to introducing ramifications I draw from those characteristics. Discussed individually, the ramifications fall into seven categories: wholes and parts – diversity and coherence, dissonance, conversation, developmental stages, power and leadership, issues and candidates, and participation. These suggest some concrete ways we would see integral politics manifest. The concluding section is my reflection on all of this in relation to my ideas about conscious evolution.

**Introductory Basics: Dynamics of Wholeness**

We can view life as forever seeking wholeness, seeking health and congruence within itself, and seeking fit and harmony with its environment. I use wholeness as the most fundamental concept in my worldview, although my sense of it is not homogeneous but rather rich with diverse dimensions and manifestations (Atlee, n.d.-a).

Two dimensions of wholeness I see as having particular relevance to integral politics are inclusion and coherence. *Inclusion* means welcoming, taking seriously, and creatively utilizing all the factors relevant to the whole situation we are dealing with. Such factors include viewpoints, people, information, values, resources, history, and possibilities, and more could be listed. To acknowledge and tap the infinitude of interconnectedness in which we and our situation are embedded, we should frame relevance broadly enough to include borderline elements and even wildcards to stimulate lively engagement and keep us open and alert. In particular, inclusion of different *worldviews* is important because of their power to shape what people see, think, feel, and do, and thereby play a preeminent role in the productivity of political process. Furthermore, because worldviews impact the *kinds* of political system and process people prefer and promote, the principle of inclusion challenges us to wisely utilize a diversity of processes, as well.

*Coherence* means the way diverse elements hang together into a whole, whether a whole worldview, a whole community, a whole story, and so on. Coherence includes the relationships among the parts, as well as the factors they hold in common (like logic, culture, language, intention, theme, common interests). Thus, coherence includes everything that helps us make sense of a whole and all its elements as one thing, and for those involved to share a sense of “common sense.”

We usually find some dynamic tension between coherence and inclusion. In any system or situation, including additional elements or a bigger field tends to disrupt whatever coherence existed before the inclusion. Likewise, efforts to maintain coherence tend to make it harder to include new (and thus potentially disruptive) elements. Since novelty and disturbances are continually emerging in any system, inclusion and coherence are perennial issues of life as it seeks to be whole within itself and with its environment. The fact that both inclusion and coherence are essential dimensions of wholeness tells us something very important about wholeness: it is dynamic. Wholeness *evolves*—driven by inclusion, disruption, and the eternal impulse towards coherence.
Here I find the concept of “integral” especially useful for naming the successful integration of inclusion and coherence. To the extent we embrace all the relevant elements—including emergent dissonances—in a coherent way, we have an integral system or dynamic. The fact that in real life new factors are always emerging to disrupt coherent systems suggests that an integral system evolves through successive coherences. The family system gets disrupted by the birth of a child. One’s prejudices are disrupted by a compassionate or unexpected act from a person in the disrespected category. One’s pet idea is critiqued with devastating effect. Each instance raises in us the need to find some new coherence to depend on.

With that as grounding, I propose a definition of integral politics, followed by what integral politics “does” if we follow that definition. I offer these for exploration, introducing my initial forays into ramifications of viewing integral politics this way.

**Integral politics would be politics that were especially competent at including diverse elements in evolving coherence that served the ongoing vitality of a community, nation, or other human system.**

What integral politics does:
- Integral politics embraces any and all interactive process through which the evolving diversity of a community or society engages in consciously co-creating its collective life.
- Integral politics emerges from other forms of politics to the extent that we attend to the dynamic relationship between “the parts” and “the whole” (the members of a community and the whole community; conflicted political positions and the whole field of opinion around an issue; our many facets as individual human beings and our essential wholeness; and so on).

**Ramifications of Integral Politics Definition**

**Wholes and Parts - Diversity and Coherence**

Assuming that definition, then, as politics became more integral, we might expect it to include more attitudes, efforts, and phenomena like the following (as they pertain to public affairs).

**Welcoming** people from diverse demographic, developmental, and other groups into appropriate forms of participation while promoting the respect and commonality of all people as human beings regardless of what category or categories we, they, or others may place them in.

**Engaging** diverse dimensions of our humanity (head, heart, body, spirit, behavior, etc.) and their related modes of understanding, expression and engagement, while **understanding** the various ways these can influence each other to enrich (or undermine) the larger wholeness of who we are, individually and collectively.

**Engaging** diverse sectors, stakeholders, and interest groups in aligning their self-interest to the well-being of the whole (community, society, natural order) by co-developing truly integral solutions, stories, social system designs, etc.
Including diverse partisan people in transpartisan or metapartisan explorations of how all of us as citizens of a common community or society can most creatively share challenges, resources, and destinies.

Weaving diverse perspectives, bodies of information, and values considerations regarding an issue or situation into expanded “big picture” understandings of what is involved (sometimes called “framing an issue for deliberation”).

Helping people’s diverse creative or practical insights, gifts, and passions interact towards solutions that are, as a result, (a) broadly understood and appreciated, (b) implemented in participatory ways and (c) effective over the long term (because of the inclusive wisdom of the original design), being revised as necessary through such continuing interactions.

Another application of wholeness is this. Integral politics understands that every whole is a part of some larger whole, and that every part is a whole in its own right. This understanding not only helps us see things in the context of the larger systems they are part of, and the smaller entities that make them up (a perspective known as holonics). There are also two dynamic aspects of wholeness that offer agents of integral politics potentially free resources.

Synergy is a common term highlighting the dynamic relationships through which a whole becomes greater, stronger, or more than the sum of its parts. Whenever we integrate youth and elderhood, head and heart, private and public, top-down and bottom-up, us and them, or any other such diverse energies or entities, they together form a whole that is far more powerful than when they are separate or opposed.

Holergy is a term I coined to call attention to the often invisible power of each entity’s embedded uniqueness. That power becomes a resource to the extent we look beyond any single role they play or obvious categories they belong to. We might summarize this as “the part is greater than its role in the whole.” Each person and group is both a whole in their own right and part of many other wholes. So a teacher who knows that her students are not only students will tap their experiences, hobbies, and families for resources to use in teaching her class. An integral mediator will recognize that conflicted parties are not only adversaries but are also sources of insight and creativity for resolving their shared problem. An integral politician will recognize that citizens are not only voters, supporters, complainers, and recipients of government services, but potential sources of wisdom, creativity, and implementation in public affairs.

Significantly, both of these phenomena—synergy and holergy—include the phrase “greater than” as part of their definition. This means that the entities and factors in a situation can generate greater or lesser power and benefit, depending on how we view and engage with them. This is useful knowledge for anyone seeking to create change with limited resources. Well-utilized diversity in well-designed whole systems can provide free resources “out of nowhere.” The diversity of a community, well engaged, can generate collective healing, collective intelligence, and collective transformation accessible in no other way.
Dissonance

In public affairs it is normal for problems, issues, conflicts, differences, and other forms of dissonance to surface among those involved (among the parts) and between them and the larger community or society (between the parts and the whole). Integral political theory and practice would invite us to engage with this dissonance in different ways than those invoked and used in partisan politics. As we grow into integral politics, we would increasingly embrace the whole and all its parts in our calculus—and see the dynamics among them, including dissonance—as a sign and source of life energy, of life trying to find its way toward wholeness.

As politics becomes more integral, dissonance would less and less invoke assumptions about one “side”—one part of the whole—winning over the other “sides.” We would not even assume that the ideal is a compromise solution tolerable to all sides. Instead, we would see the supposed “sides” as partial expressions of a larger whole that has not yet been fully comprehended. We would, therefore, increasingly see dissonance as a resource for moving into a more vibrant wholeness of some kind. We may strive toward healing—renewing some healthy coherence of the past—or for learning, transformation, and development toward some new coherence of the future.

It would be increasingly natural for people practicing integral politics to see every issue or conflict as an opportunity not only to find good solutions, but to heal and/or transform the community involved, and all those in and around it. Often a community will actually heal itself by meeting crisis together using collective transformational engagement. The Transition Towns initiative (Hopkins, 2008), for example, is a remarkable program of community healing through collective transformation towards resilience and sustainability. Integral politics recognizes that working with emerging dissonances is a key aspect of sustaining ongoing health and development, individually and collectively.

This phenomenon can be taken as an identifying criteria for how integral our politics is: To what extent are issues, conflicts, crises, and so on seen as opportunities for healing and transformation at all levels, rather than as something to fight over, solve, suppress, or get beyond?

Of course “growing into integral politics” is no simple matter. But then, neither is playing the game of adversarial politics. The primary difference lies not in the effort or resources required, but in the unfamiliarity of the territory, the pioneering imperative, the need to try different responses to dissonant stimuli. Instead of closing down in the face of challenge or discomfort, we need to open up. Perhaps most importantly—because politics is not primarily an individual project—we need to take proactive initiatives, together, to create contexts in which welcoming dissonance and working creatively with it are supported and empowered. The more we can bring (and embed) such assumptions and practices into our culture, public discourse, and political institutions, the less we will need to depend on—and the more effectively we will benefit from—enlightened individual capacities.
Conversation

Conversation is arguably the primary form of human social interaction. (Some might argue that war and commerce are more influential, to which I would respond, Where would war and commerce be without conversation?) Obviously, because we are different and seriously challenged to cooperate in order to survive and thrive, conversation remains key to solving our problems and conflicts nonviolently and wisely as well as to transforming ourselves and our societies together in life-serving ways. Because of its remarkable power to creatively engage the life-energy of all participants, we find conversation plays a central role in most efforts to move beyond violence and manipulation.

Violence and manipulation help us dominate others with our own desires, visions, and perspectives, rather than engaging them in finding out what is best for all involved. In contrast, integral politics assumes that every perspective and passion has gifts for the whole, and so views the use of violence and manipulation as wasting those gifts and wasting, as well, the potentially coherent self-organizing life-energy of the whole that comes from creatively engaging those perspectives and passions.

From a systems perspective, conversational interactivity is the medium through which different parts of a system can find the coherence—coordination, protocols, and shared understandings, narratives, intentions, etc.—that they need to function efficiently as a whole. From an individual perspective, high quality conversation is a primary alternative to violence as we seek to pursue our self-interest in a world of other self-interested entities with limited perspectives.

Conversation derives from roots meaning “to turn together,” as in a dance. From a big-picture perspective, we are dancing with everything around us. The universe is in conversation with itself. At the most literal, physical level, few objects, systems, or conditions in our lives have come into being without being shaped one way or another by conversation. Conversation is how we can and do create desirable futures together.

Conversation is therefore central to any dynamic conception of integral politics. More model-driven conceptions of integral politics make a great contribution with political maps of how different political ideologies or developmental stages fit into larger political and developmental realities. When such maps inform the designers, conveners, facilitators, and participants of conversations, they move into a realm of dynamic interactions through which that diversity can actually be employed to create larger benign realities in our lives and help us all heal, learn, and evolve together.

High quality conversation is now a major field of theory and practice—and even faith. Going by such names as dialogue, deliberation, choice-creating, cafés, facilitation, gatherings, conferencing, forums, public participation, citizen engagement, hosting, mediation, coaching, community involvement, etc., conversational know-how has become very sophisticated in recent decades. Professionals in this field know a tremendous amount about “whole-system engagement,” “collective intelligence,” “participatory leadership,” “holistic politics,” and other topics of great interest to practitioners of integral politics.
Conversational methodologies abound, from Future Search to Open Space, from Dialogue Mapping to Sacred Circles, from Appreciative Inquiry to Listening Projects, from Dynamic Facilitation to World Café, from Citizens Juries to Study Circles, from The Integral Process for Complex Issues to Holistic Management. Inventories of such methodologies get compiled in both book form (Atlee, 2003; Holman, Cady, & Devane, 2007) and online databases like the Urban Research Program Toolbox (Griffith University, n.d.) and the Engagement Streams Framework (National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, n.d.; in particular, note its “three page accompanying handout” for a list of processes).

Perhaps most importantly, work is underway in a number of quarters to identify conversational success criteria and wisdom about the underlying dynamics of conversations that matter. These inquiries free practitioners from the segregated silos of methodology into more flexible, creative design and hosting of powerful conversations.

I believe that knowledge and competency in this arena of the practice and institutionalization of powerful, empowered conversations is one of the primary foundations of integral politics. I see it as key to helping fragmented parts of the body politic become truly whole and sustain their evolving wholeness, especially when faced with changing circumstances or consciously moving in transformational directions.

### Developmental Stages

Different developmental stages and worldviews offer different benefits and problems for a society that includes them all. For example, tribal dynamics provide both a strong sense of belonging and often provincial distrust and dislike of others, while modernist perspectives provide tremendous innovation and often destructive exploitation of natural and human life. To the extent possible, those practicing integral politics would endeavor to welcome and validate the positive manifestations of each stage while minimizing or ameliorating its more toxic dynamics (Beck & Cowan, 2005; Cook-Greuter, 2006).

People manifesting different developmental stages or worldviews often have a hard time relating to each other. Confronted with a logic and reactivity that makes no sense to them, they can drive each other into negative manifestations of their respective levels of awareness. Integral politics can use high quality conversational process and competent facilitation to ameliorate this dynamic. A large amount of experience with dialogue and deliberation that engages the broad public suggests that such diverse people have a far greater capacity to work together for the common good than is acknowledged among those with less experience with high-quality conversation or with an ideological bias towards the incompatibility of diverse values systems. There is tremendous hope in this.

There is also tremendous hope in another dynamic. One of the most intriguing phenomena I have seen in powerful conversations shows up in successful efforts that engage ordinary citizens constructively with others unlike themselves in a shared search for insights and solutions that can best serve their community. I have the distinct impression that as such conversations unfold, the effort to truly comprehend other viewpoints expands the individual participants’ state of
awareness such that they collectively manifest a higher level of awareness and development than they individually did at the start.

Other factors are probably involved in this phenomenon, for example:
1. Some conversational methodologies produce this effect more powerfully than others;
2. The presence of one or more psycho-spiritually mature, systemically aware, and/or broadly informed person in the group can raise the group’s awareness toward theirs;
3. Potential repression or the positional stance, authoritative status, or expertise of certain group members can hinder this effect if not ameliorated by appropriate conversational design and competent facilitation.

In short, I believe that the conversational dynamic noted above—the expansion of awareness through successfully facilitated hearing of diverse viewpoints among ordinary people—happens to some extent in any case, and can be augmented by (1) and (2) and impeded by (3).

This phenomenon—and the capacity of people with different values and worldviews to develop policy recommendations together—can be the basis of testable hypotheses I would love to see researched in more rigorous ways.

If both these phenomena prove out and their nuances become adequately understood and applied, they may well offer a breakthrough channel for systems-change work by integral change agents. To the extent conversational forums are actually empowered to influence policy decisions and/or public awareness, plugging them into existing political-governance systems (Atlee, n.d.-b) could raise the developmental level manifested by society as a whole in its collective behaviors and impacts, beyond that of the vast majority of its individual members. This would remove, or at least ameliorate, the problems involved in the commonly advocated strategy of improving society’s developmental state by increasing the awareness of its individual members.

Power and Leadership

If one of the chief characteristics of integral politics includes the interactive process through which the evolving diversity of a community or society engages in consciously co-creating its collective life (as introduced above) we need to rethink power and leadership from the top-down shaping of social phenomena to a more participatory, emergent, “power-with” worldview. What kind of power and leadership does a community or society need in order to engage its diversity in interactions that consciously co-create its collective life? I think this question leads to three related forms of servant leadership.

Capacity-building eldership that does whatever is needed—from inspiration to provocation to teaching to convening—to increase the capacity of the led community or society to lead itself. In the early stages, this can include whatever managerial guidance may serve to maintain the community or society while it achieves greater self-organizing competencies. But this more directive leadership can only work (for this purpose) if it is humble enough to keep trying to delegate more responsibility to the led system, and thus work itself out of a job.
Emergent participatory leadership, in which different people serve the group by (temporarily) leading in a realm defined by where their volunteered competencies and life-energy meet the needs of the group. This produces a fluidity and distribution of leadership functions among the group, according to the needs of the moment.

Embedded systemic leadership in which the guidance systems needed by the group to function and evolve are embedded in its culture, collective narratives, institutions, infrastructure, systems, and technologies. These ever-present sources of direction minimize the need for individual leadership to provide guidance—at least until the established guidance systems cease to function adequately.

At such junctures, when systems no longer function well, capacity-building eldership or emergent leadership shows up to bring group consciousness and co-creativity to the dysfunctional area. This is a sociological manifestation of the general rule that increased attentiveness is called for when automaticities—habits, institutions, reactions, etc.—are no longer serving well. Consciousness temporarily replaces the automaticities in making life’s choices while also exploring the dysfunctional dynamics in order to create new automaticities that better serve the new circumstances. Putting newly functional automaticities in place then frees consciousness to attend to other things.

**Issues and Candidates**

Since the essence of integral politics, in the sense discussed here, is the capacity of a community or society to make its own high-quality decisions, integral political activism would not focus on issues and candidates to the extent traditional activism does. The one exception would be if decisions on this issue or the election of that candidate would make a significant contribution to the society’s capacity to engage its diversity in consciously co-creating its collective life.

Integral political activists could also usefully focus on how issues and candidates in the public limelight were being dealt with by the existing political system, using them as stimulants for dialogue exploring more integral approaches that might better serve the whole society.

However, by its very nature, integral politics is not about taking sides or promoting particular solutions. So even if integral activists saw political solutions that could help us make more integral decisions, they might prefer to present them in a context where diverse citizens would consider alternatives in ways that furthered public understanding the issues involved. Integral approaches would not tend to push their favored solutions or candidates through to a win, no matter how “integral” those solutions and candidates might seem to be. This, itself, implies a radical shift in activist perspective to a deep trust in the collective wisdom of ordinary people in generative conversations.

**Participation**

When terms like “public participation” and “citizen engagement” are used in traditional forms of politics, they tend to refer to (a) interested people being able to have their say, thus exercising
their agency as individual citizens in the political process and/or (b) as many people as possible engaging in political or community activities of all kinds.

Because of the dynamics discussed in the previous two sections, integral politics, in the sense being explored in this essay, would tend to function with a different concept of public participation. To a great extent, the goal would no longer be mass participation or the exercise of citizenship, per se. The rationale for engagement would be primarily the inclusion of diverse perspectives in processes capable of generating useful, integral results that benefit the community, usually involving collective intelligence or transformational potential.

Some participation issues are common to both traditional and integral politics. For example, participation plays a major role in generating shared understanding, agreement, ownership, and energy for implementation. But even here there are important nuances to consider.

Traditional political theory discusses the role of consent in establishing legitimacy in governance. A legitimate policy, leader, political process, or governing institution is one that has the consent of the citizenry. In other words, the population will go along with it without being compelled to do so. The concept of democratic legitimacy implies that those in authority need minimum force to implement their decisions, and that what force they do need to use is considered appropriate by a sufficient majority of the population. This minimization of force is often noted as the primary mark of democracy’s superiority over dictatorship.

This is where participation comes in. If a large number of people or a broad spectrum of stakeholders and opinion leaders have been involved in making a decision, their sense of being part of the collective decision-making process tends to produce “buy-in” to the results. They consider the process legitimate. (The fact that participation and consent can be manipulated with PR and media mechanisms is a related but separate issue that I will not address here.)

Similarly, from an integral perspective, to the extent the population broadly understands why a particular approach to a public issue is better than others—particularly if they have either participated in or witnessed the interactions that came up with that approach, and have seen people like themselves powerfully involved—they will join in support for and implementation of that approach. The decision “makes sense” to them, so they willingly or eagerly engage with it.

But high quality deliberations that include vast numbers of people are notoriously expensive to implement. So one of the primary approaches of integral politics might logically be the efficient use of well-selected microcosm groups to come up with good decisions on behalf of the rest of us. High quality information and access to experts can be combined with high quality dialogue and deliberation in a highly focused way to generate powerful collective intelligence with minimal expense. This was one of the original rationales for representative governance. However, most representatives are not anything like the rest of us (e.g., millionaire lawyers), and we’ve all watched how far they can be pulled from public realities and pursuit of the common good.

So other forms of microcosm conversation have been developed that are less subject to the distortions of representative democracy, more reflective of the population, and often more
capable of high quality decisions, which can serve to improve the performance of existing governmental structures and processes. For example, citizen deliberative councils use a randomly selected one-time group of 10-100 ordinary citizens to come up with solutions to a public issue and/or to evaluate existing proposals or candidates. (Atlee, n.d.-b) The fact that these councils are small and may not include a certain level of diversity may subject them to “legitimacy” challenges.

However, there are ways to generate a more integral (and deeper) form of inclusion and legitimacy than can be achieved even by mass participation. Convenors can consciously select participants and publicize the process in such a way that most citizens see people like themselves engaged on the council (for example, see the Macleans magazine People’s Verdict project, Doyle, 1991). Participation can be further promoted by engaging the public in conversations with the council and/or each other before, during, and/or after the council’s deliberations. Engagement with the council can be done through hearings and white paper submissions, as was done with British Columbia’s Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform (Citizens’ Assembly, 2004) or on the web, or through TV or radio combined with call-in and “televote” phone numbers. All these engage the public without having to provide them all with the expensive conditions that enable the high-quality council process, nor (for the sake of economy or co-optation) engaging everyone in low-quality conversations that do not adequately serve the common good. This kind of engagement—synergy between a citizen deliberative council and the broad public—takes participatory democracy beyond consent into the realm of collective identification with the process, authentic co-creativity, and co-evolution.

Conscious Evolution

I do see a larger story being played out here than one of mere politics, or even of democracy. It is the story of conscious evolution. We are all participants in life and society, no matter what we do or don’t do, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we intend to be or not. Participation is intrinsic. Both action and not-doing are actual contributions to what happens next, for better and/or worse. We are all part of the evolutionary process, which unfolds with inexorable inclusivity.

Conscious evolution means becoming an aware, intentional participant in that evolutionary process. Conscious evolution means seeking to be aware of what is involved in that process in specific domains and situations and seeking to be aware, too, of who we are and who we might be in relation to that. It involves making choices and taking action—or not—with as much awareness as we can of our evolutionary role as we seek to serve and manifest the best of what life is and seeks to be. Conscious evolution means not only being a conscious agent of evolution. It means realizing we are living manifestations of that aspect of evolution that is becoming conscious of itself.

I see integral politics as a societal manifestation of conscious evolution. It is the means by which a community or society consciously co-creates its next evolutionary development. In the development of integral politics, we see living political systems waking up, becoming conscious agents of their own evolution and, therefore, manifestations of evolution becoming conscious of itself in and as social systems.
This perspective does not necessarily provide how-to guidance to agents of integral politics, unless, of course, we wish to study the known dynamics of evolution in cosmic, geological, biological, and cultural systems in search of patterns we might use in consciously evolving our political and economic systems, communities, and societies. However, this evolutionary perspective does give a greater meaning and cosmic significance to what we are doing when we work towards creating a more integral politics.

From the evolutionary perspective, what we are doing here is the next chapter in a remarkable—and many of us would say sacred (e.g., Dowd, 2007)—story that goes back at least 13.7 billion years. It is a very fresh chapter. This particular task has not been done before. We are the edge of a wave, developing modes of being together that will play a profound role in the evolutionary destiny of the human experiment. There’s nothing small about what we are doing.

And it is not only about process, it is in process. And, ultimately—like, and as, evolution—it is process.

References


Introduction to Interviews that Apply Integral Lenses to Sustainability and Politics

Russ Volckmann

One of the apparent implications of our growing connectedness and concern for global challenges—economic, political, social, ecological, spiritual and more—is that there seems to be a parallel development of attention to ways we have of thinking about these challenges. To stretch this notion a bit more, we are looking for ways that we can engage as complete beings in addressing the challenges that face all aspects of our places in communities, nations, and the world and as individuals threatened with possible survivability challenges, as well as opportunities to realize our potentials in ways we may have never considered before. It seems quite natural that we would turn to systems theory and quantum/complexity theories in the material realm in that they seem to offer approaches to assist us. It seems just as natural that we begin to engage with the non-material aspects of existence, as well.

One of the newer institutions for sharing innovative efforts around the world is the TED conference. Originally, all of these conferences were held in Monterey, California in the United States. Here is their description

TED is a small nonprofit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading. It started out (in 1984) as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: Technology, Entertainment, Design. Since then its scope has become ever broader. Along with the annual TED Conference in Long Beach, California, and the TEDGlobal conference in Oxford UK, TED includes the award-winning TEDTalks video site, the Open Translation Program, the new TEDx community program, this year's TEDIndia Conference and the annual TED Prize. (http://www.ted.com/pages/view/id/5)

Since then the conferences have spread around the world, most of them being referred to as TEDx conferences. What is useful to those of us not able to attend is that presentations are recorded on video and posted on their website. The result is a host of inspiring, challenging, innovative presentations in many fields.

In a recent TED presentation Stewart Brand—a man who has been involved in addressing whole earth challenges for decades—presents four environmental heresies.

1. The growth of cities is good for the environment. It relieves the destruction of subsistence farming and engages individuals who move from the countryside into the city in entrepreneurial processes that support their economic development (which promotes educational development, etc.). What is needed is support these activities through such things as provision of energy and crime prevention.
2. Further develop nuclear power. It is the cleanest energy technology we have.
3. Develop even more genetic engineering for crops. It allows for increased food yields to meet the needs of a growing population.
4. Use more geoengineering to control the earth’s climate.

His brief presentation following TED guidelines does not address some downsides of his proposals, such as the estimate that we will run out of fissionable materials for nuclear energy in just a few short decades or the history of humans’ engineering endeavors. By the latter I mean that the negative impact of engineering strategies can often be devastating on the ecology. A simple example is the construction of dams to control flooding and that have destroyed habitats of people, fish, and animal life. Similarly, there are concerns among the scientific community that geoengineering has control and predictability problems, with potential unintended consequences. From a political point of view, sophisticated systems of geoengineering could be used as weapons in our hugely at risk humanization (meant pejoratively) of the technology.

Brand’s heresies are one set of many energies being directed at addressing assumptions and challenges we face in the world today. These are technical challenges, as well as social challenges. These are challenges to our life conditions and worldviews and our connection to the universe. If we are going to be capable of more sophisticated, holistic and generative approaches for addressing these challenges it is essential that we increase our understanding of the implications and ramifications of the choices we make to intervene in the ecology of the world. Our inattention has contributed to the state of the world’s ecology today in which our choices may lead to the premature demise of our children and their children. Therefore, we need to develop our capacities to intervene that are not only driven by current and anticipated realities, as we understand them, but also leverage the best tools we have for our efforts. Challenging assumptions, as Brand does, is part of that. And we have inklings of the power of new ways of being, seeing and doing the world and ourselves that can help us evolve that sophistication. Transdisciplinary, integral and other developmental approaches offer us some of this potential. Systems theory has a contribution, as does design thinking.

Fred Collopy, Professor and Chair, Information Systems Department, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio points out in a *Fast Company* blog that design thinking needs to be introduced in a way that it does not take on so much baggage as to make it of marginal utility by leaders and managers of our institutions.

Note that design thinking goes beyond product design. Michael Ben-Eli (more about him in a moment) notes that Buckminster Fuller used the term “design” to imply a number of distinctive qualities:

- A sense of an underlying order,
- A “whole,” marked by coherence, and
- The implied presence of a deliberate intelligence.

This way of thinking about design goes beyond the material into the realms of cognition and the senses. Its implications, according to Ben-Eli are

- Design can involve an active initiative, the shaping of a particular configuration (a particular part of reality),
− It can relate to a subjective experience as when we recognize order in an observed phenomena, and
− It can entail concepts as well as physical entities and combinations of both.

Further, “This value driven, ethical aspect is derived from a hierarchy of three concepts that are central to Fuller’s design philosophy. They include:

− Acknowledgement of the mystery and inevitability of an implicated higher order,
− A particular definition of Universe, and
− A specific view concerning the function of humans in the cosmic scheme of things.

Ben-Eli’s presentation flows from here into a parallel discussion of design thinking that emerges from design as a process of realizing intentions. “Design is fundamentally an integrative process involving the synthesis of elements into a coherent whole. Synthesis is paramount. It involves the intuitive ability to see the possibilities of novel combinations.” Here we see the principle in action underlying our interest in systems and design thinking, integral theories and transdisciplinarity. Ben-Eli also has outlined a clear relationship between design as a process and an intention. His PowerPoint presentation on this is available at http://www.sustainabilitylabs.org/page/design-science-framework-change.

Embracing these approaches also leads us to examine our assumptions, many of which stem from values, worldviews, ideologies and—some would maintain—neurology and biology. Brand models this, as must we.

In the pair of interviews to follow I present individuals who have two very different and, I would suggest, complementary approaches to addressing the politics of ecological and developmental challenges. Yet, even from their divergent paths they have reached some very similar conclusions and intentions, as you will see.

Jan Inglis focuses primarily on local communities and the use of an intervention designed, tested and implemented in the US and in Sweden by Sara Nora Ross and others. She describes how this process (TIP: The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues) works (see here for a workshop overview or here for articles). Fundamentally, hers is a think globally, act locally strategy.

Inglis’ work has been primarily with individuals and communities, particularly from her small community base in British Columbia, Canada. She is focused on how change occurs and how individuals evolve into healthier ways of being. Thus, her attention has been on individual and cultural change. Her interests have led her into peace movements over the years, as well as engagement in local community politics. She has engaged in bringing many different fields of study and action to inform one another and find ways of creating an integrative approach to social change. She founded the Integrative Learning Institute and its curriculum for social change agents, the Cultural Coaches Training Program.

Michael Ben-Eli brings many years of experience based, in part, on his association with Buckminster Fuller, his training as an architect in the United Kingdom, and his work all over the
globe on behalf of bringing his design perspective to engagement with change and development capabilities. While he eschews politics, there is great political relevance in his work. He has founded the Sustainability Laboratories that includes this vision.

As I read this, nothing could be more political in its implications. But his message seems to be that the path to sustainability will be served best by focusing on the practices and activities that support sustainability through both technological and cultural design. In his sustainability principles he extends our attention from the technical and the cultural into the realm of the spiritual (a treatment of these may be found here).

Taken together, we find the elements of an integral perspective on sustainability and change. We see in the lives and work of these individuals the integration of the domains of attention required for generative development. And we are challenged to consider how we engage with “politics” to move forward. The world of action represented by these individuals is not just action in the realms of individual, community and cultural development designed to address ecological survival and sustainability. Theirs are political acts often taken outside the realm of formal politics.

In economics we speak of the formal and informal economies. The latter are those aspects of
economies that are difficult to identify and account for through financial and government bookkeeping and taxing activities. Just as there are hidden populations in census surveys there are hidden economies and hidden political dynamics. To address the world of integral politics we can look through at least two lenses, which can be expanded through a metatheoretical approach into many more lenses.¹ The first is integral as it represents a “theory of everything,” that is, it can produce models and maps in which we can integrate widely diverse ways of knowing and researching political dynamics and systems on the individual and collective levels, include “meta-collectives” which move our attention from community and nation to the global perspective of politics. It can include lenses related to governance, agency and communion and many others. The point is that to gain an integral perspective involves the application of transdisciplinary approaches through the use of multiple lenses.

A second is to understand politics from a stage of development perspective. Here we would consider what politics might look like in a social stage where the focus is on family and tribes, as well as other stages of phases of human and cultural development in which politics is played out through institutions to enforce rules and correct behavior, to one that seeks to integrate diversity through transcending and including all those individuals and cultures at various stages of development. In these interviews we can glimpse both these perspectives, albeit they have not been made explicit. I trust that these interviews are in service of our development and learning in this process.

Design and Sustainability:  
An Interview with Michael Ben-Eli  

Russ Volckmann

Russ: Welcome Michael Ben-Eli, it’s a wonderful opportunity to speak with you. I’m hoping that we can explore some really interesting areas, and given your background, I doubt that will be a problem.

To begin with, I want to talk about your background in design. Is it primarily in architectural design? And how has that been a part of your life?

Michael: I’ve been fascinated since childhood with buildings. I went to study architecture and urban planning at the Architectural Association in London during the sixties, at that time, a preeminent place in the world. It was a very avant-garde and progressive school. A lot of really fascinating people were there focusing on all questions of urban planning, buildings and everything that revolves around architecture.

Russ: When you talk about addressing all the problems and challenges of city planning and architecture, are you speaking of that with essentially an engineering perspective on design? One that is primarily concerned with the technology—is that what you meant?

Michael: If you look in retrospect there were two different main areas of emphasis. One was technology, more technology in general than engineering. In England especially, there were futuristic groups trying to translate into architectural visions possibilities that were opened up by the world of technology. The new technology of space exploration, for example, had a huge influence on what could be done with building design both in terms of visual impacts and actual structural possibilities. Designers were grasping for the outer reaches of technology—how those would impact both on urban planning and individual structures. The latter were increasingly conceived as large mega-structures made possible by new materials and other technologies.

At the same time, there was a growing emphasis among urban planners on social issues as an integral part of physical planning. There was the realization that there were a lot of important “soft” questions and socio-economic forces at play shaping urban environments, all of which had to be understood and taken into account in effective design. Such issues would relate, for example, to different income groups, different needs and functions, and the integration of people, spaces and functions in a comprehensive design. England, at the time, was very advanced in those ideas. A great deal of pioneering work was done on these issues starting from the years immediately after the war—I’m not quite sure who’s in the lead today in that field, but at that time, many of the showcase model projects, were developed in the UK.

Russ: You’re speaking of model projects both of city planning as well as building design?
Michael: Yes. This is probably because when you look at the urban field, some of the best English architects and planners were actually employed by local authorities. At the time, the Greater London Council and some other organizations like it were in charge of urban planning addressing large scale issues of transportation, new housing projects and the like. They were all public sector entities. They were not private offices. Some of the best people in England were employed by those organizations that provided unique opportunities for real creativity, quite an unusual thing for government organizations.

Russ: What opportunities did it create for you?

Michael: I was a student at the time, so I was not participating in actually solving real problems, but London at the time—and the AA in particular—was a hotbed for new ideas. The AA was basically a club. It was a school that was operated by the British Architectural Association. At the heart of the school were a restaurant and a bar. Many of the architectural offices tended to aggregate in that area, near the British Museum. Architects and planners from those offices would all come to the AA twice a day—first for lunch, and then for drinks after work—and these were the moments where a lot was happening in terms of open discussions, brainstorming and plain networking. There was a lot of excitement. It also meant that anyone who was anyone in the architectural world who was passing through London would somehow end up at the AA. These visitors would have an opportunity to lecture and chat informally with the students. It was a unique and creative environment—that’s where I met Fuller and some other leaders in the field.

Russ: You met Buckminster Fuller there. Can you tell us about that?

Michael: In the mid-sixties, Fuller was advocating an incredible program. In retrospect, it was one of those typical Fuller ideas—naïve and completely impossible, but absolutely correct. It was a program he called the World Design Science Decade: Ten Years of Design initiative, where all the architectural schools in the world would collaborate in a ten-year program that would focus, in five two-year increments on redesigning the world—dealing with issues of human trends and needs, energy, natural resources management, pollution, the environment, the whole industrial infrastructure—all the issues that have now become so pressing from the viewpoint of sustainability. Fuller gave a lecture in London about the program and I had never heard anything quite like it. I was completely awe struck and fascinated by his vision, so along with some others at the AA, I joined in the program and started working on it. Much of my subsequent time at the AA was dedicated to this effort. I was also involved with a lot of experiments in designing geodesic domes and various space structures, trying different materials—anything from bamboo to aluminum, corrugated cardboard and Ferro-cement, things of this nature.

Russ: Is there any one project or effort that is memorable to you?

Michael: One very unusual project comes to mind that requires a bit of an introduction. The British educational authorities—the bodies that are in charge of granting degrees and so on—were actually in charge of University education in Ghana, a former British colony.
In particular, the Royal Institute of British Architects was in charge of supervising degree granting at an architectural school that was established in Kumasi at what was at the time known as the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. John Lloyd who was a Year Master at the AA was asked to take over that school and run it. He was a big Fuller fan, so his idea was to go to Ghana and reorient the school—develop a new curriculum that would reflect a lot of Fuller’s design philosophy, including a focus on the World Design Science Decade program. Although I was only a second-year student, he invited me to come to Ghana—I was quite close with Fuller by that time—along with Keith Critchlow, who was teaching at the AA, to work with him and Fuller on redesign of the curriculum of the school.

So we went to Africa for a year and worked on trying to reorient that school and focusing its approach around Fuller’s ideas. That was also a time during which Keith Critchlow and I had a great opportunity to do a lot of research in Fuller geometry and tried different types of structures. We did some very nice aluminum and bamboo geodesic domes in Africa. We were experimenting with a lot of local materials. Aluminum was one of them, because Ghana had a great deal of bauxite sources. So, we tried to use aluminum as one possible building material. These were basically experiments with geodesic structures. Of course, Keith went on to become a preeminent authority on geometry and architecture and his work was very much influenced by Bucky’s synergetic geometry.

Much of the rest of the years at the AA involved the sort of normal design project that you get in school, but also a great deal of work on designing some of the events that related to the World Design Science Decade program as advocated by Fuller.

Russ:  Were you involved with Buckminster Fuller in other ways?

Michael: The school actually allowed me out of regular schoolwork in order to have this basically “apprentice” opportunity with Fuller. Hence, it was possible to spend the year in Africa and otherwise focus on the work of the World Design Science Decade for the five years that I was at the AA. The basic understanding was that I would also do all the other stuff that my peers had to do, like exams and projects. I lived a double life in a way, but it was fascinating and very energizing.

Russ:  It sounds really exciting. Where did it take you from there?

Michael: Oddly enough it took me away from architecture. I graduated from the AA, but largely because of Fuller’s influence I realized I would not end up in architectural design. I became fascinated with the issues that were raised by his vision concerning the management of world resources and the environment. I started to move in that direction and look for additional tools that would make me more effective in dealing with those questions.

I felt at the time that the emerging fields of General System Theory and Cybernetics offered such new ways of thinking, a new conceptual framework, a new language,
essentially—new in the sense of creating new tools for dealing with complexity and understanding the nature of complex systems, how complex systems regulate themselves, how they change, adapt and evolve. So when I graduated, Fuller invited me to join his staff here in the United States. While working with him on some projects, including a very interesting project with members of some street gangs in New York, I started commuting back to London to work on a Doctorate in Cybernetics with Gordon Pask. That took me to a more abstract notion that is interesting as it relates to your question about design. I started dealing with a more abstract form of design—the design of organizations and the “architecture” of institutions, organizations and management processes.

Russ: So your attention expanded from the physical design dimension to human system design?

Michael: Yes, completely correct.

Russ: How did you proceed with that in your career?

Michael: In 1973 when I left Fuller’s entourage, I got married and was offered a project to work on in another country. So I left the United States for a while. I was just finishing my Ph.D. then and I basically set myself up as a management consultant. I was very lucky from the outset in that I received some very challenging and large projects that allowed me to experiment with all these ideas—both the fundamental intention that is imminent in Fuller’s philosophy and his design approach, but also experimenting with all the ideas from general systems and cybernetics. I was increasingly focusing on the ways large systems function and on their essential architecture.

Russ: What might be an example of one of those types of projects?

Michael: For example, in the early years I did a lot of very large strategic planning projects in health care in some of the key academic medical centers in and around New York. All of these involved designing the process of planning, itself. This is something that is rarely done deliberately, as it should. People jump into planning activities without understanding that the planning process itself requires an entire infrastructure of its own in order to succeed. Some of those projects also included major reorganization efforts, which meant having to deal with the architecture of those institutions. The design of their internal structure needed to be addressed and there were fascinating issues involved. Remember, the typical medical center comprises a number of very different functions under one roof. It has a hospital, for example, something that people can look at from a more conventional business point of view, more like an industrial operation, where you can measure things like patients per day, length of stay, level and intensity of care, and the like. Then, you’ve got the medical school, basically a university with all the teaching and pure research components. These are three functions—patient care, teaching and research—which require different management approaches, yet need to be integrated in one whole system. This makes these organizations especially interesting—more complex
than the typical business enterprise of a similar size. They were very interesting times as I attempted to get my feet wet in institutional design in those environments.

I expanded from there into other arenas until 10-15 years later I was called into projects that were dealing more with regional management and planning issues. For example, in the Great Lakes area there was a planning project that brought many of the issues raised by Fuller, issues of environment, resources, technology, economy, society and so on, in one effort. In all of these kind of projects, I think my contribution was to bring the system perspective, both in the design of the approach to a problem as well as in actually carrying it out.

Russ: Are there some key principles around the design of the approach that you could identify?

Michael: There are a few that come to mind. One is the systems approach, which means a comprehensive view of problems that takes into consideration a larger domain of concern. It tries to understand what are the key elements, the key variables, in that domain, how they interact and what are the consequences of those interactions. Taking a system view to what are essentially systems is essential—we normally deal with complexity by trying to simplify it often to the point of trivialization. We take a typical system issue and we trivialize it by trying to make it as simple as possible by reducing it to handle-able components. By the time we do that we tend to lose the whole system essence, ending up treating a complex system as though it was a simple clockwork mechanism. We then are surprised that many of the results of such an approach don’t work well. So, one important thing is the comprehensive system approach.

Another important aspect is one that has been given different names. Its significance was emphasized by Fuller, but by other thinkers as well, notably by Russ Ackoff, for example. He called it “Ideal Design.” Fuller referred to it as “preferred states,” that is, the requirement not to focus on the limitation of a problem, but rather to project yourself to the ideal situation that you wish to achieve and then work backwards to achieve it.

Russ: Can you give an example of how that works?

Michael: One example would be how you deal with the energy issue. You could approach it by saying, “We are burning fossil fuels. This is creating greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that have impact on climate change. How to solve it?” You proceed to focus on the solution on how to ameliorate what is going on now. Then you can come up with all kinds of arguments about whether to reduce emissions by 5% or other solutions, short term, limited solutions that are typical to the way the international community has been trying to deal with the problem. Or, conversely, you can take a completely different approach and say, “What we need here is a global planetary energy independence, which means graduating to a source of energy that is non-depletable, must have zero harmful emissions and be available to all.” Then the problem you have to solve is of a completely different nature. Do you see the difference?
Russ: In the latter, you’re starting with your goal or vision. Then you look at the activities that would be required to create that.

Michael: Exactly! There’s a big difference if you start with an aspiration, something you would like to achieve, even if for the moment you don’t even know how, as distinct from starting with a current “problem.” You can fix the faucet, but you’ll still have the same water supply, whereas if you take that problem instance as an opportunity to consider what the best thing would be for everyone, it’s a completely different question.

So that is the system approach and ideal design. It’s so important, because it is essential to addressing the challenge that humanity faces on the planet today. You can talk about how to eliminate poverty or hunger or how to create a future where all of humanity can live and experience different degrees of wellbeing altogether, and then determine what will be necessary for that. Then you can talk about what we need: clean renewable sources of energy, clean, reliable, water supply, all these things in a qualitative sense, first. Then you go on to explore what would be required in order to achieve that, including the technology, institutional redesign and removing of the obstacles that are in the way. If you start with the problem, you’ll never get there.

Russ: As I listen to you, your passion for addressing the issues of sustainability is palpable. I’m aware that is an arena where you have been investing a great deal of your energy.

Michael: It started, with Fuller’s inspiration, to understand that those issues exist. I never had any sense of those issues when I started school. I was thinking about architecture like Frank Lloyd Wright—building and so on. Fuller opened my eyes to a completely different way of looking at the world and the kinds of issues that are important. Over the years, I think that I’ve tried to intuitively assemble the experiences and the tools that will make one more effective in understanding and dealing with those issues. For a few years now, I have been feeling increasingly confident that I completed my basic training. That I graduated from my own university, if you will, and that I am ready to focus on these issues trying to affect real change. That’s where the idea first came to develop the Sustainability Principles and to launch the Sustainability Laboratory.

Russ: I’m aware that you’ve spoken about sustainability principles. The last I’ve heard there are five of those. Is that correct?

Michael: Yes. The origin of that is when I began to play with the idea of establishing the Sustainability Laboratory. I was wondering what would make it different than many other centers or institutes for sustainability that currently exist. One thing that I thought was missing was a set of coherent principles that define the true meaning of sustainability, as a state. What are the absolutely essential elements, the minimum statements that you can make regarding sustainability, the required conditions without which it can’t be fulfilled no matter how you play with words. If you want to construct a vehicle so you can fly, you had first better understand the principles of aerodynamics. Similarly, if we are serious about implementing the state of sustainability as the universal planetary state, what are the underlying principles that need to be upheld?
I pondered that for a long time and I spent about two years drafting my ideas. I was very unsatisfied with the currently prevailing definition of sustainability, basically the one that was offered by United Nations’ report associated with the Bruntland Commission, a definition that is accepted by most. So, I tried to give the concept a more precise definition and then derive the principles from that.

**Sustainability:**

_A dynamic equilibrium in the processes of interaction between a population and the carrying capacity of an environment such, that the population develops to express its full potential without producing irreversible adverse effects on the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends._

**Sustainability Principles**

**The First Principle:**
Contain entropy and ensure that the flow of resources, through and within the economy, is as nearly non-declining as is permitted by physical laws.

**The Second Principle:**
Adopt an appropriate accounting system, fully aligned with the planet’s ecological processes and reflecting true, comprehensive biospheric pricing to guide the economy.

**The Third Principle:**
Ensure that the essential diversity of all forms of life in the Biosphere is maintained.

**The Fourth Principle:**
Maximize degrees of freedom and potential self-realization of all humans without any individual or group, adversely affecting others.

**The Fifth Principle:**
Recognize the seamless, dynamic continuum
Of mystery, wisdom, love, energy, and matter
That links the outer reaches of the cosmos
With our solar system, our planet and its biosphere
Including all humans, with our internal metabolic systems
And their externalized technology extensions --
Embody this recognition in a universal ethics
For guiding human actions

The five principles pertain to the five different levels or domains, almost like chakras, that are important to pay attention to. On one extreme you have the physical domain that deals with issues of energy and matter, all the “stuff.” The second principle deals with the economic domain in the sense of the meaning and creation of wealth. The third domain deals with the principle of life. We are part of a larger, living fabric called the Biosphere.
and we have to behave as good neighbors to other species. The fourth is the social domain that deals with the guidelines for social behavior. The fifth, which is probably the most critical, is the spiritual domain that really provides the value orientation to everything else that you’re doing.

It’s interesting—in the beginning I only had the first four domains and I felt that something was missing. I was beginning to play with the value or spiritual dimension. Many people that I talked to in trying out those ideas were discouraging this. “If you want leaders in government and business to take you seriously,” they would say, “you cannot talk about spirituality.” It didn’t take long for me to realize that without the spiritual domain the others are just techniques. It is really the spiritual orientation, the underlying value held, which coheres and ties everything together. It serves as a center of gravity for the other four domains, for all of the rest.

That’s how those five principles developed and began to spread on the Internet and so forth. Certainly they’ve been the guiding principles for the work I do and for much of what the Lab is and will be doing. The important thing about those five principles is that they are not single separate things. The five constitute the dimensions of one coherent system. What we tend to do many times is try and focus on problems in one area, not the others. Some people think we need to solve some technology problems and everything will be all right, but if we have a predatory orientation toward the world, that’s how you will use your technology. Going to the other extreme, some believe we need everyone to become spiritual and sit and meditate. That, of course, will not take you too far if you don’t also have the physical infrastructure to sustain the 9 billion people we are soon to have on the planet. You really need all five principles to cohere and create one system, and that’s the biggest challenge of the sustainability transformation. You cannot deal with it in pieces—you have to deal with it as one whole system that is manifested in those five dimensions.

Russ: In recent months, I’ve been feeling a little dissatisfied with the concept of sustainability and have been playing around with the notion of “thriving” as opposed to sustainability, because it suggests something more of the evolutionary potential that may be involved here.

Michael: I also have been very unhappy with the term, especially because it’s been so misused that it’s almost lost its meaning. I haven’t found a better term, so what I did instead is adopt that term but give it my own definition.

Russ: How are you working in the world around the extension of these sustainability principles?

Michael: At the moment, I’m working essentially on two levels. One is educational where I do quite a bit of speaking to all kind of audiences. I try to spend as much time as I can with young audiences—university students in different countries mostly. On another level I try to do actual projects. Currently, I am working on a fascinating project in the Negev Desert, in Israel, with a group of local Bedouins. We are creating an actual model of a
sustainable desert community, which will be based on the Bedouin tradition and expertise with desert agriculture, but leveraged with the most advanced technology in solar energy, water treatments, silvipasture, and the like. At the end, we’ll have an integrated desert, organic farming operation with livestock, medicinal plants and authentic, native vegetables. The whole site will be designed to deliver zero harmful emissions and every function on the site will be linked, providing an input, to another function, so there will be very little waste. It will be integrated from a sustainability point of view. The social dimension of the sustainability principles will be embodied in the way that the community will be organized. The group is developing a cooperative structure that is very innovative, and completely unique in the context of governance in the Bedouin society, which tends to be male dominated, hierarchical, tribal and clannish.

Russ: Have you examined adult developmental psychology at all? Any of the models such as the work of Michael Commons, Robert Kegan or Don Beck and Chris Cowan on Spiral Dynamics?

Michael: No, I must confess that psychology is an area I’m especially weak in. I’ve read things through the years but that has not been my focus.

Russ: The reason I ask is because of the way in which you are addressing the social. Particularly in the case of Spiral Dynamics, there is material on my Web site and a book entitled Spiral Dynamics. I would encourage you to take a look at it as a way of tapping into a framework that may give you some important insights in that arena.

Michael: I’ll look into that. Incidentally, I don’t know if you had a chance to look at the Design Science document I developed, which was published on the web site of the Buckminster Fuller Institute. You can see there how the spiral has been used as an imaging icon for the process of design.

Russ: Yes, I recall that. Could you elaborate on that? How is the spiral representative of the process of design?

Michael: You need to accept a definition of design that goes beyond the conventional view of design as having to do with an arrangement of objects or what-have-you. Normally, we use the term “design” in a very narrow way. I think there’s the possibility to look at design in a much broader sense as a concept that indicates some sort of underlying order. You start with that, a notion that means some whole that is marked by a consistent coherence, which of course, implies some deliberate intelligence. Fuller, for example, used to say that the whole universe is a fantastic piece of design. This is how he used the term. So “design” is basically given the connotation of an underlying orderliness.

If you think of one of the unique and important functions of human intelligence in the cosmos, it is to produce unique designs and act as a local cosmic feedback loop in the process. This is the opportunity that we have with our awareness, consciousness and intelligence. It is to progressively create more order, although often we do not act that way. Arranging and rearranging events in comprehensively preferred ways demonstrates
the potential of the fantastic capability that we all possess as universal designers. So when you look at it from this point of view, you can come to a new definition of design. You can define design, in the most general sense, as being the process of realizing intention. The process itself has to do with applying intelligence to physical processes and it comprises a number of steps ranging from an intention to actually realizing that intention.

You start with an intention and then there is an action to reduce that intention to practice. There is a process that moves from the intention to the realization. If you think about that process a little bit, it would have the typical structure of purposeful behavior in general. This is where there exists an important link with psychology, where the intention obviously corresponds to a goal and the later corresponds with projecting ahead a preferred state, as we talked earlier. So you have got the goal, you have got the realization process, the activities required for realizing the goal, and then, you have the process of evaluation, which is the feedback function where you see whether you achieve the goal or not and whether you have to continue and try to realize it or you can move your attention to something else.

So you have got the three major aspects of intention, realization and evaluation, which are linked in a circular framework. But you have to be able to evolve. So you have to be able to break free from this circle. In order to jump out of it, once the circle is complete, you need to connect to a new more comprehensive, more inclusive intention and you move to the next circle level. That’s what creates the spiral. In relation to each circle level, which comprises a typical feedback loop situation including intention, realization and evaluation, you need to be able to accommodate the possibility of learning, adaptation, and the kind of shifts that are involved in evolutionary expansion of context.

This requires that each such circle—each closure—will be opened up to the next more comprehensive cycle of integration. If you take the circle and open it up to the next circle and the next one, you’ll get a spiral. A spiral is an entity that expands. It can be used as an iconic representation of evolution. Evolution, whether biological, social, cognitive or whatever, comprises basically an expanding process. If you contemplate it further, you might say that what is actually expanding in the spiral is a quality we call “experience.” It’s the experience of the cosmos itself that is becoming more comprehensive as we go through those cycles.

Russ: And it’s probably replicable at multiple levels. You indicated experience with the cosmos, but the individual and the social systems can go through those same kinds of dynamics.

Michael: Absolutely! But in the same breath I’m also saying that the individual and the individual’s design—the individual’s invention and social design—are part of the cosmic experience itself. We think that it’s our experience, that it is all about us, as humans, but it is not. It’s something greater that is working out its purpose. It accumulates its experience through all the possible manifestations including us, our thought, feelings and actions.
Russ: Fascinating. I’m wondering if in your work on sustainability whether you see yourself engaged in a political process. I’m assuming the answer is yes, and if so, how?

Michael: I have avoided the political process, and no, I don’t intend to engage in it. The main reason for this is that the political process requires a tremendous amount of compromise. I think that in order to understand what the issues really are, and how best to approach them, you need to avoid compromise as much as you can. I prefer to work in this way.

Russ: It occurs to me that one of the other arenas in your life has been attention to issues of peace. Can you expand on that?

Michael: I think of peace more of a derived consequence of many conditions rather than a result only of deliberate activist focus. I was born and grew up in Israel, so my whole early experience has been an experience of a region that is torn by conflict. Having lived outside of it for many years now, I can also see the potentials very clearly, of what things could be if energies could be diverted from conflict to more creative modes of being. Over the years, I became involved in some peace efforts. I served on the board and for a while as its chairman, of an organization called Givat Haviva, which brings together Israeli Arab and Jewish youth just so they can experience each other more directly and get away from stereotypical ways of thinking about each other. It’s very important work, but very slow, and really a drop in the bucket.

The project that we are doing now could have an important impact on government policy with respect to the Bedouin minority in the Negev. One of the ideas we are discussing is expanding that project and doing something collaboratively with a group of Bedouins in Jordan. If you start that, you can clearly expand very effectively on issues of peaceful existence between the two countries. In all of this, though, I am trying to create peace conditions through concentration on something else. We are not involved in peace demonstrations in the project, but we are trying to create a thriving community in a way that can demonstrate that there’s really no need for destructive conflict if you collaborate. Incidentally, with the Bedouin project, the kind of coalition of people in organizations that we were able to put together is absolutely unprecedented. It shows you that when a group of people really wants to focus on an ideal and sincerely try to achieve it, anything can be possible—and that, can rarely, if ever, be achieved through conflict which is driven by fear. Of course, in relation to the five sustainability principles, I think that the fifth one viewed in relation to the social reality would see a condition of peace as a prerequisite for a thriving society and a happy, thriving future for many reasons.

Russ: It seems to me that the sustainability principles are really the domains of both design and social action.

Michael: Absolutely!

Russ: I said “social action,” but I guess I mean just action. Period.
Volckmann: Interview with Ben-Eli

Michael: They are actually very powerful. I don’t mean it as a self-serving statement, but the principles are very powerful if you think about them as guidelines for organizing action, for developing sensible policy or designing the necessary change.

Russ: Where do you see yourself moving at this time? In what domains will you be putting your energy?

Michael: The Bedouin Project is consuming a lot of energy and time. I shall continue with that to see it through, but I think I shall be switching my attention to the evolution of the Lab itself, as a vehicle to support activities like this one particular project.

Russ: Tell us about the Lab.

Michael: I started to work on issues of sustainability and sustainable development largely in the context of the multilateral organizations that deal with issues of development: organizations like some U.N. agencies, the World Bank and others. Both in that arena and in the private sector where some concepts of sustainability are being pursued, there are real limitations on how far existing institutions can go for a number of understandable reasons. It took me some time to fully appreciate that. I thought that I was operating at the center of activities furthering sustainable development until I realized that there was a huge gap between the prevailing rhetoric and what was actually happening on the ground.

It took me some time to realize that this was not because people are bad or they don’t want to do the right thing, but because the whole framework within which we operate, both in the public and the private domains, is extremely restrictive in that sense. In the private sector, we operate under an economic accounting framework that is really driving us in the wrong direction by distorting reality enormously, for example, allowing us not to take into account what economists refer to as “externalities”—the impact of pollution, the impact of depletion and so forth, but even worse, allowing us, in many instances to count consumption as profit.

If you were a CEO and did this with your company’s accounts, you would be put in prison, but that’s how we operate the planet. We deplete the resources and think we are getting rich. That existing framework constrains what any CEO or any given company can do before they reach the very low ceiling of acceptability—of dealing with shareholders’ value and all those familiar restrictions. In the multilateral arena, it’s the political restrictions where you have to operate by consensus. The arguments around achieving a consensus go in a direction that takes you further away from the problem itself. By the time you reach the lowest common denominator of what is acceptable to all, you are dealing with a “solution” that is so far from the essence of the problem involved, that there is no correlation between the two anymore. This is why a lot of development policies have not been very successful.

It occurred to me after experiencing that world for a long time in projects all over the world that it would be very useful if there would be an independent entity that could
actually experiment with breakthrough approaches without worrying about the conventional frameworks of both the conventional economic and political varieties, and create a portfolio of success showcase models, demonstrating true paradigm shifts in different necessary arenas.

The lab will focus its work in four key areas: on questions of strategy — approaches to demonstrate sustainability in development, for example, on technology, financing and education. I am not trying to define what the lab will do through defining problem areas or specific development objectives, but rather by those four functional areas. In each of those, we would identify an issue that needs to be addressed, and bring the best possible talent and process to bear on creating and demonstrating a model approach that others can review, adopt and scale up. This is basically the idea behind developing a prototype sustainable desert community with the Bedouin’s.

That’s what the Lab will try to do. I hope it will attract some attention and collaboration with a number of cutting-edge institutions. At the moment we are working with two: one is the Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel where a great deal of cutting edge work is being done on solar energy, water management, desert agriculture, and so on, and with EARTH University in Costa Rica.

Russ: If anyone wanted to learn more about your Lab, what is the URL for it?


Russ: If there’s an interest in becoming more involved in the work you’re doing is there an avenue for that?

Michael: All that needs to be done is to contact me directly at muben@aol.com, but there is also Lab contact information on our Web site.

Russ: Michael, I deeply appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. I’m very impressed with your range of interests and energy and I am sure we could have a dozen more conversations in great depth. At least this has served as a foundation to get the key elements out there in front of a larger public that will pay attention.

Michael: Russ, I very much appreciate the opportunity and I enjoyed talking with you.
3D Democracy: An Interview with Jan Inglis

Russ Volckmann

I have known Jan Inglis for several years as we are co-directors of ARINA. Also her articles have been published in the Integral Review of which I am an associate editor. I know that she has been very focused on using developmental and integral approaches to respond to some of the very complex issues that challenge us these days, specifically climate change. I was curious to know what motivates and sustains someone to work in the public realm since many people in the integral or developmental field have chosen to focus instead on personal development, organizational leadership or academic teaching. I also wanted to know what specific and effective methods there might be for how communities are engaged in political or social issues considering that I recognize that people are all over the map when it comes to their diverse lines and levels of development.

Russ: Jan, I’m so glad to have the opportunity to chat with you today. I’d like to start by asking about your interest in politics.

Jan: I haven’t been directly active in what most people would consider politics—as in party politics and lobbying. But I have been involved in public decision making which is the broader definition of politics: how we make group decisions regarding public issues. I call it “3D Democracy” referring to the multidimensional aspects of decision making. That interest is a continuation of earlier observations in the work I was doing re how people make choices—how they weigh things out and subsequently make decisions. I’ve long had a fascination with that.

Russ: Is there a particular context in which you’ve been concerned about that, or is it across the board?

Jan: A long time ago, I was working as an occupational therapist with people who had many types of disabilities. They faced multiple physical and emotional challenges. I would observe how they responded to those challenges; there were incredible differences in how people would rally to face those challenges. I was fascinated by how people arrived at their choices, what supported them in the context of their beliefs, families, their culture, etc. That was something that moved me into the field of therapy: Integrative Body Psychotherapy. I did a lot of work with the internal processes of how people looked at their issues in the context of their values, their current sense of energy and what they assumed blocked them from getting what they wanted in life. I noticed that as they would examine what was in the way of them achieving their goals, and look more deeply at potential influences such the history of their childhood patterns, and assumptions they were holding, this would change their relationship with their “problem.” They could find ways that those blocks could surface, be sorted, understood and coordinated and it would help them move forward, beyond their obstacles to make healthier choices.

Russ: At that point in your work did you notice any patterns?
Jan: The more self-reflective people became, the more they were able to look beyond their external problem situations and examine their internal responses to their situation: was it based on assumptions that had been holding? did it have to do with how their assumptions might be different than those of other people around them? So that capacity to inquire and see connected layers underlying problems and be self-reflective made a huge difference in how they created new options and resolved their situation.

In parallel, I was doing a lot of community work and dealing with issues regarding the environment, social justice, and peace. I was looking at how this process of self-reflection, that seemed so available and worthwhile for individuals, wasn’t present when we were in our public groups. Behind the closed doors of a therapist’s office, individuals were able to become more aware and create change, but there was little transference to how that showed up in our cultural work and social change efforts.

I became increasingly concerned about environmental issues some time ago and felt we needed to find ways of looking more deeply at the patterns re how our problem issues have formed and were impacted by our views of them and each other. It was that question of how we make decisions—and why we make such bad ones that endanger our very survival—that eventually pushed me into looking more deeply at adult development in a social context not just personal growth. This opened up a whole new field of understanding about why we had differences in how we approach things…and why change is not simple.

Russ: You’re addressing both individual levels of decision-making and all that is compounded into that process, as well as how communities are engaged in that process when it comes to political or social issues.

Jan: Yes. For quite a few years, there was a disconnect in my work and in what I saw occurring around me that felt really uncomfortable. My therapy students could be doing a lot of deep personal work, but not have any concern at all about the health of their communities or world. Or, I could focus on the bigger issues in the world but work with people whose own dysfunctional way of communicating with others was actually a key part of what was creating the issues, and they were totally unaware of that. I felt I needed to find a way that could bring coherence to those two fields. At that point, they were two separate fields; inner personal work or outer community work. I felt that I needed to work on them together, not just view them separately and needed to find a method to pull them together.

I was doing a lot of reading and research and understanding of what other people saw regarding this. I found some of Wilber’s early work—he mapped out the exterior and interior—and it was helpful to have that split acknowledged. I knew I wasn’t the only one feeling the split and that it was part of a larger context of development.

Working with Integrated Body Psychotherapy was helpful because it was about working in real time—not just from a conceptual understanding of what was happening in terms of problems and issues but with the experience of being present and the impact
that had on our ability to observe and understand. It was an integrative process as well, supporting people to focus attention into their gaps and make sense of what they were seeing. I moved on into studying Bohmian dialogue, Spiral Dynamics, Robert Kegan’s and Bill Torbert’s work. And meanwhile I was learning from my own processes as well. I was seeing that my community work focused on the issues being “out there” and a lot of my earlier activism had been about finger pointing and blaming “those” people “out there” that were doing those “bad” things, whether it was the corporations or the politicians. As I became more aware of my own processes and question this patterns of blaming and creating “in” group “out” group polarities, I was also seeing how that perpetuated the very issues I and others seemed to want to resolve. It is so easy to blame, harder to get at dealing with it all being about ‘us.’

Russ: Given your professional background, this probably came relatively naturally to you. In addition to the reading, what were the kinds of things that helped you bridge that distance of consciousness and understanding?

Jan: I’ve been lucky to live outside of the mainstream culture most of my life. I grew up on a farm where you really do get a sense that everything is connected. My father was very involved in the cooperative movement and concerned about the common good, and also money was only available for practical things. So the combination of all those things meant I wasn’t part of the consumer culture very much. Although that was not much fun as a teenager, I think that allowed me to follow things of interest as an observer rather than an enmeshed participant. In the early eighties, I came across Joanna Macy’s work, ecofeminism and deep ecology. I was doing programs with groups and really seeing the difference that could happen when minds came together. I was part of intentional communities and started working with consensus decision-making, mediation etc. I was searching for a method under which we could come together as groups but finding limitations of all those previous processes. I found there was a lot of great intentions and ‘feel good” energy in much of the personal and spiritual development work but none of this was sufficient to actually, pragmatically, assist us in responding to the complexities of our social ecological or political issues. In fact, it seemed to serve as a distraction.

I felt I needed to find something else—I was looking for something to help me understand the process of how we make decisions in a way that groups or cultures can create change, much in the same way I had found change could be supported to happen step by step with individuals …… I came across the work of Sara Ross. She had taken a lot of the large fields of research and theory about adult development and behavioral sciences and complexity, and put them into a form that could be applied at a community level.

Russ: I’m interested to learn more about the role of marginality or the role of being at the boundaries of social systems that has its implications for people in their development. It sounds like it was important in your case, and it resonated with me. Is there something in that we should discuss?
Jan: There’s a certain push and pull in that. There’s a sense of wanting to belong, at the same time as wanting to individuate and not be enmeshed with a group or culture. You need to take a step back to see it and yourself in that. The tension feels like a struggle and a gift.

One thing that helped me in my early career when everyone else was only focused on career moves and earning a lot of money, was that I came across the work of Joe Dominguez and Vicky Robbins. They had put together the “Financial Independence: Your Money or Your Life” material especially for people who were headed into being social change agents. Working with them made me rethink my goals and evaluate how I was putting my money, time and my life towards them. My biggest goals were certainly beyond just gaining more paid holiday time, or making car payments. Their work helped me validate my priorities. It offered an articulation and a concrete doable structure for how to step back and look at the whole idea of working just to earn money and helped break the trance of that aspect of mainstream culture. So to answer your question…I guess that marginalization can be another name for outgrowing the old forms and not yet settling into the new, and so that means dissonance which offers motivation to find a better way. But besides dissonance we also need supports such as models and methods of better options and validating experiences so we can move to a more satisfactory next level. I am very grateful that I have found both internal and external structures that have supported me… although there have been some times on the desert.

Russ: It’s clear that all of us go through a variety of developmental experiences in our lives and we find ourselves centered in different levels or sets of capabilities on multiple lines. One thing that I’m curious about is that when we’re working in a collective context, we’re dealing with people who are all over the map along those lines. Is there anything that you discovered in your work on adult development that was an important lesson for you around working in collectives?

Jan: Initially when I was a therapist, I could see the great changes that people could make. So then I jumped to an assumption that if everybody could just get on with doing some inner work then that was what was needed to change the world. I felt that was what everyone could and should do and I felt they could do it in a short time. From the lens I was looking through then, I failed to recognize that this capacity for self reflection was just not available for everyone. Eventually from my own observations and understanding from adult developmental theories of Robert Kegan’s, Bill Torbert’s and Michael Commons’s I came to respect the fact that we’re all going through different places at different times based on many different aspects and life conditions. The stage we are at is just where we have to be. Then social change work wasn’t about pushing someone else to do something; it was about looking for structures that could intentionally hold the richness of that diversity and work with it as active grist for the mill.

Russ: One of the big challenges is the creation of structures that allow for the richness of that diversity to be brought together to support our collective creativity and innovation. I’m wondering if there’s some patterns or principles around structure that have been significant for you.
Jan: The term “scaffolding” is being used to describe what it is that supports us as individuals to develop, and what supports us as groups to deal with more complexity. I think that with the challenges that we’re facing—the climate change or any number of issues that we’re dealing with: economics, health care etc. — these are all such complex issues. But we’ve attempted to deal with them in a simple, linear way. And our public interactions are tending to come from a very adversarial stance. We need processes that are as complex as the issues. We need systematic methods of dealing with issues, but we don’t have processes in place in our politics for dealing with them that way.

I think our public processes need to be designed to match the challenges of those public situations. I think we take our public interactions, like politics and community development, for granted. We’re not seeing how poorly we interact. We’re not seeing that by using an absolutist form of thinking and talking together that it forces us into simple yes and no responses, inadequate for complex issues. That doesn’t allow us to bring together the diversity of perspectives on the issues. We are not seeing that the issues exist in relationship to the whole context of other issues. We’re not seeing them as a system, within systems, that is, as a metasystem. We’re trying to deal with poverty, violence or climate change as simple issues when they are truly complex. One core principle then is to commit to methods to address the complexity of our issues. They need not to be dealt with as fragments, but rather integrally.

Russ: How would one go about seeing the diversity of an issue rather than the diversity of the population around the issue?

Jan: We need to see and address both. There is both the multi facets of the topic issue that make it complex like crime for example, and the multiple perspectives within the population regarding potential solutions to crime that need to be considered before we can agree on and support actions. So we need to see the issue within this broad context. For example we tend to talk about climate change as though it were a single “it” and really there are many diverse aspects and sub issues and they all need different ways of being responded to. We can use the movement towards biofuel as an example where one perspective of a “good” solution was used without adequate exploration of other perspectives or implications. Converting fields to corn crops to produce biofuel supposedly was a solution to create alternatives to fossil fuel but it was done without considering all the repercussions that it would have—impacts on markets, on availability of food, land use, etc. When we don’t look at an issue’s interconnectedness, that’s a failing on our part. To gain a broader understanding we need to work with those most knowledgeable about the issue, who bring necessary and diverse perspectives based on their life experiences. Starting with inquiry into the context and causes and creating a map indicates graphically that issues are complex and very interconnected, and gives an understanding of why we will need deeper consideration than just quick fix it solutions.

Russ: I think of what you’re saying as a shift in the way we think about phenomena. it takes us from an engineering perspective to a more gestalt examination of the phenomena.
Jan: Yes, absolutely. Everything’s connected and you can’t just pull one string without knowing that it’s connected to other threads in the tapestry. Yes, the engineering model would have been an approach to a single cause, a single problem and was based on the assumption that we understood the problem, could just plug in the solution and then predict the outcome. That's a very simple, linear approach, using formal logic, instead of realizing there are many causes and many effects that have to be understood within a context, a post formal logic. Part of the ‘gestalt’ is the many very legitimate perspectives that are connected with the phenomena. So being able to talk about “the” problem in terms of the many perspectives that we bring to it is absolutely necessary.

Russ: We’re touching on one of the added values of bringing a complexity theory perspective to issues. On one level, it’s about recognizing that everything is connected; on another level, there are other lessons that can be drawn from that complexity perspective. such as small changes that can create large results? Interventions can be less grand than the whole phenomena itself.

Jan: Well I look at the enormity of all the things we’re dealing with on the planet and can wonder where I should start. It helps me to recognize that if we work with the patterns of how we interact and make decisions, and even if that is just one group working with its issues in a different manner than they have before, that that is setting the potential for a bigger change. That learning can then be used again and there’s an incredible impact of how that can ripple out. Without digging too deeply into complexity theory and patterns, it’s vital to recognize the importance of what happens when we are able to change a pattern and have it work at a level that is more adequate than some of the structures of thinking we’ve used before. This gives me hope.

Russ: So it’s not just about structures and processes, but it is also patterns over time. By intervening in a way that alters one of those patterns, we’re beginning to build the neural networks among us that allow us to shift the patterns to make them more effective in the future.

Jan: Yes, I think that nothing is isolated. If we’re learning something and reflecting on it, then that can become something that we will start using and eventually over time can consider institutionalizing. That then gives us the foundation upon which we can build our next pattern and a culturally recognizable way to deal with the next issues that we’ll be challenged with. Hopefully we will move beyond thinking our minds operate in isolation. And it is exciting to think that at some point we will be able to have neurobiological evidence, not just social science evidence of those changes which are occurring.

Russ: You’ve referenced Sara Nora Ross’ work. I wonder if that’s an example of an intervention or a set of interventions that is about changing patterns.

Jan: Very much so, and I think it works on a lot of levels So much of what drives evolution is dealing with challenges and unmet needs and finding ways to resolve them in a more complex way than was available before. Right now, we have big challenges and potential
for major unmet needs as a result of climate change and we will need to evolve to deal with them and that involves collective decision-making. We can be supported to do this better when we work with the universal developmental patterns underlying how humans make decisions.

These are built into the process that Sara developed, which is called the TIP Process—The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues—within that there is both very specific and detailed methods of working with the community or group to make a decision on complex issues. There is also processes that scaffold our individual development and the group’s capacity to work together. It’s designed from a developmental and behavioral science understanding. It also supports us to move forward because we’re having to face into the complexities and interconnectedness of issues and multiple perspectives that we bring to the issues. With a series of steps we can move through that process. The issue we’re working on can benefit and the individuals and groups that are working on the issue can also increase their capacity for more complex thinking.

**Russ:** *Can you expand on what that process and those steps are?*

**Jan:** Sure, I can attempt to go over the basics and hope the answer does not get too long. A lot of the first steps help us build a sense of focus and attention, which is lacking in a lot of our public interactions. We often just come in to a meeting, and just start to talk and we’re all over the map. We’re talking about some general topic assuming we are meaning the same thing but we haven’t really agreed about what the main focus is. There is a need to be able to help people focus and build their attention span, and do this in a manner that isn’t triggering an absolutist stage of thinking where we fight over the ‘right’ or “wrong” answer. Using the action inquiry process that Bill Torbert had put forth, we inquire into our understanding of the issues. In that way, we start to build a common meaning of what we are thinking the issue is really about.

Some of the early steps include seeing the issue in its context with other things and building a broader understanding from hearing different people’s views. We need to use inquiry to get us beyond thinking there is a right or wrong way to see an issue. This sounds simple but it is where many meetings regarding a public contentious situation get stuck. So in the first steps we’re building the basis for more complex and connective thinking. We move through understanding what the issue is, looking at how it got there and its root causes. That takes us below the usual surface desire for quick fix solutions to starting to make connections between multi-causal points of how this issue came about. We move bit by bit into understanding what the causes are in relationship to our behaviors as individuals, or as whole group or community policies, or non profit, business or government practices and priorities. And also how these reflect our individual and organizational values and attitudes. When we get to a point where we define causes and priorities of what we want to focus on, we have a much larger context to work from than if we were just working at the quick fix solution level. We then are deeper into the systemic understanding of an issue after these earlier steps, so then our choices of actions are likely going to be more systematically focused.
One thing that happens in politics and in our public interactions is that we don’t trust people’s capacity to know the issue very well. But when given this kind of scaffolding and by asking people, we find they do know what their issues are, especially if you provide a setting by which they can actually explore their knowledge of issues together. Then they can start moving towards agreements and come up with some responses and create potential solutions that could shift the deeper aspects of their problematic issue.

There is a method of framing the naturally-occurring multiple perspectives, so we see it is not just my favourite perspective against yours, which is quite often how our public processes work. Instead we’re going to examine the fact that there are 3-4 different perspectives on how we should proceed and deal with this issues and come to realize that of course our response to this issue will differ based on our perspective.

That, then, moves us into the next step, a process of “deliberation.” I realize that that term probably requires some background. We all deliberate all the time, but we don’t realize it. So for a real life example,—remember when you and I were in Oakland at the Integral Theory Conference and you gave me a ride in your Prius? I remember you saying that when you bought it, it was an “easy” decision to make. I was thinking that while the decision may have been easy, there must have been an inherent deliberation as you calculated how best to satisfy your needs in your choice of car. You probably considered the purchase from the point of view of several needs: first, a security need, that is the safety of the car, and your financial ability to purchase it. Second, a stability and accountability need, that is your view of the reputability of the company and its ability to make and service the car. Thirdly, a competitive or entrepreneurial need, that is, is this the best car in the hybrid market. Then you settled on your more obvious responsible citizen motivation, that is, the impact your purchase would have on the planet. Within that “easy” decision, there is the whole universal stack of viewpoints and needs that probably were sorted through unnoticed but had to be met before you could arrive at an easy decision.

I think we do that kind of internal deliberation all the time. If you take that and apply it to another entity—say you sit on a board of a nonprofit organization—then you add a whole different level of complexity. Now it’s not just you deliberating; it’s a group, with different needs, and priorities that all need to be considered and included before reaching a decision that everyone can support. If you move that up the rank to bigger and bigger entities such as the State of California buying a fleet of cars you add more complexity and layers that need to be considered to reach a decision and take action.

So with more complexity we need to be more intentional about including all the factors or our attempt to reach decisions will bog down or not feel satisfactory. We have to weigh costs, consequences and trade-offs, and we need a structure to do that well, especially with public decisions. If we simply leave our decisions to leaders we can end up with an apathetic, passive or frustrated citizenry and likely bandage approaches. We need more participatory and deliberative decision-making so people can go through and weigh out the decisions that impact them. They can look at costs and consequences that affect them. By the time a decision is reached, we can take action on that decision as a
public because we spent time examining the trade offs. It isn’t just a reactive decision, which is quite often what our usual public processes set us up to do.

Russ:  You’re talking about something critical. It brings us back to this piece about the developmental levels of participants. Have you considered the values of people who might have different worldviews and different capabilities around hierarchical complexity or subject-object relationships? How have they been able to transcend those differences to work together deliberatively?

Jan:  Yes that is a core aspect. The invitation of different viewpoints in the exploration of the issue and in the people talking about the issue from their real-life experiences is accommodated in what is called a framed issue booklet. These diverse perspectives or frames of reference clearly describe the legitimate views and we can see these issues from different places based on different life experiences. The differences include those same universally different voices which occur inside us, just like the ones I was saying you might have needed to listen to in your internal deliberation about what car to buy. We need to ensure that those different voices are included, and especially included as concrete examples of where they do rub up against each other and create tensions in our communities. The deliberative process is built so that tensions between these different viewpoints are used, not avoided. We’re using the diversity to push our process to come to terms with the differences and reach a more complex understanding and do it in a way that the diversity is both welcomed and necessary. It is giving people a clear shared way of meeting with no bias as to what perspectives have been invited onto the table.

We’re so often are used to being scared of that diversity and we don’t know how to give it room at the table. Without structured process and with just open-ended speaking or blurting—like what occurs at town hall meetings—we just push against each other and the diversity of voices creates arguments and isn’t given equal space so we can learn from each others real experiences. By doing a developmentally-designed deliberative decision-making process, those different voices don’t have to compete, because they’re actually given space and attention, not just to be nice, but because they are necessary to forming complex decisions and that result in many people being motivated to being involved.

Russ:  I’d like to examine this from game theory. There are zero-sum and non-zero-sum games. Zero-sum allows for winners and losers. I’m thinking about things like the legitimacy of gay marriages. In issues like that where there is an either-or decision it seems to me there is no deliberative process that will bridge the gap for those who are deeply committed to their blue values versus those who want to create a space to allow for diversity.

Jan:  Quite often we start talking about an issue and give it a label without taking time to flesh out the sub-issues. The issue of gay or straight marriage has been a topic that is laden with multiple issues. To go back to an early principle of the TIP Process, we need to look at the topic systemically and be willing to open it up and examine other possibly connected issues that are there. If we’re trying to deal with it simply, it will be narrowed
down and will force people into an either-or camp. By doing so, we’re ignoring the complexity of the issue and no one will end up with a satisfactory result.

Russ: So that could result in using this example to break down the intricacies of an issue—for instance, how do we allow gay couples to see each other in hospital rooms, get health benefits, etc. How do we make it possible for them to have the same kinds of rights that heterosexual couples do?

Jan: Looking at those topics, what are the many other aspects that are connected to views and needs re hospital visiting or health care that make it feel problematic to address for certain individuals or groups? There are issues regarding a whole context of intricacies: cultural history and identity, economics, social structures, legal aspects—there are many things connected to the issue. So you need to consider which issue is the troubling tip of the iceberg topic and how can we have the quality of discussion to examine the root causes, so as to look deeply and systemically at the issue.

Russ: Are there further steps in the process?

Jan: Yes an important step is that once the group has moved through the deliberation process, then decisions needs to be made, actions taken and coordinated over time. In North America there is more of a movement towards more recognizing citizen engagement and building better processes. A lot of these processes though aren’t designed so that there are actual decisions made that people can take specific actions on. Many citizen engagement processes are used for public dialogue or ways to gather public input only. But to get to where we can make informed decisions and engaged actions, there needs to be steering committees who support the actions and follow up to maintain coordination and follow-through. It’s not just people talking conceptually about something—they need to actually work through steps to take action on something that challenges them. It is only through this real involvement with real issues that we get the systemic results on issues that we need and evolve the systemic thinking we need.

Looping back to your earlier question about politics and political involvement—when there is group decision-making that can lead to action, some of those actions will be policy, and some will be volunteer initiatives by individuals or groups. It’s this broad based comprehensive involvement that shifts and activates our politics in a different way.

Russ: Does this approach operate within the existing structures of government as well as outside these structures?

Jan: I think one of the challenges that has happened in the field of public engagement is a that a sense of separation has developed between elected officials and ordinary citizens. That’s a gap that needs to be overcome, and trust rebuilt. We need to define our issues, work on deliberating them and choosing action with ordinary citizens and public officials working on them together.
Russ: So this process makes it easier for any kind of structure that’s created or currently exists to open the door to multiple stakeholders.

Jan: Yes, because multiple stakeholders are those who are impacted by the issue or can impact the issue. Those people all likely have different perspectives, so there voices all need to be in there.

Russ: The kind of approach that Obama has been advocating for, which is essentially a learning political system as opposed to a confrontational political system, is not unlike what you’re talking about. Essentially it’s about getting people from diverse points of view engaged and arriving at decisions to take actions. We can evaluate and adjust those decisions as we move forward. Is this parallel obvious to you?

Jan: Many people who are working in the field of public interactions are feeling excited and hopeful about the climate regarding engagement that the new Administration seems to stand for. Seeing it as an educational process is so appropriate because we need to learn how to make decisions together. We fail to see that as a learning process. Engaging in a developmentally-designed and deliberative process—whether it’s a small nonprofit group or international consortium—requires a pedagogical aspect. It is action learning; we do it, we reflect on it what worked or didn’t, and decide how to do it differently the next time. We learn about not only the issue, but also about the process of working on issue through participation not abstract theory. We learn about how we can change our culture by doing that. We also need research to see if what we are doing makes a difference, and develop training programs for those who want to be agents of social change.

This all needs that “scaffolding,” that support built up over periods of time and I think that certainly has been one of the big challenges of trying to bring in a different process into our politics. People are still hoping for quick, short-term, low-investment processes. Let’s get at it, make a decision, grab the answer and get going. People’s attention spans to actually ask those bigger more complex questions need to increase—What are the different perspectives? How is this issue related to other issues? What do we need to consider in terms of trade-offs? What actions will we be willing to agree upon? It takes more time and commitment to use structures to help us make our decisions wisely, but really wastes time if we don’t and considering the state of the world we cannot continue being so sloppy in wasting time. We spend a huge amount of time dealing with the bad decisions we’ve made. It’s a difficult thing to get across. Until people understand that public decision-making is not an easy task, they won’t agree with the need for a different process or an educational approach.

Russ: One of the big challenges is first attracting a sufficient number of stakeholders to engage in the process, because it’s different than what they’re accustomed to. There are structures in our society that militate against it that also need to change. Two examples come to mind: (1) In regards to the Obama factor, there are major power-holders who are taking a strategic approach that acts against those kinds of stakeholder involvement developmental processes; (2) Our media—it seems to me that public media has a
tendency to couch things in either-or terms, to set things up in opposition to increase rancor, further divide people and make it more exciting. There is a whole media culture and political culture that we’re dealing with historically. It creates a challenge that needs to be addressed. The strategy of building on success is a wonderful one, but are there other activities that you see that need to be introduced to help us move in the direction of such a process?

Jan: I agree that our tendency to having a short attention span and to see things simplistically while at the same time sensationalizing is a huge challenge. As we move through our natural stages of development and see that there is more complexity to our issues, we may notice that we don’t get results or a high level of satisfaction when we operate that way. Hopefully we’ll realize that those processes are taking more resources and keeping us trapped from our key issues like our economic crises or issues with water or food. If we can build in a self-reflective process that demonstrates why issues take a lot of time to resolve well, we may be able to find ways through them. I think that hopefully we will be able to institutionalize different decision-making processes into our culture that keep us from jumping into those either-or camps and impeding the process towards more systemic social change efforts.

There are more instances of media using inquiry. I hear more situations where media is now reflecting on its own self and the bind they get in when reporting on touchy issues. There is more awareness that shoveling fuel onto that fire isn’t necessarily the best move. I’m seeing more capacity for self-reflection within the media and certainly within some of our governance. Would I like to see it happening faster? I certainly would. That’s what my work is about.

Russ: Yes, and it’s parallel to the kind of strategy that Ken Wilber implicitly and explicitly been manifesting around trying to build a critical mass of people with development and experience that can help move society forward in a developmental path. What are your next steps?

Jan: One thing I’ve jumped into recently is making a documentary film. I don’t see myself as a film maker although I did make some films quite a few years ago. I feel a film needs to be made regarding the challenges in our public interactions and our decision-making. A lot of the material regarding better processes regarding our social evolution and adult development stays within academia. I felt that it’s not very accessible for people there. I wanted to use the type of imagery and metaphor that could be available in video for a documentary regarding the challenges that we’re facing re climate change and the gaps that we have in our capacities to respond. We need to focus and concentrate long enough to consider different perspectives adequately to make decisions to deal with these issues. I’m in the process right now of putting that together.

Russ: Do you have a completion date?

Jan: I do—well, I keep setting one and it seems to escape me. (laughter)
Jan: Either other things get on my plate or when we assume that we have a plan in place, our own processes of learning along the way changes the original plan. It’s a dynamic process. I’m hoping it will be done in two months… I’ve done all the initial interviewing, so it just needs to be edited in a lively, coherent and accessible fashion.

Russ: And who have you interviewed?

Jan: I’ve got Thomas Homer Dixon who is very well-known in Canada—he’s like a Canadian Al Gore. He does a lot of work in the field of climate change, and he is currently the International Governance Innovation Chair for Global Systems. He’s written The Upside of Down—fascinating book. I’ve interviewed Robert Kegan who many people will know as being a developmental psychologist and the author of The Evolving Self and In Over Our Heads. I’ve interviewed Bill Torbert, another developmental psychologist and author of Action Inquiry. Also, Shawn Rosenberg who works at the Center for the Study of Democracy and is the Director of the Graduate Program in Political Psychology at the University of California in Irvine. I interviewed Sara Nora Ross who is an associate editor of the Integral Review and the developer of the TIP Process. I have been very privileged to gather so many viewpoints and such wisdom from these good people who have worked really hard in this field. I’m hoping to have the capacities and resources to put this project together in an interesting and inspiring way to be useful for those working on the climate change issues, or any complex issues, who are in the field of adult development and/or the field of public engagement and deliberative democracy.

Russ: I appreciate your spending the time with me, and I wish you all the luck in your endeavors.

Jan: Thank you, Russ, and I appreciate the effort you put into your work.

Russ: Thank you.
Integral Politics: A Swiss Perspective

Elke Fein and Hans-Peter Studer

Abstract: This article tells the story of the Swiss NGO “Integrale Politik (ip)” founded by about 20 people in November 2007 with the aim of becoming a regular political party at a later stage (www.integrale-politik.ch). We wish to make ip’s concepts and approaches known to a wider public. Inspired by integral thinkers such as Jean Gebser and Ken Wilber, ip develops its own ideas and interpretations of integral in view of the concrete challenges of Swiss and European politics.

Integral political culture is understood, for example, as including practices addressing all senses, turning political commitment into an experience of meaningful activity and an expression of joy, ease and celebrating life. One of the most important challenges currently faced by the group is to perpetuate and further develop this working culture as the organization grows. Its success in doing this seems to be one of the main reasons for ip’s attractiveness to the Swiss cultural creative sector in general and the growing integrally-minded community in particular to whom it gives an increasingly visible face and a clear-cut voice. At the same time, the Swiss political system offers particularly favourable preconditions and thus, a fruitful ground for new political ideas and experiments such as this integral political one.

Keywords: awareness, creativity, democracy, holacracy, integral consciousness, integral economy, integral politics, integral society, integral working culture, spirituality, Switzerland.

This article tells the story of an NGO called “Integrale Politik (integral politics)” which was founded by about 20 people from all over Switzerland in November 2007 with the aim of becoming a regular political party at a later stage. Meanwhile, Integrale Politik (ip) has considerably increased its membership and considers itself probably the best organized and the most dynamic integral political force in Europe. With this “report from the field,” we wish to make ip’s concepts and approaches known to a wider integrally interested public in order to share some of the experiences ip has had in the course of preparing the establishment of an "integral party."

The History of “Integrale Politik”

The history of “Integral Politics Switzerland” reaches back to the beginning of the Millennium. In 1995, ip’s founding president Gil Ducommun, at that time professor of

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agriculture and development at the Swiss College of Agriculture in Zollikofen, launched a project called Holon, a network of holistically oriented organizations promoting new and unconventional ideas, especially in the field of economy. Holon was founded in March 1997 in four countries (Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Austria, with additional contacts in France and Belgium). Later, supported by Holon’s network, a group called dynamik5 emerged which for the first time set itself the aim of becoming a political party based on holistic views and principles. Dynamik5 held regular meetings, had local groups, and produced several papers on specific topics related to holistic/integral politics and economics. However, because of difficulties to constructively integrate different personalities and opinions as well as the perspectives from different countries into one common project, the original aim could not be realized.

In hindsight, Gil Ducommun openly calls his personal “lack of maturity” and emotional competence the main cause of this failure, more important than substantial differences between the participants. As a leader, he concedes to have been overcharged by the task since he inevitably lacked some of the necessary capacities to build an integral party. One of the main lessons he drew from this experience was that a strong group was necessary right from the beginning which could not only pool together the competences and perspectives of its members in view of a shared vision, but also accomplish the necessary shadow work to compensate and transform individual or collective shortcomings whenever they appear. A similar group was missing in the case of dynamik5.

Another aspect which, in Gil’s view, might have rather harmed than supported the development of dynamik5 was a donation of 1 million Swiss Francs given to the association. Since this money had not been earned through “hard work,” it in some sense prevented the organization from growing organically – and to build up the competences necessary to generate surplus income by its own efforts. As a result of these difficulties, dynamik5 stayed a social project trying to introduce new ideas into public discourse instead of becoming a political party. Lately, it was fused with Holon and thus does not exist as an independent organization anymore.

Gil Ducommun himself then took a creative “time out” during which he published After Capitalism. The economic order of an integral society (2005, in German). After that, he tried to find other, more adequate ways of institutionalizing integral politics, still in view of establishing an integral political party. This time, he started off along with a few of his close companions, experts from the fields of economics, psychotherapy, as well as party-politics proper. A draft concept was written of what they thought to be basic principles of integral politics. On this basis, several more members were carefully selected. As a result, the so-called core group (“Kerngruppe”) of 20 people emerged who later founded ip as an association. Before that, the core group, made up of ten men and ten women from different social contexts and areas of work, further elaborated the draft concept during a process of about two years of intensive work and cooperation.

The result of this creative and mutually transformative process was a white paper (“GLIP”) of 52 pages on the foundations of integral politics (“Grundlagenpapier, GLIP,” www.integralepolitik.ch/d/images/stories/dateien/dokumente/glp1.pdf) which now constitutes the substantial theoretical basis of the association. The paper deals with central dimensions of the
current global crisis and proposes new ideas on how they could be addressed in an integral way. Amongst the basic elements of integral politics which the paper elaborates on are integral consciousness, integral economy, integral ecology, integral health, integral education, migration, and what ip calls “peace politics,” a new way of dealing with transnational conflicts in a globalizing world.

At this point, a few remarks are due with respect to the question: Why a party? This question is indeed asked again and again by people from the cultural creative sphere who are interested in ip’s work. In fact, “integral” and “party” seem to be contradictions at first sight, since the integral vision wants to unite and view the whole picture instead of mere partisan and partial truths. Instead, it is often suggested that integral actors introduce their values and perspectives into already existing parties and enter into a dialogue with them.

ip’s answer to these concerns, meanwhile formulated in a short FAQ text, is that firstly, integral consciousness, thinking, and feeling, for the moment, actually is only a part – and a rather small part – of the spectre of social and political world views. However, being a part that will try to look for integral perspectives and solutions, ip neither can nor should speak for all, even if it is prepared to perceive and appreciate all other opinions and perspectives. All it can and does try to do is to bring new ideas into the political process and to take care of promoting a political style of respect, awareness, and constructive cooperation. In order to become visible as a new culture, it needs its own “container” where integrally minded people can come and work together both to substantiate and concretize their vision and to publicly stand up for them.

However, ip is also only part of a larger integral movement, more precisely, its political part or aspect. The emerging integral consciousness is constantly gaining ground in most (western) societies. Now, it is in need of a political voice making it more clearly visible in the public and political scenes. While a growing number of non-political networks, NGOs, institutes, and educational centers give birth to integrally informed citizens, ip offers a structure for the latter to channel their efforts in order to bring about a deeper, integral transformation of society as a whole. Thus, ip sees itself as that part of the integral movement which brings together those who wish to take responsibility for implementing the integral vision on a larger scale. Let us now take a closer look at ip’s notion of “integral.”

What is Integral?

As mentioned before, ip’s predecessor organizations still operated on the basis of a different terminology, mainly using the term “holistic” (“ganzheitlich”) to describe their “spiritual, eco-social, European” aims. The term “integral” is being used only since the publication of Gil’s book in 2005. In this sense, ip is giving itself a broader basis. Nevertheless, the main theoretical impulses of dynamik5 have been almost fully integrated into ip’s thinking and position building.

ip’s use of the term “integral” is strongly inspired by Ken Wilber and Jean Gebser – yet without becoming dogmatic about either of them while elaborating ip’s own interpretation of

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integral in view of the concrete challenges of Swiss and European politics. ip’s white paper therefore makes clear: “What ‘integral politics’ means, cannot be found in any encyclopaedia. It still has to be thought out, palpated and invented.” In this document, the term “integral” is defined first, following Gebser, as a newly emerging era within human cultural history, and second, as the level of consciousness of a growing number of people within this era, with consonant attitudes, ways of thinking and being-in-the-world.

On an individual level, integral consciousness is able to de-identify with thoughts and feelings while watching them from the perspective of a timeless observer (witness) and rather identifying with consciousness itself. Therefore, it senses the unity of all things and beings, an outlook which is able to generate a loving and compassionate attitude towards all things. As such, integral consciousness is thought to give birth to the new culture which Gebser was probably the first to call “integral” (GLIP, p. 3).

On a cultural level, integral consciousness thus increasingly transcends either-or dualisms such as of body and mind, left/right or better/worse by inclusive, intuitive ways of thinking and acting from the centre of the heart. Whilst helping to give up an exaggerated adhesion to materialistic values and attitudes in favour of a more balanced integration of the multiple human needs and potentials (such as social, emotional, spiritual ones), it enables creative freedom to emerge. At the same time, competitive logics are replaced by an attitude which seeks the good, the true, and the beautiful in every contribution, i.e., through transcending and including ever more aspects into ever broader perspectives with the aim to “protect and promote the greatest depth for the greatest span.”

Thus, instead of arguing against what it holds to be inappropriate, ip rather tries to develop positive visions. By the way, this self-set standard has important implications for ip’s future interaction with other political parties. It is therefore aware that the way it communicates with external partners, counterparts, and competitors will be a decisive challenge to the organization’s identity and reputation (see GLIP, p. 52).

Integral consciousness in ip’s understanding invites the individual to an ongoing self-development in the sense of ever growing awareness of the levels of being and of one’s own trajectory through states and stages (GLIP, p. 7). In view of policy outlooks and society as a whole, ip holds that integral politics is liberal in that it promotes the creative freedom and responsibility of the person. It is social in that it considers a factual equality of chances as a primary aim in order to enable the personal growth of all individuals. It therefore consequently rejects an unlimited freedom to enrich oneself and to accumulate power on the account of others. Integral politics is ecological, since it wants to arrange economy and consumption in a sustainable way bringing it into utmost harmony with the needs of nature of which we are all a part. And it is spiritual in that it values immaterial qualities and vertical, transformational development at least as much as material quantities and horizontal innovation (GLIP, p. 6).

These principles have led ip to develop quite visionary goals which, as of today, might still look somewhat radical, but which ip is very realistic about. For the group is fully aware of the

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fact that integral consciousness at a cultural level is still in the process of emergence, and that therefore some of the more ambitious goals will only be achievable within one or two generations. However, ip is convinced that “time is working in our favour,” since to the extent that today’s materialistically oriented society and economy are confronted with their limits, and the more obvious the problems become which the latter bring about, the more people will have the courage to search for new solutions, individually as well as collectively. They will recognize, in ip’s presumption, that the present, mainly materially motivated striving for ever more possessions and consumption at some point has to be limited both for the sake of personal development, of social welfare and of democracy. At the same time, people are expected to increasingly share the experience: If we are able to gradually limit our material demands to what really serves our lives, we will become free to detect and live our social and spiritual potential in a new and fascinating way. We can only achieve true satisfaction and live deep joy if we seek them within ourselves, thus connecting ourselves to wider wholes and learning to transform the world (also) from within.

The Making of an Integral Policy Platform: The Example of Integral Economics

Integral political position building, for ip, is an ongoing process, which is why the governing board has decided not to publish a traditional party platform, but rather to popularize integral political solutions through more flexible single policy papers. Based on the organization’s white paper mentioned above, developing more detailed policy position papers is amongst the most important of ip’s current activities.

In October 2008, a commission for platform elaboration (“Programmkommission”) was created which is in charge of coordinating the work of several thematic working groups each of which is due to concretize, differentiate, and substantiate one of the central chapters of the white paper. The policy papers to be issued by these working groups will either deal with fundamental questions or with issues of high day-to-day actuality and are scheduled to have gone through the internal revision process by summer 2010.

The members of these working groups have largely been recruited during ip’s first two nation-wide gatherings (on November 14th 2008 and Mai 9th 2009) in Bern. Through open invitations to all who consider themselves competent in the respective field, surprisingly resourceful and effective “think tanks” on integral consciousness, integral society, integral economy, integral education and integral peace policies have emerged. As an example, the working group on economics shall be briefly presented.

Economy surely is one of the areas where integral approaches have only begun to be worked out. While Kevin Bowman (IntegralLife) has recently outlined what it means to perceive

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6 As of today, IP has working groups on integral consciousness, integral society, integral education, integral economy and distributive justice, integral health, climate and energy, migration and integral peace politics (see the chart at the end of this article).
economy from the four quadrants and from different stage perspectives, answering the question on how these perspectives could enter a productive dialogue and what actual integral economic solutions could look like, is much less obvious. In this respect ip’s starting point is, on the one hand, its integral anthropology, conceptualizing humans as potentially ever-developing beings with at least four basic needs (material-biological, emotional-affective, mental/intellectual and spiritual) and on the other hand the idea of common welfare. Generally, ip strongly pleads in favour of reintegrating the economic sphere into society as a whole.

For that purpose, ip holds a self-organizing market economy to be indispensable which, however, has to be embedded in effective and commonly backed rules to prevent it from becoming self-sprawling. This means that not only do the so-called external, social, and ecological costs of production and consumption have to be internalized, but, even more important, that the increasingly destructive dynamics of the modern money system would also have to be tamed. “ip” therefore suggests to define limits to the maximum achievable income and revenue, combined with a guaranteed basic income, in order to establish a market economy with a high creative potential, and with revenues more equally shared by all members of society. For the same purpose, ip proposes to establish rules by which concentrated capital would be periodically reallocated in order to offer similar economic chances especially to all young people when commencing their professional careers. According to ip’s economic concept, this will lead to a more locally oriented economy based on small and medium-sized companies that would both be free from the pressure of constant material growth and from the one-sided financial interests and influences of some mighty few.

In view of making this vision understandable also to those people who until now have not reflected on the principles, culture, and effects of today’s economy in similar depth themselves, ip is fully aware that its vision has to be outlined and explained carefully. And of course, intermediate measures have to be defined, helping to implement the greater vision step by step. Right now, ip’s working group on integral economics is in the process of discussing and substantiating its central ideas which is being experienced as a very fruitful and sometimes also controversial endeavour, since the group consists of members with rather different backgrounds: professors, economists, managers, entrepreneurs, engineers as well as people with just a general interest in integral economics and business.

It is therefore no scarcity that in one or the other working group, conflicts arise both with regard to the design of substantial policy suggestions and, for example, to integral leadership and the coordination of the groups themselves. In this respect, some of them have already experienced difficult moments of personal and relational tension. To this point, however, similar situations were always resolved though transparent dialogue, combined with careful self inquiry and communication which, as a rule, not only leads to the deepening or even renewal of the respective member’s commitment to the group and its working project, but also to processes of personal and collective transformation.

The working group on integral economics, for example, has recently worked out a conflict on several fundamental issues through taking all the necessary time to carefully listen to all opinions

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and to actively speak with those voicing minority positions until a common understanding or even consensus was found. In this case, several advisory votes were held in the course of the discussion. In the end, a (former) representative of a minority position even agreed to write a text from the perspective of the majority argument. The principle of consent (within which an issue is discussed until no more legitimate objection is raised against a particular solution) is indeed one of the central elements of ip’s working culture.

How Does ip Operate?

As the however-scant glimpse onto ip’s working group on integral economics has shown, the modes and culture of cooperation within ip are probably as important as the substantive aspects of policy development. In fact, this is true for all of ip’s units or “holons” on all levels. With regard to ip’s internal functioning, three interrelated aspects can be distinguished: the association’s general working culture, the procedures of developing contents and the emergence of structures and mechanisms adequate to an integral organization.

Firstly, the meetings both of the core group and of any other thematic working group are not merely intellectual processes, but also integrate moments of silence and meditation, shadow work, physical exercise, and dance. Integral political culture as practiced within ip is understood as addressing all senses, turning political commitment into an experience of meaningful activity, and an expression of joy, ease and celebrating life. Rituals are used to create awareness and centring and to foster individual, as well as collective transformation. Emerging conflicts are carefully looked at and thoroughly solved. This usually happens through creating spaces of awareness allowing to bring in and to voice all aspects appearing relevant from perspectives of the people involved. These perspectives are then balanced out until some sort of consensus or consent is found providing sufficient common ground for further activities. Within ip, the president is not entitled to put his or her foot down and lay down the law in cases of conflict.

This ongoing experience strengthens the group’s collective identity, often engenders transformative processes, and sometimes leads to surprisingly creative solutions. As a result, a specific kind of integral working culture, based on a set of guiding rules, practices, attitudes and habits has evolved over the past three years. It can be described as a culture of presence and awareness, of silence and creativity, of conscious dialogue and transparent conflict resolution which continues to define and shape ip’s work.

In order to support the necessary but sometimes difficult processes of collective shadow work, several roles and bodies have been created. Besides the principle of consent (see above) and the continuous emphasis on inviting individual perceptions, objections, and feelings, one of the central roles in all of ip’s internal processes is the so-called “process observer (Prozessbeobachter).” For any working session, one of the participants is assigned the role of carefully watching how the others interact with each other and to report his impressions in the end. In case of perceived tensions, the process observer can interrupt the session and call for resentments to be resolved immediately.

In order to deal with conflicts and cases of discord that cannot be resolved through the practices described above, ip is continuously creating new bodies and mechanisms. Currently,
these are an ombudsman, individual and collective supervision, working groups for mediation and for giving feedback with regard to the quality of single processes as well as of the functioning of ip’s internal dynamics in general. Even though some of these new forms still have to find their ultimate shape, in their totality they probably already do provide a suitable frame for quality control, as well as for further developing ip’s integral working culture.

Secondly, during the substantial process of elaborating contents, all the thematic working groups follow similar schedules and practices which also go back to the early phase of the core group’s work and are now supported by one of ip’s members, a specialist in organizational development. The process of content development usually starts with the creation of a common vision, for example through techniques of “presencing” (i.e., creating awareness for oneself, the group, and the subject or situation in question) and of collective intelligence (i.e., inviting solutions and letting them “appear” from collective, transrational realms of consciousness). This vision is then broken down step by step into more concrete “real utopias” before elaborating single, concrete policy suggestions and projects in yet more detail. In the end, the respective processes are always critically reflected and their results appreciated in one way or another.

A considerable challenge to the quality of ip’s working culture constitutes of the organization’s rapid growth during the past year. In comparison to the time when ip was officially founded, it has experienced an enormous increase in membership after participating in the Congress for Integral Politics in August 2008,\(^8\) where for the first time it became visible to a larger audience. Within only 1½ years, ip grew from 20 to 326 members in May 2009. And between November 2009 and January 2010, 101 new companions joined the association, now counting 492 members (as at Feb. 18\(^{th}\) 2010). This includes active, ideational, and sustaining members and has, by the way, been achieved solely by mouth-to-mouth propaganda, combined with strategic informational activities in like-minded contexts. More noteworthy public campaigns to make it known to a wider public have so far been strictly subordinated to a rather silent, organic growth and are envisaged by the association’s leadership only after a certain number of members has been attained. If the steady growth process continues, however, it is hoped that in summer 2010, the quantitative basis will be sufficiently convincing to turn ip into a regular political party.

In order to nurture and perpetuate its working culture as the organization grows, the core group initiated a working group on internal culture, which is taking care of cultivating and fostering ip’s basic rules and principles and of developing them further. Also, members are increasingly offered training and enhancement, both to experience and internalize ip’s culture and to promote their own self-development.

\(^8\) The first Congress for Integral Politics took place in St. Arbogast/Austria from August 3rd to 10th 2008. It attracted over 100 participants from Germany, Austria and Switzerland and was completely sold out. During a whole week, five plenary lectures, dozens of workshops and other activities, from music to dance and project development, helped to shape an integral political spirit, which is supposed to be perpetuated in future follow-up conferences. For more information see: www.integrale-politik.org.
Holacracy avant la lettre

Finally, ip’s growth also constitutes a challenge with regard to its internal structures and organizational development. While for the first two years ip’s activities were still quite easy to coordinate due to the limited number of 20 participants plus some well manageable working groups, its steady increase in membership has created the necessity of dynamically emerging new bodies and structures. Firstly, in order to disburden the board members, a permanent office was established in January 2008. It is run by a part-time worker and takes care of the day-to-day administrative business. Secondly, the newly arriving members had and continually have to be integrated, organized, and cross-linked on regional and local levels. Thus, in the period of a few months, regional groups emerged in Basel, Bern, St. Gallen, Glarus, Lausanne, Luzern and Zurich – with more to come – and large nation-wide gatherings are now held twice a year. This shows that ip is now also increasingly represented in the French speaking part of Switzerland.

Furthermore, new working groups and commissions continue to appear in view of the various emerging tasks and challenges. Besides the already mentioned bodies (such as the core group, the board and the commissions for platform editing and integral education/culture), the most recent creations are commissions for organizational development, public relations, finance and for coordinating regional activities. Also working groups on party formation, feedback and for mediation are about to be formed. Besides that, ip is currently inviting appropriate personalities to join the association’s patronage and advisory board (see the organizational chart at the end of this article).

As a result, a rather differentiated structure has evolved which ip is thoughtfully and persistently optimizing in an ongoing process of feedback and reflection. In many respects, this structure and its underlying practices therefore correspond to holocratic principles as proposed by pioneers of integral organization like Gerard Endenburg, Brian Robertson, and others, even though these were not explicitly known to ip’s members when they started their project in the first place. In the meantime however, holacracy has become a much-debated issue inside the commission for organizational development and might soon be adopted as an overall aim and guiding principle by ip’s board. This concerns both organizational development and the quality of working processes. On the one hand, dynamic growth is invited, although it is carefully channelled and framed to ensure ip’s overall substantial and structural coherence without any other general control being exercised from above. On the other hand, holocratic principles and practices such as the equal value of all participants’ perspectives, the shifting of roles and competences, and the continuous observation, reflection and evaluation of ongoing processes have been in place since the beginning.

In particular, organic holocratic development is permanently reflected and facilitated by the commission for organizational development, while the future feedback group is supposed to look after eventual disruptions of the integral flow, for example by monitoring implicit and explicit conflicts and by promoting their careful, constructive and transparent solution in order to avoid new collective shadows from emerging. As indicated above, one of the reasons why careful self-reflection and shadow work are central to ip’s working culture on all levels is that the experience is continually reflected and facilitated by the commission for organizational development, while the future feedback group is supposed to look after eventual disruptions of the integral flow, for example by monitoring implicit and explicit conflicts and by promoting their careful, constructive and transparent solution in order to avoid new collective shadows from emerging. As indicated above, one of the reasons why careful self-reflection and shadow work are central to ip’s working culture on all levels is that the experience

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of unresolved problems with communication and personal as well as collective shadows inhibiting effective political work were among the main motivations to establish and organize ip the way it was in the first place. Meanwhile, the qualities acquired in the course of three years of integral politicising as described here seem to be part of ip’s “Unique Selling Proposition” and one of the main sources of ip’s success and attractiveness within the Swiss cultural creative sphere.

Of Whom Does “ip” Consist?

How can ip’s membership be described and characterized? Although no systematic sociological data have been gathered until now with regard to the personal, professional, and motivational background of ip’s supporters, we can give an intuitive analysis based on more or less long-term and intimate knowledge of the organization. From this perspective, ip’s members, activists, and supporters are a colourful mixture of people from different age groups and various social and professional backgrounds. Most of them, however, can certainly be attributed to what Paul H. Ray and Ruth Anderson call the “cultural creative” sector of society.10

The age span of ip members reaches from about 25 to 85. About half of its members are women. ip’s members are part of all social strata. Their professional backgrounds are quite heterogeneous, reaching from managers, professors and artists to farmers, craftsmen, and housewives and housemen. Many of them have an intellectual background and/or work in the fields of education, therapy, ecology, communication or health and quite a few are self employed.

With regard to the “upper left” characteristics, ip’s supporters are generally rather conscious of cultural- as well as self-development, most have been following their own personal and spiritual growth paths from traditional through rational, critical to post-rational and integral levels for many years. Also, the individual portraits of the members of the core group, for example, show that the majority have already gone through major transformational experiences in their lives.11

Among ip’s members and supporters’ community, there are people with long-term experience in social and political work and ones who preferred not to get involved with the traditional political business – that is, until they discovered ip. Since this organization is perceived and experienced as being different both in terms of its contents and its practices and behaviour, it functions as an umbrella for the cultural creative sector which until now has probably been under-represented politically and in some sense lacked an appropriate vehicle.

Moreover, ip gives its adherents the possibility not only to gather with likeminded people, but also to experience the joy of experimentation, collective creativeness and intelligence and of the transformational and sometimes even healing effect of an integral dealing with conflicts. In so doing, it offers chances for meaningful activity, allows for the emergence of common creative

11 See http://www.integrale-politik.ch/d/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=48
projects of multiple kinds and helps to give the growing integrally-minded community a visible face and a clear-cut voice.

To what extent ip will be able to maintain its character or will to have to adapt to more traditional practices once it actually enters the day-to-day political business, is an open question. For the moment at least, most of ip’s followers are basically interested in serving their common task as an expression of their spirituality rather than in making a career within the organization. But when the development of the association reaches the point where it will become a political party, qualified members will have to step forward as candidates for political duties, first on a local and cantonal, later also on a national level. In contrast to most other politicians, however, they might not do so with the intent of being re-elected, but to bring new impulses into society by using the available political vessels.

Why in Switzerland?

To our knowledge, Switzerland is the first country to see a party appear based on an integral worldview and explicitly calling itself integral, while elsewhere in Europe, either no efforts have been made in this direction or similar efforts have lead to different results. In Germany, for example, which has a rather old and therefore differentiated integral community, part of which had organized itself under the roof of the “Integral Forum” about ten years ago, no integral political force has emerged thus far. The political party which probably comes closest to ip was founded in 2001 and calls itself “the violets – for spiritual politics” (“Die Violetten – Partei für spirituelle Politik“). The “violets” have meanwhile taken part in several regional elections in Germany, as well as the elections to the European parliament and the Bundestag in 2009, where they received 48,000 (EP) and 32,078 (BT) votes respectively. However, even though the party cooperates with ip, for example in 2008 while organizing the Congress for Integral Politics, it has so far neither adopted an integral theoretical basis nor developed an internal “lower left” working culture comparable to ip’s.

In contrast, France, another big neighbour of Switzerland, lacks a comparable integral community but has seen the foundation of “La France en action” (France in action), which seems to be the political force most similar to ip. It was founded as a party in 2004 and received over 265.000 votes in the European parliamentary elections in that same year. However, even though like ip, it aims at bridging the traditional left-right cleavages, the programmatic outlook of “La France en action” is primarily humanistic and ecological, with its main emphasis on ecology and biodiversity.

While ip does keep a loose relationship with “the violets” and other groups in Germany, there are, for the time being, no formal contacts with groups in France. Since earlier attempts to launch transnational and European initiatives had failed (see earlier section), ip has chosen to focus its resources and energy primarily on its own country in order to take root within Swiss politics and society before engaging in more ambitious partnerships again.

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12 See: www.die-violetten.de.
It will be interesting to see how ip will take its place within the Swiss political landscape and develop relations with the existing political parties and relevant actors in Switzerland. In view of successfully launching integral political projects, it will certainly be helpful that the Swiss political system is a direct democracy and traditionally based on the principle of concordance, i.e., structurally integrating all political parties represented in parliament into the decision-making processes and all major parties into the government itself, the so-called Bundesrat (see http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konkordanzdemokratie).

This means, first and foremost, that the highest political power is with the citizens themselves. They not only have the right to elect the members of the two houses of parliament, but also to cast their ballot on (changes of) laws, as well as of the constitution itself and, more so, to take initiatives in order to try and insert new political ideas into the constitution. A second important characteristic of political life in Switzerland is that even the strongest political party or parties can never dominate all the other forces but have to cooperate with them in a way that also respects the position and interests of the minorities in order to reach sustainable political majorities.

In other words, the Swiss political system itself in some sense already resembles a “holocratic structure” or at least incorporates quite a few holocratic principles. Above all, the tradition of concordance, giving individual (ideas) and small parties a much bigger chance to be heard by the main political forces and thus, to play their part in the political concert than in many other countries. This is further supported for example by the lack of a five-percent rule, by important positions being subject to direct elections, and by even seemingly small initiatives having a genuine chance to launch constitutional amendments. All of these factors are likely to make it easier for ip to bring new ideas into political discourse, as well as to gradually promote a wholly new political culture.

Another reason why Switzerland might be a fruitful ground for new political ideas is the fact that the country has always tried to stay independent and to pursue its own way. Furthermore, it is the richest country in the world. Therefore, an understanding that even more material growth will probably not lead to a higher quality of life and level of personal happiness but will rather cause more social and ecological problems might be stronger here than in other parts of the world. Finally, the high standard of living along with a good educational system and a well functioning infrastructure offers favourable preconditions to search for the new, more sustainable and more sensible way of social and economic development, which, as ip is convinced, a growing number of people are longing for.

At this point, it is premature to report about what differences an integral frame of reference really makes on a larger scale, since ip is not communicating substantially with “conventional” political parties so far. However, its general emphasis on a-perspectivity, on “as well as” in stead of “either-or” and on evaluating without (ad)judging implies appraising other parties’ positions for what they are rather than competing with them. It implies a new way of politicizing, of going up to meet other parties without engaging in aggressiveness or role-playing – and thus, a new culture of policy-and decision-making.
The starting shot of this challenging endeavour has recently been time-phased to September 18th 2010. On this day, ip plans to announce its official foundation as a political party with an integral ceremony of handing over its integral political vision to the Swiss people. The ceremony is to be held on the Bundesplatz (Federal Square) in Bern, just in front of the Swiss Parliament, and next to the central government buildings of the Swiss Federation and of those of the mighty National Bank, in other words in the heart of the country’s capital.

For an audio-visual impression of ip’s culture of self-presentation, see the Swissgerman-French video clip:

www.integrale-politik.ch/d/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=76&Itemid=93

For more information about ip, please confer to www.integrale-politik.ch (German website) or www.politique-integrale.ch (French website) or contact ip’s office at: info@integrale-politik.ch.