

# Towards A New Art of Integration

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Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but the little fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel he turns, he never develops harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge. But even that meager, fragmentary participation, by which individual members of the State are still linked to the Whole, does not depend upon forms which they spontaneously prescribe for themselves [...] it is dictated to them with meticulous exactitude by means of a formulary which inhibits all freedom of thought. The dead letter takes the place of living understanding [...]. (Friedrich Schiller, 1982 [1795]), p. 43)

The present profound malaise is really a form of growing pains. The new world for which the old world is in travail is still like an embryo. The components are all there; what is lacking is the integration, the completeness which is organic consciousness, binding together of the different elements, making them breathe and come to life. (S. Radhakrishnan, 1940, p. 91)

[...] integration need not demand a unitary singularity but can find expression in partial, local and even fractal possibilities. Such a soft wholeness joyfully embraces difference and multiplicity as expressions of the possibilities of wholeness where the uni-versal allows in the multi-versality of the kaleidoscopic dance of consciousness. (Marcus Bussey, 2012, p. 3)

## Introduction and Invitation

Integration is an important calling of life, self, culture, society and the world. But its significance is rarely realized especially in our present day world as we live a fragmentary existence and valorize differences. Social and discursive movements in the last half a century have rightly challenged us to cultivate differences but cultivation of difference is different from valorization. Differences also have threads of connections among them—they also seek to be part of a respectful and dignified emergent wholeness. Differences are also part of an emergent journey of integration, an integration which does not suppress differences but which build upon their flourishing. This calls for a new art of cultivation of identity and differences and making both co-travelers and co-painters in a new art of integration which may be called *differential*

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*integration*. It is a new art of integration which is not totalitarian and oppressive but rather seeks to help us realize our connectedness and potentiality. This can help us in creatively crossing our boundaries and learn across.

This new art of integration which invites us now is different from the earlier discourses and practices of integration which were imprisoned in a logic and machinery of strong integration. It is an art of weak and gentle integration compared to the telos of strong integration in modern self, society and polity. The discourse of integration in social sciences as well as in the wider public discourse in modernity, for example, in the discourse of nationalism and self, has been imprisoned in a logic of strong integration which has been source of much violence, suffering and annihilation of potentiality. It has been imprisoned in a logic of assertive and exclusionary sovereignty (cf. Giri, 2009a). In this place we need to cultivate an art of weak and gentle integration where integration begins with realization of weakness<sup>2</sup> and vulnerability and where this acknowledged vulnerability becomes the lubricant and binding thread for integration as an unfolding, evolving and emergent journey of realization of connectedness and wholeness. This is facilitated by transformation of sovereignty to shared sovereignties and realizing non-sovereignty (cf. Dallmayr, 2005). If sovereignty propounds the cult of mastery, non-sovereignty urges us to serve and share which help us in our art of gentle and weak integration. This involves artistic processes of creativity and nurturance and is facilitated by the work of creative art in politics, society and spirituality (cf. Ankersmit, 1996).

In this essay I explore pathways of a new art of integration and then explore how it can help our learning across boundaries.

## **Cultivating Weak and Gentle Integration**

As we explore pathways of a new art of integration, it is helpful to begin with earlier sociological discourses about it. David Lockwood had distinguished between social and system integration:

Social integration refers to the principles by which individuals or actors are related to one another in a society; system integration refers to the relationships between parts of a society or social system. Despite the use of the word 'integration' there is no assumption that the relationships so described are harmonious. The terms social integration and system integration can embrace both order and conflict, harmony and contradiction. (Scott & Marshall, 2009, par. 2)

This distinction has influenced the subsequent distinction of Habermas between system world and life world. But in this essay I am concerned not only with the distinction between life world or system world nor between social and system integration. I explore a new art of integration in

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<sup>2</sup> Cultivating weakness becomes a deliberate act of choice and responsibility given the cult of mastery and strength through out histories especially in the modern times. Cultivating weakness belongs to long spiritual traditions of humanity where one wishes not to have an overbearing and overpowering presence rather than be weak.

both the spheres of the social and the systemic, life world and system world, in the process helping us to overcome the boundaries between them and learn across.

A new art of integration is a weak and gentle one. Cultivating weak and gentle integration is facilitated by building on and cultivating weakness in different domains of life and thought, for example, weak naturalism, weak nationalism, weak epistemology, weak ontology, weak identity, weak difference, weak theology and weak pedagogy. Weak naturalism<sup>3</sup> as a companion in quest for weak integration helps us realize that we are part of nature but we are not determined by it and we should eschew the arrogance of human mastery and social control (Habermas, 2003; Strydom, 2009, 2011). Habermas has recently explored weak naturalism which tells us

how we are socialized into an irreducible normative ‘space of reasons’ in a way that is consistent with our being products of natural evolution thereby reconciling Kant with Darwin and establishing the ‘right way to naturalize the mind.’ (Flynn, 2009, par. 4)

Habermas also talks about a “soft naturalism” which “embraces a non-reductionist account of human language and thought in which normativity and intersubjectivity are central” (Flynn, 2009, par. 1).

Cultivating weak naturalism building upon works of scholars such as Habermas can be accompanied by cultivating weak nationalism which interrogates the construction of nation-state as a naturalized entity propagating the cult of unitary strength at the expense of the plurivocality of beings, societies, languages, nations and cultures. Weak epistemology in this journey makes our epistemic certainty humble and urges us to realize the limits of methods in our scientific understanding as well as social life. All these are accompanied by weak ontology which urges us to realize that ontological cultivation is not only a cultivation of mastery of the self but also cultivation of its humility, fragility, weakness and servanthood facilitating blossoming of non-sovereignty and shared sovereignties (cf. Vattimo, 1999). Weak ontology helps us realize that both identities and differences have inbuilt limitations and they ought to realize their own weakness as a starting point for communication and sharing through cultivation of weak identities and weak differences. This, in turn, is facilitated by realizing that all identities have a dimension of non-identity as differences have also a dimension of non-difference. If we realize relationship between identity and difference from the starting points of non-identity and non-difference it helps us realize a new art of relationship rather than just the relationship between identity and difference which is often talked about now (cf. Connolly, 1991).

Gianni Vattimo is noted for nurturing pathways of weak ontology. Vattimo’s ontology is weak as opposed to a strong one. It also brings a post-metaphysical engagement to religion; it does not

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding weak naturalism what Piet Strydom (2011, p. 329) recently writes is helpful:

By contrast with strong naturalism and anti-naturalism, weak naturalism allows two things at once and at the same time: ontological continuity between nature and socio-cultural life, within the framework of which an evolutionary explanation of the grounds of human sociality is certainly possible; and epistemological discontinuity according to which the socio-cultural world, without denying the interference of neutral or biological factors and the need to take such restraints into account under certain conditions, must be studied in the irreducible pertaining to it as the special world in which social actors become involved.

dismiss religion, rather pleads for weakening some of its entrenched belief systems. That way there is an important connection between weak naturalism of Habermas and weak ontology of Vattimo but this has been rarely explored in the field of contemporary critical theory. Habermasian weak naturalism is part of his recent effort to create pathways of dialogue among naturalism, religion, science, religion and the secular public sphere. Weak naturalism is connected to multidimensional learning processes across borders especially between the religious and the secular where they are not fixed entities or finalities. Similarly Vattimo's project of weak ontology weakens fixed construction of religious identities and has a potential to make them partner in learning though both Vattimo and Habermas mainly operate within a Judeo-Christian frame and they could embody much more concretely learning from different religious, secular and spiritual traditions of the world, which we witness in a contemporary seeker such as Fred Dallmayr (1991, 2007) who also talks about practical ontology. Dallmayr's practical ontology is an ontology of learning, action and meditation and is part of what I have elsewhere called meditative verbs of co-realizations (Giri, 2012). Weak ontology and practical ontology have an integral dimension of transcendence as an ongoing journey of overcoming the existing closures and that way is related to what Victor Frankl (1967) had long ago called "dimensional ontology" which is animated by striving for transcendence.<sup>4</sup>

With weak ontology and dimensional ontology with its striving to realize the spiritual dimension of being, we can cultivate weak theology as a companion in the journey of weak integration. This makes theology weak rather than strong which then facilitates border-crossing dialogues among religions and theological systems. Weak theology is also facilitated by the rise of practical spirituality in religions which relativize pronounced religious beliefs and dogmas and lay stress on practice, especially transformative practice, to transform suffering.<sup>5</sup> Finally weak pedagogy helps us realize that as educators we can not perpetuate the logic of strength imposing our views on others, especially children, but persuade them to take part in collective transformative co-learning where as educators we realize, as Sri Aurobindo challenges us to realize, "nothing can be taught" (cf. Giri, 2009b). Weak pedagogy can transform all of us, including some who fashion themselves as teachers, into learners—co-learners.

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<sup>4</sup> In the words of Frankl:

One characteristic of human existence is its transcendence. That is to say, man transcends his human existence towards the world; but more than this he also transcends his being towards an *ought*. When he does this, he rises above the level of the somatic and the psychic and enters the realm of the genuinely human. This realm is constituted by a new dimension, the *noetic*, the dimension of the spirit. Thus there can be no talk of parallelism in the sense of dualism, nor of an identity in the sense of monism. Nevertheless, in spite of all the ontological variations of the somatic, psychic, and noetic, the anthropological unity and wholeness of a human being are preserved and saved as soon as we turn from an analysis of existence to what I call dimensional ontology.

Rising spiritually above one's psychopathological condition might also be called the existential act. By this very act man opens and enters the noological dimension of being; nay, he even creates this dimension as a dimension of his own. (Frankl, 1967, pp. 129-130)

<sup>5</sup> Weak theology is at works in movements such as Habitat for Humanity (cf. Giri, 2002a) and Swadhyaya (cf. Giri, 2008) where participants emphasize not so much belief or doctrinal content but the need for building homes and collective institutions of well-being. We can look at Bellah's project of beyond belief as also contributing to the art of weak theology.

## Cultivating Differential Integration, Dynamic Harmonization and Dynamic Emptiness

Processes of weakening of entrenched identities and differences through cultivation of non-identities and non-differences lead to a new art of differential integration. Our earlier models of integration were based upon annihilation of differences. But the new art of integration builds upon our differences both in the ordinary sense as well as in the sense Derrida (1990) talks about it. Differance in Derrida is characterized by both spatial and temporal refusal to be incorporated into dominating systems. But what Derrida and followers of Derrida have not explored is the emergent art of communication among differences as well as difference. Differential integration transforms both identities and differences as it challenges both identity and difference to realize the responsibility that they have to each other, come out of their closures, embrace each other and learn together.

Cultivating weak and gentle integration is animated by work of dynamic harmony<sup>6</sup> which is different from static harmony which perpetuates the existing logic of status quo and oppressive and humiliating modes of integration. In fact, it is not only dynamic harmony but harmonization as an ongoing process of unsettling and establishing rhythmic connections. Realization of dynamic harmony is an animating concern in many religious and spiritual traditions, for example in Kashmiri Saivism (cf. Deheja, 2006)<sup>7</sup> and Zen Buddhism and a new art of integration as it seeks to realize dynamic integration can build upon dialogue among these traditions of practices and reflections. The theme of dynamic harmonization can be found in many religious, spiritual and political traditions of the world and for cultivating it as an aspect of a new path of integration we need to learn across boundaries.<sup>8</sup> There is a tradition of quest for dynamic *sunyata*

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<sup>6</sup> In his work on Japanese religion Bellah (1985) presents us the work of dynamic harmony in the following way:

What has been said about the unity of man, nature and divinity should not be interpreted as a static identity. Rather it is a harmony in tension. The gratitude one owes to superordinate benevolent entities is not an easy obligation but may involve the instant sacrifice of one's deepest interests or even of one's life. Union with the ground of being is not attained in a state of coma but very often as the result of some sudden shock in daily living. Something unexpected, some seeming disharmony, is more apt to reveal the Truth than any formal orderly teaching. Japanese art and aesthetic attitude toward nature are also concerned with the unexpected ... (pp. 62-63)

<sup>7</sup> Realization of dynamic harmony is also an animated aspiration in paths of Kashmir Saivism. As Harish Deheja (2006) writes about it:

Kashmir Saivism postulates that Parama Shiva contains the entire universe, pulsating within it, just as the seed of the mighty *nyagrodha* potentially contains the entire tree. At the immanent level, the transcendent *prakashavimarshamaya* splits into *prakasha* and *vimarsha*, Shiva and Shakti, *aham* and *idam*, I and this, subject and object, held together in pulsating, *dynamic harmony* [...] At every level there is differentiation into subject and object, *aham* and *idam*, but the differentiation is based in, and unified by the non-duality of consciousness. (p. 422; emphasis added)

Kashmir Saivism seeks to realize dynamic harmony by realizing differentiation without dualism. Realization of non-duality is also an animated goal in the paths of Buddha and Kashmiri Saivism possibly has contributed to this pursuit of non-duality the work of dynamic consciousness.

<sup>8</sup> Note for example the teachings of Jesus when he says that he has not come to establish peace but set the father and son against each other. What Jesus is suggesting that unless we transform existing structures of

(emptiness) in Buddhism and it is important to understand the significance of dynamic *sunyata* or dynamic emptiness for realization of dynamic harmony. Dynamic emptiness helps us realize that reality has an integral dimension of emptiness: “things and events are ‘empty’ in that they do not possess any immutable essence [...]” (Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 49). Dynamic emptiness and dynamic harmony contribute to realizing what Sri Aurobindo talks about as dynamic unity as contrasted with unity as a fixed thing or a static state (see Das, 2009).

Dynamic harmony and dynamic emptiness also help us overcome what Arjun Appadurai (2006) calls “anxiety of incompleteness” which generates a propensity to violence. Anxiety of incompleteness as it works through production of majorities and minorities creates anger, terror and violence and a new art of integration urges us to cultivate the fertility and the festivity of incompleteness in place of anxiety of incompleteness. Festivity of incompleteness in place of anxiety helps us to relate to each other in a more open-ended way working through our given prejudices and learn across boundaries. In such modes of engagement and relationship, participants complete each other.<sup>9</sup>

## A New Art of Cross-Fertilization, Solidarization and Cultivation of Weak Strength

Cultivating weak and gentle integration is accompanied by cross-fertilization in knowledge, self and society. In the domain of knowledge, there is need for cross-fertilization between the cognitive and the emotional (cf. Bellah, 1970; Giri, 2009c) and also between faith and knowledge. It also calls for cross-fertilization between the religious and secular (cf. Ratzinger & Habermas, 2006). Such cross-fertilization calls for us to be agents and midwives of cross-fertilization by making our identities, differences and fields of habitation, co-habitation and interaction fertile by ourselves becoming “earthworms” (Giri, 2009c). In the dimension of self there needs to be cross-fertilization between different dimensions of the self, for example the unconscious and the conscious, the rational and the spiritual which then facilitates creativity and helps in learning across boundaries in transformative ways. In the sphere of society, different social groups are also called upon to cross-fertilize their experiences, ideas and interests. For cross-fertilization and learning across boundaries we need to be earthworms making our soils fertile. If Socrates had urged us to be gadflies a new art of integration as it calls for cross-

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domination we cannot realize peace. We can look at the spirit of Marx in this way as well in a spirit of dynamic harmonization.

<sup>9</sup> This can be better understood by drawing on the work of Vygotsky who talks about the process of completion. Building upon Vygotsky, we can cultivate and relate to situations of learning as processes of completion in which we complete each other as in Vygotsky’s pathways “thought is not expressed but completed in the word” (Vygotsky, quoted in Holzman, 2010, p. 33). For Vygotsky,

The relationship of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a movement from thought to word and from word to thought [...] Thought is not expressed but completed in the word. We can, therefore, speak of establishment (i.e. the unity of being and non-being) of thought in the word. Any thought strives to unify, establish a relationship between one thing and another. Any thought has movement. It unfolds. (quoted in Holzman, 2010, p. 33)

The attitude of completion entails upon us to create processes in which we help each other to complete our initial incompleteness. As Louis Holzman argues: “Completion is far more than a critique of dualism. It is a positive (postmodern) move (an activist move) beyond dualism” (Holzman & Newman, 2004, p. 9).

fertilization urges us also to be earthworms thus helping us overcome the limits of anthropocentrism and realizing “cross-species dignity” (cf. Nussbaum, 2006).

The logic and machinery of strong integration in modernity has created many wounds in self and society and a new art of integration is also an art of healing<sup>10</sup> our many wounds. It is confronted with the challenge of reconciliation and transformation. Through healing and reconciliation it seeks to realize a new solidarity, a solidarity which is beyond the absolutism of both the collective and the individual. It is a solidarity which nurtures the creative solitude of individuals, at the same time, urging them to be part of vibrant sociality—a soulful togetherness—to realize their potentialities.<sup>11</sup> Solidarity is part of nurturing solidary praxis and multiple journeys of solidarization (see Brunkhorst, 2005). It is a new solidarity which seeks to realize a new strength which is at the same time gentle and weak. If traditions such as Tantra had helped us cultivate strength then the called for new solidarity which cultivates weak strength calls for a new Tantra of human and social development which helps us cultivate weak strength.

A new art of integration also builds upon integration of personality about which Carl G. Jung had taught us a long ago. A new art of integration on the way to realizing a new art of wholeness and solidarity also seeks to integrate the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of self and society. Modern knowledge guided by critical rationality and democratic mobilizations has challenged us to realize the significance of the horizontal. Habermas’s communicative rationality is part of the much needed democratic transformation for horizontal dignity, justice and equality. Religions and spiritual quest have always challenged us not to forget the significance of the vertical and depth dimension of our lives. But in traditional religions and spirituality the vertical

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<sup>10</sup> We should note here the work of social therapy which goes beyond an individualistic model of therapy and creates spaces of togetherness where people can share their pangs, understand each other and heal together. This helps to weaken the egotistic construction of self, other, society and the world and embrace alternative points of view, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Earlier this was being in the lone encounter between the psychoanalyst and the patient but now it is done in a space of caring and concerned togetherness. Lois Holzman who has pioneered such efforts tells us that this is based upon process ontology which in turn is linked to weak ontology. In her essay, “Activating Postmodernism,” Holzman (2006) writes that social therapy re-examines “the very concept of boundaries if new postmodern and relational psychologies are to exist” (p. 14). Social therapy helps us cultivate relational responsibility. For Holzman, “we begin to see social therapy as a method to help ordinary people get free from the constraints of language and from various philosophical pathologies that permeate everyday life” (p. 8). She further writes that social therapy focuses “on the group activity without subjugating the individual.” Social therapy uses a performance and activistic models drawing upon thinkers such as Vygotsky: “[...] performance is an alternative to individualistic, behavioral and cognitive views of what it means to be a person” (p. 16).

<sup>11</sup> Durkheim (1984) had made the distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. The proposed solidarity builds upon organic solidarity. While earlier conceptions of organicity and organic solidarity were bound to varieties of dominating hierarchies, as Durkheim himself had warned us of the dangers of forced division of labour, the proposed solidarity is an ongoing journey of transformation of hierarchy and realization of potential of individuals and societies. Here we can remember what Durkheim had written more than a century ago:

[...] the division of labour only produces solidarity if it is spontaneous, and the degree to which it is spontaneous. But spontaneity must mean not the absence of any deliberate, formal type of violence, but of anything that may hamper, even indirectly, the free unfolding of the social force each individual contains within himself. (Durkheim, 2004, pp. 312-313)

has got imprisoned within many hierarchies of domination and it has also been accompanied by world-rejecting renunciation and flight from responsible and transformative engagement with the world. Ascent has rarely been accompanied by descent and horizontal solidarity with fellow beings. But now we are called for a new art of integration of the vertical and the horizontal as part of an ever-evolving, expanding and mutually interpenetrative circle of the vertical and the horizontal. This calls for bringing together practical discourse and practical spirituality which involves boundary-crossing dialogues, mediations and transformations (cf. Strydom, 2011).

## A New Art of Learning Across Boundaries

Such an art of integration helps us to learn across boundaries in creative ways. It invites us to rethink the very concept and reality of borders and boundaries. Our boundaries are zones of necessary closures and indispensable opening. Without the work of both closure and opening life is not possible as the dance of life in self, culture and society. But unfortunately through out histories as well as in modernity our borders and boundaries have been made entrenched and inviolable but despite this multiple movements across them do take place.

A new art of integration transmutes existing borders into flows of communications. It also helps us to create cross-border spaces as spaces of communication and leaning. We can create cross-border spaces as what Vygotsky calls “zones of proximal development” where we help each other to learn and unfold our potential.<sup>12</sup> For example, we can look at interdisciplinary spaces as spaces creatively nurtured to create zones of proximal development in which different disciplines help each other to develop their potential through mutual interaction. The same can be cultivated vis-à-vis other boundaries such as religions, nations and individuals. Weak and gentle integration and differential integration as emergent processes of self-unfoldment, embrace of the other and conjoint mutual transformations are helpful companions in creating spaces of transformative co-learning and collaborative learning across and inside boundaries in the process transforming entrenched boundaries into zones of necessary closures and transformative openings.

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<sup>12</sup> For Vygotsky,

What we call the Zone of Proximal Development [...] is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under the guidance or collaboration with more capable peers. (quoted in Holzman, 2010, p. 29)

We can also look at Zones of proximal development as zones of cross-fertilization.



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