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Editorial Introduction
to the IR Special Issue on
Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality

Tom Murray,¹ Bruce Alderman,² and Layman Pascal³ (special issue editors)

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³ Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him – this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress – He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc. pretendtomeditate@gmail.com
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Issue Overview

In 2006, Bruce Alderman, who teaches at John F. Kennedy University in the Consciousness and Transformative Studies, Transpersonal Counseling Psychology, and Holistic Counseling Psychology programs, started an online discussion forum titled "Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality: Participatory Spirituality for the 21st Century" (IPS). The official description of the online forum/group begins with an invitation to inquiry:

What paths lie ahead for religion and spirituality in the 21st Century? How might the insights of modernity and post-modernity impact and inform humanity's ancient wisdom traditions? How are we to enact, together, new spiritual visions – independently, or within our respective traditions – that can respond adequately to the challenges of our times? This group is for anyone interested in exploring these questions and tracing out the horizons of an integral post-metaphysical spirituality.

Bruce launched the IPS forum initially in response to Ken Wilber's 2006 publication of Integral Spirituality, with the intent of digesting and evaluating this new phase in Wilber's thought
(especially as presented in this text and the Kosmos trilogy excerpts). Members explored the many threads leading through the "post-metaphysical" and "participatory" turns in contemporary philosophy and theology, considering their implications for integral theory and spirituality in general. The group eventually morphed into a semi-formal, peer-to-peer colloquium and site for ongoing scholarly inquiry.

The first incarnation of the forum was on a platform called Zaadz (and later Gaia) from 2006 to 2010. It then moved to the Ning platform in March of 2010, and finally to Facebook in August of 2013, following the births, deaths, and evolution of platforms during the formative years of social media. Bruce had been a well-known and respected scholar within the integral theory community, and was one of the first in that community to realize a vision of experimenting with the then-new social media technology to nurture an intellectual commons that was fresh, semi-formal, even edgy, compared with traditional scholarly venues such as journals, newsletters, and conferences. The forum (or series of forums by the same name) attracted many participants over the years, and includes a variety of discussion threads ranging from deep dives into scholarly topics to playful or irreverent musings and rants, and includes a whole section containing visual and musical art by its participants. In this Special Issue, we aim to shine a light on this important but obscure corner of the social media noosphere, which has been bubbling on the feral fringes of academic scholarship for some time.

The Facebook forum is alive and well to this day here, and the Ning forum is archived here. The Zaadz forum has been taken down, but many of the key threads from that period have been archived as well. The Ning forum contains almost 800 discussion threads (and an order of magnitude more posts and comments) organized into categories including "Postmetaphysical Visions and Visionaries," "Re-visioning the Great Traditions," "Engagement," "IPS Arts," "Book and Film Club," "IPS Town Hall – For discussion of all things political," and "O’Kenny's Pub (A rustic, slightly seedy little place, named after its dishwasher)". The Ning forum topped out at 168 members, which was apparently the maximum allowed. The Facebook forum is actually a Facebook "group," and does not allow for the type of organization and archival functionality of a true discussion forum, so we cannot give a similar summary of its organization or contents. It does, like all Facebook groups, have a section for Photos and Videos, and one for downloaded files, which contains dozens of essays, musings, and reference materials. The Facebook group clocks in at an impressive 1,960 members as of December 2018.

The original aim of this Special Issue was to curate, synthesize, and/or update material from the forum(s) into a form suitable for an (albeit progressive/innovative) scholarly journal. We invited the forum's primary contributors to submit reflections or updates on the topics they had frequented. But, in keeping with the spirit of the IPS forum, we also wanted to branch playfully away from traditional scholarly journal formats. In addition to scholarly papers, we include artwork and poetry from or inspired by the IPS website. We also sponsored an online dialogue about online dialogues that are focused on topics overlapping with IPS – i.e., we gathered a group of experts to inquire into what it might look like to practice some of what our community "preaches" about spirituality and adult development as we use social media technologies such as discussion forums and video conferencing. Included are links to archives of the dialogues, and summary of key points and themes. This issue also includes a compilation of reflections on a controversial public intellectual, Jordan Peterson, whose podcast/Youtube interviews and writing have "gone viral" on the internet.
within the last year. Peterson's work covers many subjects, but here we focus on his work related to religion, archetypes, and the spiritual side of human meaning-making, since his approach is arguably post-metaphysical. Because Peterson and the phenomena of his popularity and controversy have been a focus of heated conversations within the "integral diaspora," we thought it appropriate to include this conversation in our IPS issue.

The special issue is co-sponsored by the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to cultivating, curating, and hosting the emergence of integrative spirituality in both academic and social venues. (http://www.integralreligion.org).

It should also be noted that prior issues of Integral Review (integral-review.org) include papers related to the theme of IPS. In particular, the August 2018 issue included Zak Stein's "Love in a Time Between Worlds: On the Metamodern 'Return' to a Metaphysics of Eros;" and the March 2014 issue contained Bonnitta Roy's "Born in the Middle: The Soteriological Streams of Integral Theory and Meta-Reality."

As you will see, we have tried to weave various forms of participatory engagement into this issue. In that spirit we invite all readers to post comments and engage in dialogue about this Issue's content. Marco Morelli has graciously created a "channel" for us on the Infinite Conversations discussion forum website. There you will find a topic for each article in this Issue, and a Welcome post showing you how to participate. If this facility is well used, we plan to have discussion spaces for all future issues of Integral Review.

To access this channel, see http://www.infiniteconversations.com/c/ir. Anyone can read. To be able to reply to a topic click the “Sign Up” button and register (no anonymous posts!).

Below, we provide an overview of the textual and multimedia cornucopia of creative offerings that awaits the reader/listener/viewer of this special issue of Integral Review.

Papers

This issue contains the following essays and articles:

- **Bruce Alderman’s** Generative (En)closures, Bubbles, and Magic Circles is a wonderful, updated revisitation of some of the dialogues found in the IPS forum. Bruce has mined the archival threads and fashioned its raw material into a retro-emergent, updated dialogue amongst himself, Layman Pascal, and Edward Berge. The result is a format that allows for a deeply lyrical and imaginative interactive riff, playfully exploring the interweaving/streaming, bubbling/frothing themes within integral postmetaphysical religion and spirituality. Strap on your seatbelt.

- **Bonnitta Roy’s** Why Metaphysics Matters draws on Whitehead, Gebser, and Hartshorne to argue "why metaphysics matters in our current Metamodern era [of] escalating epistemic complexity," and "how adopting a process metaphysical praxis can help us renew our ways of meeting the complexity of the world."

- **Layman Pascal’s** Thus Spake Zarathustra: The First Postmetaphysical Spiritual Hero offers a playful portal into Nietzsche's novel and the proto-post-post-modern lessons offered through
• **Layman Pascal's** *Thus Spake Zarathustra: The First Postmetaphysical Spiritual Hero* offers a playful portal into Nietzsche's novel and the proto-post-post-modern lessons offered through its protagonist. Layman's insightful homage, itself poetic and playful, frames the novel as "a developmental teaching which treats meaning as something we grow towards through exercises that unfold and spiritualize the self – practices instead of beliefs, humor instead of idealism, ecology instead of heaven, and the daring to see beyond our conventional metaphysical assumptions."

• **Edward Berge's** essay *From Capitalism to the Collaborative Commons* links spiritual to economic human concerns, and describes "the slow decline and endgame of capitalism while also highlighting the emerging new socioeconomic system of the collaborative commons." It "criticizes the notion of conscious capitalism" and points toward "a more spiritually oriented economic system." The essay synthesizes Edward’s contributions to a several-thread-long conversation on anti-capitalism from the IPS forum.

• **Oliver Griebel's** essay *Nonduality – Non/duality – Many-One Duality* explores the range of meanings attributed to "non-duality." He notes that "[E]ven in spiritual post-postmodern, postmetaphysical, integral approaches there is still" significant diversity and controversy "about what the spirit or consciousness of Ultimate Reality is: Is it self-conscious, intentional and caring, about its coherence and beauty, worth and life within? Or is it non-reflexive, transrational, 'empty'?"

• **Michael Schwartz's** *Theses on Any Future Philosophy of Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality* offers incisive and considered reflections on the roles that philosophy may play as underlaborer for integral postmetaphysical spirituality; on the scope, promise, and challenges of a postmetaphysical orientation for spiritual practice; on subtle refinements to IPS that an encounter with other postmetaphysical orientations (such as Bhaskar's Critical Realism) might suggest; and on several possible avenues of flight for IPS beyond its dominant Wilberian formulations.

• **Layman Pascal's** second contribution, *Can Anybody Hear?* (the title being a play off the "if a tree falls..." trope), is an attempt to bridge "the semantic gap between Ontology & Epistemology [...and...] provide a metaphysics-of-postmetaphysics" that "unites 'Wilberian' and 'Bhaskarian' types of metatheories." He suggests a reframing of the ontology vs. epistemology dialectic, which too often becomes circular, in terms of "the structure of the Causal and Nondual states – when they are broadened beyond the mentality of meditators, spiritualists, and psychedelic explorers."

• **Tom Murray's** *Knowing and Un-knowing Reality: A Beginner's and Expert's Developmental Guide to Post-Metaphysical Thinking* explores postmetaphysics from several perspectives: developmental, philosophical, historical, phenomenological, and ethical. Murray frames postmetaphysical thinking in terms of the "4th Person Perspective" described in adult developmental theories. This booklet-length text can serves as an extensive overview of postmetaphysical approaches to spirituality and philosophy.

### Alternative Formats

This issue of IR includes several alternative contribution formats:

• **Definitions**: Collected definitions/descriptions of Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality: In anticipation of this special issue we put out a call for definitions and short descriptions of IPS,
and received a variety of perspectives. We share submissions from Bruce Alderman, Layman Pascal, Edward Berge, and Joseph Farley. (Murray's article contains an extensive description).

- **Interview.** David MacLeod organized *The Intersection of Pattern Dynamics and Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality: What Brings Us Together?* an interview/dialogue series with Tim Winton on Winton's "PatternDynamics" framework. Links are provided to the three parts of the interview series, audio recordings of 45-60 minutes each, that primarily focus on how PatternDynamics relates to spirituality. Included is a transcript as well as an overview and detailed topic map of the dialogue.

- **Online forum reflections and curation.** Romancing the Ning – Layman Pascal and Bruce Alderman give us a guided tour of the original the IPS archival material.

- **Special Section: Videoconference dialogue: Deep Dialogue in Social Media Spaces: A Brief Experiment.** Reflective essays on four videoconference recordings of expert dialogues on the theme of supporting "deep dialogue" in online spaces, with essays by Andrew Venezia and Layman Pascal. See the description of this project below.

- **Special Section: Text dialogue on Jordan Peterson's Treatment of Spirituality, Religion, Archetypes, and Metaphysics.** Reflections on the "Jordan Peterson Phenomena – focused on themes of religion, archetypes, and (post-) metaphysics. See the description of this project below.

- **Visual art #1.** Dylan Thomas, an artist and denizen of the IPS forum, has submitted a series of his visual works, a reverent meditation upon what seems "inherently transcendent" about Nature's geometrical symmetries – the "sacred in its structural harmony" as "the architecture of a divine craftsman" (quotes are from the accompanying Artist's Essay).

- **Visual art #2.** Layman Pascal has provided a set of artistic works, some of which were featured within the Arts section of the IPS Ning forum. Kathryn Winter has provided some notes sharing her perspective on the series.

- **Poetry:** In addition to visual art, we received responses to our call for poems related to IPS, from: Edward Berge, Tim Winton, and Bruce Alderman.

### Special Sections

This issue includes two special sections that take a specifically dialogical collaborative approach to reflective knowledge production.

1. **Deep Dialogue in Social Media Spaces: A Brief Experiment**

The IPS forum has included a number of experiments with format and facilitation modalities, and those participating in IPS forums were also active in hosting or mediating other online spaces. Within integrally-informed theory and practice communities there is an, at least implicit, invitation to enact one's theory, by either "practicing what one preaches" so to speak, or by using the theory to reflect upon the writing, reading, or dialogue process itself. IPS was thus, in a way, a forerunner in the area of supporting "deep dialogue" in online spaces. Within integrally-informed theory and practice communities there is an, at least implicit, invitation to enact one's theory, by either "practicing what one preaches" so to speak, or by using the theory to reflect upon the writing, reading, or dialogue process itself. IPS was thus, in a way, a forerunner in the area of supporting "deep dialogue" in online spaces. 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online spaces such as discussion forums and video conferences. The overview contains essays by Andrew Venezia and Layman Pascal.

The participants were: Bonnitta Roy, Andrew Venezia, Hilary Bradbury, Layman Pascal, Marco Morelli, Heather Fester, Daniel Thorson, Penelope Whitworth, Geoff Fitch, Daniel Görtz, and Tom Murray (participant-facilitator).

2. Jordan Peterson's Treatment of Spirituality, Religion, Archetypes, and Metaphysics

Jordan Peterson, a recently prominent public intellectual, is known for his writings, recorded lectures, and social media commentaries on a wide variety of topics. He is most cited for his libertarian-leaning views on hot-button social and political issues related to political correctness and identity politics. Less discussed is his body of work on archetypes and the depth psychology of religion, which is mainly focused on Christianity. This is the area that we focus on in this special issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality. Peterson's expertise in archetypal modes of cognition allows for a respectful treatment of, not only "spiritual," but centrally "religious" metaphysical themes, while still allowing for a post-metaphysical attitude.

This Special Issue of Integral Review contains three essays/commentaries on the Jordan Peterson phenomena as it related to postmetaphysical spirituality: by Brendan LaChance, Andrew Venezia, and Layman Pascal.

In keeping with the tone of the IPS forum, our goal for the section of this Issue on Jordan Peterson was include a dialogic element, in which each of the authors had an opportunity to comment on the essays of the others. These comments are included.

In keeping with the dialogic nature of the IPS forum, we invited each of the three authors in the Jordan Peterson section to comment on the others’ pieces, and to pen a final rejoinder in response to other’s comments.

We hope that you enjoy this very full issue – whether by meandering, diving deeply, or consuming it whole. We live in a world struggling to recover from the purported "death of god" produced by the collision of modern rationality with old-time-Religion. This centuries-old tension is reaching its crescendo even as we gaze upon it. This Issue stakes the claim that the overlapping domains of developmental theory, meta-theories like integral theory, and post-metaphysical philosophies, can and should play a large role in this transition. What is at stake is no less that the human soul, regardless of how that is understood. As serious as that sounds, we have included enough magical art, playful philosophy, and tender dialogue to support a deeply soulful inquiry.
What is Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality?

As part of this special issue we put out a call for definitions and short descriptions of Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality. Below we share what our fishing line pulled out of the sea – four diverse interpretations of the subject – from Bruce Alderman, Layman Pascal, Edward Berge, and Joseph Farley. Murray's longer piece in this special issue offers a detailed description of IPS from yet another perspective.

Bruce Alderman

INTEGRAL POSTMETAPHYSICAL SPIRITUALITY (IPS) does not yet fully exist. It is what Bruno Latour (2013) might call an instauration – something that is at once being uncovered and created, discovered and composed. It is a risk, an artist's gamble as she puts chisel to stone, and its final form is not yet decided. But given its internal tensions, it is likely it will never be so decided; it quivers most vitally right in that gap of in/decision, each shape it takes riven by difference and haloed by an unmasterable excess.

As integral, IPS invokes the One. But it must always do so in scare quotes; its "one" is the count-as-one, a consistent multiplicity, a oneness that is always two or more. This is not a watered down oneness; it is what the one has always been. Non/dual.

As postmetaphysical, IPS invokes invocation itself. It is ascetic in Nietzsche's or Sloterdijk's sense: its sorcery is practice; its magic, participatory enactment. It is not opposed to religious forms of belief or modes of speech, but it sees them also in enactive terms: as forms of participatory engagement, which can be generative (growth-promoting and integrative) or degenerative (leading to forms of demi-reality and soul-loss).

As spirituality, IPS invokes the sacred excess of spirit through four practices in particular: the quaternity of waking, growing, cleaning, and showing up. More generally, as we discuss in my essay for this issue, spirituality is the practice of building generative (en)closures which allow for the disclosure of deeper truths (through inquiry), and the cultivation of surplus coherence (through individual and collective action and modes of integration).

As a holistic orientation, IPS proceeds on both meta-metaphysical (post-metaphysical) and metaphysical levels simultaneously. Meta-metaphysically, IPS embraces metaphysical pluralism, viewing metaphysical systems as enactive operators which play a role in the enactment of particular, ontologically rich worldspaces. In this context, post-metaphysics, as Joel David Morrison (2007) well describes it, "is not ultimately a feature of the metaphysical system itself, but a cognitive or conceptual aperspectival stance which imposes an acategorical imperative – a meta-metaphysical and metacategorical framework – in which the absolute truth claims of any metaphysics are suspended in the relative world of justification, partly through the rational truth that all truth claims may be subject, endlessly, to further analysis" (p. 50).
Such skepticism, when it is included and cultivated as a spiritual virtue (or a "Practice of the Self," in David Michael Levin's (1989) sense), is in spirit a faithful vulnerability born of the acategorical imperative: a willingness to put our or others' metaphysical truths into question, which means (at times at least) to put them to the test. This is not an anti-metaphysical perspective. Metaphysical speculation is a generative and essential part of our philosophical, scientific, and spiritual efforts to interface meaningfully, effectively, and creatively with the world. Putting metaphysical truth claims into question under the acategorical imperative doesn't mean rejecting all perceived metaphysical claims out of hand (in doing so, we would very likely be leaving our own metaphysical operating framework absolutized and unquestioned), but being willing both to rationally question and inquire into, and to open-endedly (i.e., faithfully-critically) act on, metaphysical claims: to personally take our chances with them, even with gusto and abandon, while remaining willing to hold them up for ongoing scrutiny (whenever that is called for).

At the level of practice, an Integral postmetaphysical approach frames metaphysical systems and ontologies injunctively. However, this injunctive emphasis is not, or should not be read as, merely a requirement for 'empirical support.' Rather, to emphasize injunction is to acknowledge the performative and embodied nature of our claims. It is to acknowledge the intertwining or entanglement of epistemology, ontology, and methodology in actual occasions.

On a metaphysical level (in both inter-religious and Integral spiritual spheres), IPS employs multiple enactive and integrative frameworks, such as Wilber's pronounal "Three Faces of God (or Spirit)" practice. This metaphysical framework is capable of non-reductively accounting for and integrating a variety of the 'ultimates' and 'ends' described and pursued in the world's major religious traditions, as well as enacting new soteriological horizons within the traditions that adopt it. This approach is suggested by Integral Methodological Pluralism itself, the enactive, meta-paradigmatic "engine" of Integral Theory, but it avoids being "merely metaphysical," in the sense Wilber criticizes, through the injunctive framing called for by the post-metaphysical, acategorical imperative described above.

As a postmetaphysical approach, integral spirituality might be fruitfully compared to Richard Kearney's anatheism. In the wake of the triumph of atheism in secular culture, Kearney coins a new word, anatheism, in which he takes the ana- to mean ‘after’ in two distinct senses: the postmetaphysical project of seeking after God (again) after the death of God. The God we seek after God’s demise is necessarily a stranger, Kearney argues, and this disposes us towards a theology of hospitality: we are called to host difference in our hearts, to open to otherness and surprise. And there is a sense, too, in which the postmetaphysics of IPS is an ana-metaphysics: after the post/modern efforts to wrestle free of metaphysics and spirituality, IPS represents a return to them anew, now as strange (and inviting) strangers: not as who we thought they were before, but nevertheless as valued guests, who may yet surprise and delight us still.

References


**Layman Pascal**

THE DEFINITION OF ‘INTEGRAL POSTMETAPHYSICAL SPIRITUALITY’ is ultimately very simple. I mean that there is both a very simple and complex definition of this arcane topic – depending on your own level of interest.

The easy way is simply to realize that human spiritual growth does not depend on our beliefs. Meditation work will still develop your insides whether you think God is good, bad or nonexistent. The grand metaphysical ideas don’t totally matter. We are transformed by our practices rather than our conclusions about the Nature of the Reality. Of course some doddering old wags may call this a participatory turn within contemporary philosophy but there is also an ancient colloquial tradition on Earth of valuing actions over ideas.

This preference is also found in many of the “great saints” whom we suspect of embodying higher developmental stages of human psychological growth. They were often very cynical about worldviews, words & conventional spiritual concepts. They question our reasoning, our sense of self and all of our most basic perceptions about reality. The Tao that can be talked about is NOT the Eternal Tao. Such wisdom is both old and new. As we deepen our contact with Reality we continuously move beyond our previous notions about “real things”.

Friendly skepticism is our ally on the spiritual journey. It is profoundly useful to hold our beliefs lightly and to be critical of both ordinary & extraordinary ideas. The radiant vision of Christ can sublime nourish you without requiring you to draw any particular conclusion about whether He “exists” or not. Yogic exercises are good for Hindus and non-Hindus alike. This should not be a surprise to people who were raised in a scientific world. We know that “theories” and “hypotheses” have been extremely successful. They are not less than certainty. They are MORE than certainty. More honest. More useful. Even more beautiful.

Integral philosophy frequently reminds us that a great spiritual teacher may be holy and transformative without necessarily being right about everything. Many different domains of validity exist. They do not contradict each other but neither should we get them mixed up. You don’t need everything to be totally and fantastically true in all possible ways. It just has to work. That’s the simple truth of postmetaphysical spirituality.

To describe the complex truth is obviously a little trickier. Let me relate – as well as I can recall – the incredibly clever and captivating answer I offered to Steve McIntosh who was sitting in the front row of a talk I gave several years ago in the American state of California. I said, at that time, that we all grow through layers of increasingly integrated complexity and depth. Each layer of our experience is like a whole world. It envelopes, supersedes and critiques its previous world. Each of these layers has its own implicit presuppositions about What Exists. Because of an ancient joke
about Aristotle and a bookshelf (look it up) we call these assumptions the “metaphysics” of a world.

Yet we only think of them as metaphysics when we are moving beyond. We become retroactively postmetaphysical about our previous metaphysics. They appear in hindsight. Our earlier ontology starts to get teased apart. It wasn’t all equally true. Some things will be kept (but understood in a new way) while others will be discarded.

For example, as worldcentric rational humanism dawns within us, we still think rocks exist. We have that in common with our previous worldview. But now we see these rocks as ‘ancient geological objects full of atoms’. We keep the rocks but we let go of our former conviction that all necessary objective truths are already contained in the blessed Quran. That older idea starts to look like a social bias or a weird form of authoritarian book-worship. We leave that God behind. But do we leave God behind? More spiritual members of an integral community may worry that postmetaphysics implies a strong materialist rejection of divinity, soul & purpose. Not necessarily. The so-called Green vision emerges with a postmetaphysical stance toward that very Orange “materialism” and “rationality”. Then an integral vision will try to include but transcend all of these different kinds of metaphysics. Nothing important is being lost.

Integral Post-Metaphysics does not diminish our spiritual experience but amplifies and enriches it. Our access to the deepest holiness that we can assimilate is powerfully increased as we learn to hold our ideas about reality in an “as if” position. Quotation marks do not belittle “reality” – they give it wings! Perhaps there is even a part of our soul that responds more authentically and completely to “God” than to GOD?

Approximation, complexity and balanced ambiguity are not the enemies of certainty. They are its oldest roots. When we look back through time with our postmetaphysical eyes, we may see that even our most basic ways of thinking about the world were a kind of unexamined metaphysics. Instead of certainty/uncertainty as a pair of opposites we may be faced with a strange un/certainty. The slash has migrated to the center of our understanding. It is the same paradoxical conjunction that we find in in/complete, same-difference & many-one. It is also all those lines that simultaneously link and separate the diverse truth regions on an integral map. These nondual “separator-connectors” are nuanced doorways leading to a numinous realm where our transrational intellect merges with our most sublime experiences.

And those are the bones of the complex definition of integral postmetaphysical spirituality.

Edward Berge

‘INTEGRAL’ IS THE TERM GENERALLY USED to refer to Wilber's integral theory, or the integration of body, mind, soul and spirit in self, nature and culture. The idea is that there are increasing levels of progressive development within all those domains, and to explore how those domains interrelate. Metaphysics generally refers to the exploration of reality. Postmetaphysics then is a kind of metaphysics but without some of the assumptions and premises traditionally associated with that study. Those include the notion that humanity can accurately perceive reality as such either through some meditative state of consciousness, and/or through the notion of pure
Platonic forms via abstract, a priori reason. The postmetaphysical turn in philosophy instead grounds metaphysics in the empirical study of intersubjective cultural communication and the second generation cognitive science which sees the topic as embodied, enacted, embedded and extended is all domains.

How then does spirituality express postmetaphysically? First of all it is no longer a domain diametrically opposed to the material domain. Another hallmark of metaphysical thinking is this opposition, with the spiritual or absolute domain the source and cause of the material or relative domain. Postmetaphysical spirituality acknowledges the virtual realm, akin to the absolute realm, but in a very different relationship with the actual or material domain. The virtual domain is still generative of the actual, but its own genesis lies not in a metaphysical plane but within its relationship to the actual in a co-generative process.

It also has to do with the difference between the transcendent and the transcendental. The former assumes a metaphysical foundation for knowledge as described above. Transcendental deduction bypasses such a framing by speculating on what virtual preconditions must be supposed for knowledge to be possible. The virtual by this definition is multiple and immanent without any need of a transcendent, metaphysical underpinning and thus postmetaphysical in that sense.

The meta-awareness of meditative states is often contextualized as something that transcends the world of manifestation by directly perceiving the absolute. But Thompson and other neuroscientists see such a state as an embodied, pre-personal base state of consciousness, a naturalist conception of the embodied mind. What is being accessed is a baseline attention that is fully embodied and thereby limited by that embodied constraint. Such a consciousness without an object doesn’t lay claim to access to the reality of all, or even access to all of our personal cognitive unconscious or collective unconscious. It’s just accessing that embodied part of our natural awareness available to us by virtue of having the body and brain we do with all its limitations. Furthermore, the above research makes clear that meta-awareness itself is not strictly an individual affair but rather involves internalized social cognition and interaction with the natural environment. Hence spiritually in this context is not only about a syntegration within the domains of self, culture and nature but also between them.

**Joseph Farley**

**INTEGRAL POSTMETAPHYSICS FOR DUMMIES**

I wrote Evolution As Metaphysics and Spiritual Violence during the 2 or 3 year period when I participated regularly in the IPMS forum, on the defunct Zaadz/Gaia website and the forum on Ning. It was well received on the forum, and Frank Visser posted it on his Integral World website a few years later. I think back fondly to the many colorful characters that made up the group; several academics including a Sanskrit scholar, a French psychiatrist and a cowboy artist who lived in South America, among others. Like many of my fellow members, I had gone through appreciation and even infatuation with the work of Ken Wilber, only to hit a wall of questioning and disillusions.
I have no formal training in philosophy, although I am widely read in comparative religion and spirituality. When I was in my twenties I made a point of reading Gregory Bateson’s works, Steps To An Ecology Of Mind and Mind And Nature: A Necessary Unity. It seemed to me that Bateson had a holistic way of thinking and seeing the world that I wanted earnestly to grasp. I can’t say that I understood everything he wrote about, but I credit Bateson with teaching me important points on how to think. Bateson’s meta-rational explorations proposed that processes of mind are integral to the biological world, and that there are logical, hierarchical categories of learning and communication. He emphasized the importance of context and paradox, that there are pathologies of communication, and that metaphor, art, religion and myth are crucial components of human culture.

The IPMS forum was my first real exposure to Postmodern thought, as well as other versions of Integral thought. I see Integral Post Metaphysics as Ken Wilber’s attempt to integrate elements of Postmodernism into his grand synthesis, and I’m not sure it’s completely successful. I was impressed by Gregory Desilet’s essays that critique KW’s take on Postmodernism that are posted on the Integral World website (www.integralworld.net). I don’t believe we have lived through the “Postmodern Turn” and are now in “Post-Postmodernism”, as is popularly presented in Integral circles. Rather I think the last century has been one of accelerating hyper-modernism, where the exponential growth of technology disrupts social and economic systems, expedites the collision and cross fertilization of different cultures, threatens dire consequences to global climate and ecology, and frays our sense of self. I believe Postmodernism and Integral Theory are meta-rational attempts to understand and cope with the hyper-modern dilemma, and that both have problems and limitations.

What I learned from my participation in the forum was the simple methodology I employed in my essay. Inspect one’s unexamined presuppositions in our necessary engagement with metaphysical concepts. Assess who controls the narrative and how that affects power dynamics. Clarify what a given narrative values and devalues developmentally, and the world view that it presents. I also learned that there is no neutral or unbiased philosophical stance. It confirmed that, as I had come to suspect, Ken Wilber’s overarching Integral construction has it’s own set of metaphysical biases. I am gratified that other Integral systems are becoming more well known, such as the thought of Jean Gebser, (well promoted by Jeremy Johnson’s online Nura Learning Network). I also appreciate that the recent work of post-evangelical writer and preacher Rob Bell appears to be influenced by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I love the fact that Gregory Bateson’s legacy is being continued by the work of his daughter Nora Bateson.

The metaphysical interpretation of scientific theories such as evolution or quantum physics is not going away. It’s what we do as human beings trying to figure out our place in the Cosmos. I hope that other Integral systems, in addition to the work of Ken Wilber, will arise to become increasingly influential, and that post-metaphysical critique will flourish as a discipline.
GENERATIVE (EN)CLOSURES, BUBBLES,
AND MAGIC CIRCLES:
A Chat about Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality
and Religion

Bruce Alderman¹ with Edward Berge² and Layman Pascal³

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² Edward Berge graduated summa cum laude with a BA degree in English Literature from Arizona State University. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa National Honor Society. He has been a contributor to Integral World and is one of the original members of the Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality forum. In 2017, he collaborated with Michel Bauwens of the P2P Foundation on a paper for Spanda Journal titled, “Collective Enlightenment through Postmetaphysical Eyes,” which explored the intersection of integral postmetaphysical spirituality and political action. He continues motivating political action through his blog Proactive Progressive Populism and is a regular contributor to the Albuquerque Brain, Mind & AI discussion group. He chooses to live a simple lifestyle to reduce his carbon footprint. He was an initiate into Hermetic Qabalism and via Tarot extensively astral travelled throughout the Tree of Life. He is an accomplished partner dancer trained in ballroom, Latin, country western and west coast swing. He is a long time practitioner of martial Tai Ji Quan in the Tung family tradition. He was last seen thoroughly enjoying the back alleys and dark underbelly of Syn City.
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³ Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him – this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress – He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methathesory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.
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EDWARD BERGE: In the 12 years since you first launched the Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality forum, we’ve covered quite a lot of territory – too damned much to summarize! But it’s safe to say, I think, that it has served as a kind of peer-to-peer colloquium for its core members to explore the nominal themes of the forum, and to follow and develop our own respective threads of interest. One of my abiding concerns over the years, and honestly the only one that still remains vital for me, has been the intersection of IPS with economics and political activism, as I discuss in my essay for this issue. But regarding your own work there, two of the fruits that stand out for me are your concepts of *integral grammatology* and *generative (en)closures*. I’m thinking it would be interesting for this issue to discuss the relationship of these concepts to integral postmetaphysical spirituality, in general, and maybe also to some of the themes that I highlight in my paper.

BRUCE ALDERMAN: Sure, that sounds good. There’s a lot there to explore. Since I’ve given more time, in a couple recent publications, to discussing integral grammatology⁴, I’d like to focus for now on the concept of generative (en)closures – particularly in relationship to a postmetaphysical understanding of spirituality and religion. But the integral grammatology lens will provide a good way to approach it, so I’ll start there. And since Layman Pascal and I have done some extensive diving into the concept, I’d like to invite him to the conversation as well.

LAYMAN PASCAL: [Steps out from behind a fly agaric mushroom and takes a seat.]

BRUCE: At the 2013 Integral Theory Conference, building on our reflections on the IPS forum over the previous year, I introduced a grammar-based expansion of the Integral model which deploys not only the familiar pronounal lenses (I, We, It, and Its), but also lenses or philosophemes based on other parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions. Just as the pronouns in Integral Theory yield a postmetaphysical, perspectivist onto-epistemology, and provide an elegant framework for integrative metatheory, the other parts of speech may serve (and, historically, often have served) similar philosophical functions: supporting substantialist, aspect-oriented, processual, modal, and relational ontologies, respectively, and in some cases giving rise to alternative metatheoretical approaches. I discuss the grammatical philosophemes and their respective philosophical systems in detail in “Sophia Speaks” (Alderman, in press).

For each of these philosophical systems, while a single part of speech often serves as the central organizing principle or lens, the philosophemes related to the other parts of speech tend also to be included, typically in subordinate roles. For instance, in Integral Theory, pronouns are given explicit emphasis, but nounal (structural), verbal (processual), and other philosophemes figure prominently as well. In my “Integral In-dwelling” paper, I argue that one of the most important philosophemes for integral theorizing is, in fact, the preposition. The four-quadrant map speaks to the fundamental *with-ness*, the nonduality or inseparability, of the pronoun-perspectives. The integral instinct is of a deep and irreducible relationality to things; in Jean-Luc Nancy’s words, the *being singular plural* or co-essentiality of things.

⁴ See “Sophia Speaks,” to be published in 2019 in Dancing with Sophia: Integral Philosophy on the Verge; and “Integral In-dwelling,” published in Consciousness journal.
LAYMAN: Yes, I appreciate your emphasis on prepositions. This idea extends my basic assertion in some of my own writings that the common divine element which exceeds and interblends the three primary ontological domains/classes – of the gross, subtle, and causal – is not situated outside them (as would be impossible and nihilistic to conceive) but rather as omni-pervasive functional thresholds within which difference and sameness are simultaneously presented and cancelled. These are prepositional instances. They allow “trans-duality” to be ubiquitous, seemingly absent, oriented (towards something), generative and loving (relational), etc.

In other words, the integrative potential of worldviews is demonstrated only at integration-sites, which are prepositional in nature. Prepositions permit the operation of all other grammatical functions and as such occupy a distinct status relative to the others.

BRUCE: That is the contention of Bruno Latour and Michel Serres as well: prepositions do not mark a separate ontological domain, but rather they pre-position or prepare the position for what is to come. They function, as Michel Serres observes, as angelic mediators, linking subjects with other subjects or objects, dwelling in the thick midst of becoming, tracing relations and forging sites of integration in the teeming flux of things. In this sense, prepositions play a facilitative role akin to mathematical operators, proliferating everywhere, providing points of departure and possibilities for contact and co-generative interaction. At their most refined, they function, perhaps, at what the Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta called the fourth level of language. The third level is pre-articulated language, which is the precondition for conceptuality (pasyanti); and the fourth is the most subtle level (para, or the goddess of speech, Paravak), which is the precondition for all communication and sentience. In a modern framework, we might relate level three, for instance, to the embodied metaphors or image schemas of Lakoff and Johnson; and level four might be related to Roy Bhaskar's formulation of nonduality as the necessary precondition for any communication or contact at all. (Abhinavagupta's claim that "everything has the nature of everything" also seems to be one precursor – among many – to Bhaskar's notion of co-presence, which I explored in depth in “Integral In-dwelling”).

EDWARD: As is my wont, I see Abhinavagupta’s level four as my gal, khora. Such différance is an ontic basis where same/differentiation pre-exists, or sets the conditions for, our (or any) categorical perception. Différance, as Derrida suggests, is that which pre-positions identity and difference, i.e., the transcendental condition for their manifestation. Connecting this to integral grammatology, the preposition acts like khora in that it is that withdrawn core that prepares the space-time for actual occasions and is coterminous with them, a la Whitehead. Hence I'm wondering if prepositions, while parts of language, aren't themselves something pre-linguistic and which tie language back to that basic categorical embodiment via image schemata?

BRUCE: Yes, I see prepositions really as straddling levels three and four, depending on how they are deployed philosophically. But we have gotten pretty thick into the woods so quickly! I’m afraid we’re going to lose readers before we even begin. So, dialing back a little, and also re-orienting us back towards the promised discussion of generative (en)losures, I’ll just make the following observation.
In “Integral In-dwelling,” I named several prepositional constellations as implicit to integral meta-theorizing: with-above-below, for Wilber’s early spectrum of consciousness model; with-in-out for his four quadrant map; and several others related to his three heuristic principles for integral methodological pluralism. For the bulk of the paper, I focused on a prepositional constellation I called with/in, which names the mutual, concurrent with-ness (external proximity) and in-ness or within-ness (internal relatedness, enfoldment) that marks the nondual in-dwelling or co-presence of things recognized by both Wilber’s Integral Theory and Bhaskar’s metaReality. I was interested in the promise of this prepositional constellation for forging a generative “integral pluralist” (or Many/One) model of interreligious relations.

For a discussion of generative (en)closures, I’d like to start with a more traditional pairing, the in-out relation, and the between (boundaries) they establish. Together, in, out, and between constitute what Lakoff and Johnson call a CONTAINER image schema. These are important distinctions for Integral Theory’s holons, of course, as the quadrant map makes clear. For religious traditions, they are usually invoked to identify insider/outsider dynamics, with related notions of membership or belonging, protection, orthodoxy and unorthodoxy, sacredness and profanity, etc.5

A generative (en)closure is also a kind of container, still trading on the CONTAINER image schema or metaphor, but I hope in our discussion here to highlight a different, more integrally and postmetaphysically resonant set of distinctions, not limited to the traditional ones of membership, orthodoxy, and so on.

LAYMAN: So, to start, Bruce, can you tell us, in a couple short sentences, just what the heck is "generative (en)closure"? Why is this a relevant concept? What is it the opposite of?

BRUCE: Generative (en)closure is a word I came up with several years ago as I was reflecting on the relationship of several different concepts or themes: integral spirituality, participatory enaction, translineage practice, autopoiesis, ontology, epistemology, etc. Depending on the context, I've used it as a synonym for holon (in Integral thought), for object or machine (in Object Oriented Ontology), for body or body-constituting (in Gendlin's work or more generally), for autopoietic system (a la Varela/Maturana or Luhmann), for a tradition or lineage (within religious studies), or for bubble or sphere (a la von Uexküll’s biosemiotics or Sloterdijk's spherology). Which means it's either a pretty sloppy and promiscuous word, or a generative word, or both.

The way I spell it, with the parentheses, emphasizes both a verb or process (generative closure) and a noun (what we point to as enacting and embodying such closure).

Time and further discussion will tell if this is a relevant and useful concept for people. With the term, I wanted to highlight the generativity of particulars – whether persons, institutions, or things. For instance, an autopoietic entity in its self-maintaining closure, or a Whiteheadian actual occasion in its concrescence, not only demarcates something

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5 For a detailed study, see Kim Knott’s (2011) “Inside, Outside and the Space in-between: Territories and Boundaries in the Study of Religion.”
particular; it generates novelty in its very (en)closure; it is-and-makes differences that make a difference. The original context in which I was introducing the term, was as a term for religious institutions or lineages – churches, sanghas, practice lineages, etc – each of which is a site of creative, participatory enactment: each a unique way of engaging with the kosmos, each a unique vehicle for the calling forth and embodiment of spiritual vision and realization. But this is sort of a specialized use, and I intend for it to apply more broadly as well (as a general ontological distinction).

Originally, in my paper, “Opening Space for Trans-lineage Practice,” the opposite I set for generative (en)closure was Jean-Luc Nancy's term, dis/enclosure – the auto-deconstruction of things. Bubbles pop. And this, too – death, too – is generative. But for our discussion here, we might also consider the notion of degenerative (en)losures. We can go into this later, if you’d like.

LAYMAN: Probably people do not get very far into their own integral-like consciousness without having had some glimpses of the universal process by which all things arise, form themselves, distinguish themselves, change, and pass away. Bubbles rise and bubbles burst. But where is there to go onward from that insight?

What kinds of things do you hope a more clear understanding of this ultra-basic process might offer people? What might we gain from looking more closely and precisely at the way entities exist or do not exist?

BRUCE: To speak to the bubble metaphor first: Bubbles are good symbols for the generative (en)closures I am wanting to talk about here, those temples, practice lineages, and traditions that are the sites of our inspired living and transformative engagement. Bubbles exist in suspended flight, in motion and relation, lasting as long as they remain in movement; dying only when they come to rest for too long. Bubbles are obviously transient. They remind us that the traditions we inhabit similarly quiver on the edge of existence, and that our ongoing enjoyment of them is a matter of re-enactment, the serious lila of bubble play. Bubbles exist by a kind of closure, and yet in closure they make light uniquely visible; they refract and amplify it. And as Sloterdijk reminds us, a bubble is a structure of inspiration; we breathe it into existence.

Considering the basic ontological utility of the word: I do think it can function something like holon, applying all the way up, and all the way down, to all sorts of "somethings" – here, emphasizing not the whole-part relations of things but the generativity of things at all levels (as "difference engines," to reappropriate a phrase). But for the purposes of our discussion, I have seen especial promise in the concept because it allows me to bring together and interrelate a number of terms that I think are useful for discussions of integral and translineage spirituality: Integral holons, Whiteheadian actual occasions, Sloterdijkian and von Uexküllian bubbles, and Object Oriented Ontology’s withdrawing objects, among other things. These terms are not identical and can't be forced together in total identification, which is why I like generative (en)closure: it allows me to bring them near each other, without assuming identity, and to draw insight from each according to the aspect of integral/translineage spirituality that I'm focusing on.
Maybe it would help, early in this discussion, to quote from the paper where I originally introduced the concept, and then we can go from there (wherever this leads). Here’s the section of “Opening Space for Translineage Practice” where I introduced it:

“The relation of the term, generative (en)closure, to autopoietic theory should be clear: An autopoietic system, meaning a ‘self-making system,’ exhibits a definitive closure and circularity in its pattern of organization. While ‘(en)closure’ can be read as a noun, signifying a fixed structure or a static condition, I prefer a more active or processual inflection: enclosure as the ‘act of enclosing.’ Here, the term is perhaps close to what Eugene Gendlin means by body-constituting, in that both (en)closure and body-constituting are generative. Gendlin (2012) explains,

Body-constituting is a generative body-environment process (without the here-there split)... Everyone agrees that the body is made of environmental stuff, but it was assumed to be separate from the environment, merely perceiving and moving in it. But if we consider the body’s formation as a body process, then the body is environmental interaction from the start. The body is identical with its environment in one body-constituting process. (p. 6)

But body-constituting is generative not only in the formation and maintenance of the body; it is active as well in the ongoing differentiation of the environment and the generation of objects. In the process of body-constituting, the body will develop processes that become active only when certain intermittent aspects of the environment are present. When these elements are not present, however, the body nevertheless continues to imply them, and this ongoing implication is generative both of difference within the body and within the environment. As Gendlin (2012) explains:

Certain processes become differentiated; they occur just with certain parts of the environment. This generates specific environmental objects... For example, sugar, water, and light appear and are incorporated only sometimes. Then the body-constituting with these ‘objects’ becomes separated from the rest of the process (if the organism didn’t die in their absence). Then the body has separate processes just for these parts of the environment. The moment they re-appear, just these processes resume. So we call these differentiated parts of the environment ‘objects’. But to think this we need to say that when something implied doesn’t occur, the body continues to imply it. Until something meets that implying (‘carries it forward’, we say), the body continues to imply what was implied and didn’t occur. If part of what was implied did occur, then only the part that did not occur continues to be implied. This ‘reiterated implying’ is a basic concept. It explains how objects in the environment become differentiated.6 (pp. 6-7)

Gendlin’s account is thus quite close to what I mean by generative (en)closure: this active enclosure, this enfolding and implication, is generative of other bodies and forms (i.e., enactive, in a single process of body-world flowering or co-constitution). But the term,

6 Tom Murray discusses this concept from Roy Bhaskar’s perspective, as the realness of negation, in his essay contribution for this issue.
(en)closure, is suggestive of more than just the body, which is why I have introduced the term here. It evokes images of sheltering and sustaining structures – of tabernacles and dwellings and temples.

With Jorge Ferrer, I see the generative (en)closures of our traditions, churches, and lineages, whether singly or multiply held, each as uniquely embodied means of participatory enaction – as creative expressions of our invocational engagement with spiritual power or mystery. With Bruno Latour, I see each generative (en)closure as the rounding of particularity, utterly and liberatingly concrete, both irreducible and always-reducible or -relatable, and I recognize that every difference charges us with an ethical imperative. With Catherine Keller and the polydox theologians, I see in every generative (en)closure of body and tradition the folding and unfolding of the relational *pli*, which situates us in multiplicities, imbricates us in complementarities, and implicates us in the unknowing of our evolutionary becoming. With Jean-Luc Nancy, I see in the generative (en)closure of any particular tradition the singular plural of its being, the “with” that is constitutive of its presence, where its singular presence is always already co-presence, the declaration of the impossibility (and the utter poverty) of the “Only One.” And with Wilber, I see generative (en)closure as a holon — already plurisingular, the body of tetra-enaction – which, as a holon, can never be mistaken for a (non-holonic) foundation or ultimate, thus releasing it to the ongoing invitation of the divine’s becoming.”

LAYMAN: I appreciate your remarks – especially the excerpts from your article. However, I fear in my bones that most integralites are not (and probably for very good reasons) terribly well-versed in concepts like AUTOPOIESIS. You are a madman sword fighting with chandeliers. So much the better.

But when we are explaining ourselves by the use the "-*pli*" of illumination in a Gendlin/Latour context...? Are we safe in the hands of such a driver? Who knows where these kinds of words will lead!

My PBS-award-winning Metaphysics of Adjacency can certainly unfurl to appreciate the way in which you bring together many advanced models of "the basic form of Reality" and let them touch as intimately as possible without ceasing to be importantly different. Now that's adjacency!

[Canned laughter.]

This focus demonstrates the importance of having a (preposition-like) distinction-fusion terminology for the basic existential scaffolding of Being/s.

BRUCE: Yes. The slippery way I use generative (en)closure is prepositional – i.e., a promiscuous angel.

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EDWARD: That’s my gal, Khora. She’s good between the sheets.

LAYMAN: I have a few follow-up questions. How can a super-enclosure form which makes a temple of the whole civilization, the whole planet, the whole species? What is the distinctive logical structure of such a (in my words) natural planetary cathedral?

BRUCE: If we follow Herr Sloterdijk on this, we will see that the theocratic empires attempted to stretch the womb out to the size of the earth, or even bigger, and the poor overtaxed monosphere tore under the strain. If a new planetary cathedral is to be erected, I think it will be foamy and fractal; in our recognition of the unmasterability of enclosures (they withdraw), and our delighting in the endlessly fruitful in-between, I expect a great, foamy structure or composite will disclose itself.

EDWARD: Fractal, yes, if by fractal you mean that each repetition iterates – i.e., while repeating to some degree, each iteration adds something novel and is not quite the same. I often get the feeling that with some complexity-chaos theories a fractal is the same repeating pattern ad infinitum, more a formal wish fulfillment of stable, unchanging Form. And like our friends the image schemata, always in media res, this gives pause for "our delighting in the endlessly fruitful in-between," in-between itself being one of those prepositional schema.

BRUCE: Agreed. Not just “the same” at different scales.

LAYMAN: Is Sacred Space – like the wavelengths of light – an increase of frequency which creates a modified qualitative space? This is also asking: is there a necessary increase of BEING in sacred enclosure, or is it merely the standard form of human activity? Or both?

BRUCE: I’m tempted to say both. I think there is a sense, which most of us have felt, where a vital generative (en)closure – a powerful practice retreat, a therapeutic encounter, a relationship, etc – seems to greatly amplify qualitative space. I mentioned earlier how bubbles trap and amplify light. A generative (en)closure can be seen as a kind of device for trapping and amplifying light, a space of interfacial energy and intensification. We do this all the time, of course. But sometimes we do it better than others. And sometimes we create spaces which suck the life right out of us, and make our faces go numb. That’s what I mean by degenerative (en)closure: the space has soured, and turned deadening.

Regarding a generative or sacred enclosure as just a standard form of human activity: our bodies, for us, are often experienced as quotidian, ordinary. But they are particularly generative (en)closures for the elements they take in, awakening properties and enlisting them in processes that are well beyond what they would have experienced before being absorbed into our constitutions. So there’s an ineluctable relativity at play.

In any event, returning to our theme of spiritual or religious generative (en)closures, I conceive of them not only as light-amplifiers, but as magic circles, or rings of invocation – meaning, as sites of participatory engagement or enactment. At the moment, I have the image in my head of a large, cage-like metallophone, which you can strike and bow in
various ways while suspended under the sea. This musical enclosure has the capacity to call whales and other great creatures out of the deep.

EDWARD: Including especially the patron/matron saint of IPS, Cthulhu.

BRUCE: Yes, of course. Fhtagn! It is a site for participatory engagement with the tehom, the abyss.

LAYMAN: The image of a planetary fractal of self-similar sacred enclosures helping to create a human wisdom-civilization is enchanting and compelling. Moreso once we add in the vision of a xylaphone-like submarine cage sending its evocative ripples out to the denizens of the deep ocean.

BRUCE: As I’ve mentioned, with generative (en)closure, I wanted to find a word that allowed me to draw close together, and draw upon, multiple ontological models (whether of bubbles, objects, bodies, holons, or autopoietic systems), by emphasizing one feature which I think is common across all of them: the enactive interplay of "closure" and "generativity." In the case of traditions and wisdom cultures, I mean to say that, by enacting a certain membrane, which has the capacity to sensitively resonate and respond in distinctive ways (whether spiritual, therapeutic, relational, or political), we are building submarine instruments of invocation; we are calling to the deep, and to the pregnant between. If we follow Goethe, who says that for each new object we perceive we grow a new organ of perception, then through our enactive invocations we are ultimately birthing new avatars for new modes of Kosmic interface and intercourse.

LAYMAN: The "use" of membranes is certainly what enactive (en)closures bring to our terminology – above and beyond the notion of basic units... even units where substance is understand to be equally a verb and noun.

Like Teilhard de Chardin's vision of the divine sphere presencing through all the self-reflective openings in the noosphere, we must be quite saliently alert to the possibility of an emerging overall pattern which appears here, there, there, and there on its way to being everywhere. The somewhat imperial drives of L. Ron Hubbard and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi start to look oddly similar at certain points. Perhaps we see in the historical multiplicity of "theocratic empires" an already fractal proliferation of the same basic pattern of worldcentric enclosure-attempts. But inadequately intelligent, inadequately healthy. Premature.

But what would be adequate to such a task? Can a more fluid and participatory web of self-reflecting sacred cultural enclosures arise more or less spontaneously or only in tandem with a great (or the greatest yet seen) kind of enforcement? A chilling thought. One wonders what the role of the "thought of an acceptable worldcentric enclosure" is in all of this. That classic photo of the Earth from space already sort of ripples through the noosphere, creating a sense of its reflection in many lesser bubbles in the great froth.
To what degree do we need the evocative impression of the "great enclosure" in order to facilitate the fractal proliferation?

BRUCE: Yes, I like that. I think that image of the earth is decisive for our time. It reveals our world as a whole, as a generative (en)closure, as a fragile immunological zone, as a hyperobject which exhibits non-local gravitational influence on all in its vicinity. In the fractal diffusion of sacred enclosures, in all their diversity and richness, I think we also need the ubiquitous reflection of that earth image. The envelope of air and energy which enfolds the hyper-generative (en)closure of the earth both creates a protective immunological zone, a separator or sealant, which has allowed for the intensification of the cosmic "stuff" that has collected here, allowing star dust to evolve eyes to look back at itself; and provides a clear window for admitting light and connecting us to the larger cosmos. And that larger cosmic history must, too, find its reflection in the spreading bubbles of new sacred cultural enclosures.8

But this whole earth, as an (en)closure, is not a singular whole; it is singular plural, meaning it is a composite (which is as much less than as more than its parts). Are you familiar with Latour's “Compositionist Manifesto”? In his discussion of composure and composites, of emergent unities and enacted universalities, that generate new wholes while also retaining the heterogeneity of the parts brought so closely together, I think he gives voice to a sensibility (both prepositional and postmetaphysical) that you might appreciate:

Even though the word “composition” is a bit too long and windy, what is nice is that it underlines that things have to be put together (Latin componere) while retaining their heterogeneity. Also, it is connected with composure; it has clear roots in art, painting, music, theater, dance, and thus is associated with choreography and scenography; it is not too far from “compromise” and “compromising,” retaining a certain diplomatic and prudential flavor. Speaking of flavor, it carries with it the pungent but ecologically correct smell of “compost,” itself due to the active “de-composition” of many invisible agents. ... Above all, a composition can fail and thus retains what is most important in the notion of constructivism (a label which I could have used as well, had it not been already taken by art history). It thus draws attention away from the irrelevant difference between what is constructed and what is not constructed, toward the crucial difference between what is well or badly constructed, well or badly composed. What is to be composed may, at any point, be decomposed.

In other words, compositionism takes up the task of searching for universality but without believing that this universality is already there, waiting to be unveiled and discovered. It is thus as far from relativism (in the papal sense of the word) as it is from universalism (in the modernist meaning of the world—more on this later). From universalism it takes up the task of building a common world; from relativism, the certainty that this common world has to be built from utterly heterogeneous parts that will never make a whole, but at best a fragile, revisable, and diverse composite material (Latour, 2010).

8 Vision of such scope, Joel Primack and Andy Fisher (2002) argue, is necessary to begin to "take in" and adequately respond to the crises presently unfolding across the earth-sphere.
I mention him because I think that the image you invoke, not only of the earth, but of the imperial cultural/spiritual movements of the past, is one that also can inform bubble formation: not as a template so much as a kind of historical attractor, an image of longed for composure and adjacency that was immaturity conceived and realized, but which nevertheless can still speak to us as we come to face the demands of our age to think and act with greater care for the nested and imbricated cultures and systems of our globe.

Regarding the possibility of a foamy, fractal diffusion of wisdom culture, this alongsided emergence, one image that comes to mind is that of the parasite. Integral Theory, for instance, is a sort of superbug that (at this point) thrives mostly by attaching itself to all sorts of entities: religion, business, medicine, leadership, etc.

Michel Serres: "The position of a parasite is to be between. That is why it must be said to be a being or a relation. But the attribute of the parasite... is its specificity. It is not just anything that troubles a passing message. It is not just anyone who is invited to someone's table. A given larva develops only in a certain organism and is carried only by a certain vector."

I am not indicting Integral with this image; I think this is actually quite a creative, generative role it plays. In Serres' notion of the parasite, it doesn't just drain from its host; it actually can inspire it to complexify, develop, diversify, etc.

So ... what (parasitic) role can Integral play in relation to the development of various generative (en)closures, fostering an alongsided bubbling up of new forms here, there, and there?

LAYMAN: I am not well-versed in Latour's "Compositionist Manifesto." However, from the snippet you present, it certainly has the hallmarks of the Metaphysics of Adjacency. And you single out a nice passage.

It touches on both the interdependence-of-created-unities-and-heterogenous-parts AND the matter of "composure." Regarding your integral grammatical, my sense is that the higher echelon of these lenses involves both "prepositional" and "adverbial" structures. The latter concerns modalities. Universal human religiosity – adjacency-enabled faith – has a strongly postural element. This is somewhere between (1) the generalized nature of yogic asanas; (2) the theory that smiling makes you happy; and (3) Heidegger's use of comportment to describe the enacted relationship of the Being to his world.

And the "compost" aspect touches on the enfolding of the scruff, the dissociated, the organic-implicit reality into the highest spirituality. This is a tantric characteristic which intuits, I think, something necessary about the emerging planetary aesthetic. Comparing the evolutionary clarity of "in between" to a parasite (Serres) does something comparable. As too does the use of Cthulhu to signify the rising cosmic glory of divinely non-dual multiplicity in a trans-ironic age. There is a qualitative aspect to the parasite and a transitional aspect. Integral, as parasite, in this sense is much like integral as gardener.
EDWARD: At this point, I think it would be helpful to zero in and say a little more about what you guys mean by “integral postmetaphysical spirituality” (or religion). As you know, while I have a Hermetic/Kabbalistic background, I have become more interested these days in our pressing social, economic, and ecological concerns. What could be more spiritual than helping people earn a living wage to feed their families? Than addressing income inequality so that people have a fair shot at creating enough money to meet their basic needs and have some surplus time and energy to devote to needs higher on the hierarchy, like spiritual pursuits? And I don't mean just traditional religion but so-called integral postmetaphysical spirituality (IPS)? It seems most of us that are into such spiritual pursuits are already privileged with enough surplus in the lower levels like survival, membership, individual autonomy and transcendental awareness that we take for granted that most of the population is struggling to eat and pay the rent. If you are the latter you will not focus on much of anything else, let alone IPS.

So, when you talk about religious or spiritual generative (en)closures, what exactly are you talking about? Do you mean traditional religions, like Christianity or Buddhism? Or do you mean something else, something more – inclusive, perhaps, of what Raimon Panikkar calls “sacred secularity”?

BRUCE: Both, I think. I like your take on these terms, Layman. Would you like to take a first shot and then I’ll add my thoughts afterwards?

LAYMAN: In very short form, spirituality is a surplus energy or feeling that's produced in the individual through the successful integration of their sub-components. So, let's say left and right brain; let's say heart, mind, and body; let's say unprocessed psychological subpersonalities; let's say masculine and feminine essences – any of these things that could be said to be basic functional units of the individual psyche. When those are brought together and there's a successful integration, you don't just get what you had before, tidied up a little bit. You get this gestalt; you get something more than the sum of its parts, and that is a sort of numinous excess, a kind of glow at any level of individual cognition. You can perceive it as an extra force that permits you to be stylistically sculpted into more of what you hope that you are. So that's spirituality.

Now the same process, applied culturally, is religion. Instead of the subcomponents of the individual personality, you have something like social genres; you have something like art and science, war and politics, peace, mysticism, all the different classes of cultural and social experience that could go on. When those things are integrated, then the coherence, the overtone that's generated among those parts working well as a team, also creates a kind of numinous, experiential excess. And that's perceived as a kind of glow around the historical time period in which it's produced. But it also gives people the sense that spirit is communing not just with individuals but with people in general, with that society or that culture. And out of that also evolves a kind of idiosyncratic style that represents that excess coherence. And so you get the arising of Tibetan Buddhism or the arising of Christianity out of these early social events where people are bringing a whole bunch of areas of their social life together as human beings, and mixing them, blending them, and establishing
something harmonious. And it gives it this tremendous, this extra cultural energy which echoes through the centuries for us.

That's a very tidy way of paralleling the definition between religion and spirituality. And it also allows us to use a definition that's really integral in its scope, which means we can extract it out from its different developmental phases and apply it to all of them. Because the standard type of theological analysis that goes on is very anchored in the Amber definition of religion, which is the idea that there's a big bloc of people; it has a popular name that everyone recognizes; it has some mythic symbolism; it has a set of dogma; people either join it or don't join it; and when they join it, they symbolically articulate their belief statements. That's often counted as if it's religion. But that's essentially, from an integral point of view, *everything* that happens at Amber; that's just the Amber style. And as long as the people at other levels assume that the Amber style counts as religion, then I'm going to have a need to add a second tier level, a sort of meta-theology to look back over all these things.

BRUCE: That's pretty much what Wilber would describe as a level-line fallacy: to conflate religion itself, as a line, with its Amber-level expression. So I think it's really important – and liberating, in a sense – to tease that apart. Often, Wilber, in his own work, does concede to the Amber-level definition of religion; he lets religion be defined by the labels of existing traditions. And that's fine. That's actually one area in which integral meta-theory can play a useful role – engaging with different traditions as they self-define, and working within and among them in different ways. But in liberating the concept of religion from that Amber-level definition, then you can begin to look well outside of those boundaries to discern contemporary expressions of religiosity wherever it might be happening in culture – in modernist or postmodernist settings, for instance, where it may not look like "church" or a "belief cult" at all, but where nevertheless we can make out that glow that you describe, that generation of surplus coherence and numinous excess.

As you know, Wilber has been careful to offer four or five alternative but complementary definitions of spirituality, identifying factors that are broad and general enough to apply across multiple stages of development. But to my knowledge, he has not attempted to define religion in the same way. So I think what you are offering here, these parallel definitions of religion and spirituality, is really useful.

I have an alternate way of thinking about the relationship of spirituality and religion, which I think is complementary to what you are saying. As we've been discussing, a generative (en)closure can be defined as the establishment of a zone of intensity through the enactment of a "membrane" in time or space. On the individual level, through practice routines, ritual behaviors, ascetic retreats, we create the conditions for the amplification of experience, the generation of zones of intensity which push us far from equilibrium, and allow for the development and disclosure of new patterns or ways of being, new forms of perception, new states of consciousness, and new levels of depth and personal integration. That's spirituality, the creation of a generative (en)closure on an individual level. And collectively, through social practices of establishing structure and building coherence, the different ways we have of gathering together, harnessing our energy and creativity into
spheres of mutual illumination and co-inspiration, through tradition, art, discourse, games, rituals, contemplative communities, and so on – the enactment of generative (en)closures intersubjectively or interobjectively, to foster collective well-being and wisdom, is what I would call religion. But of course they aren’t entirely distinct or merely parallel movements: religious enclosures can support individual spiritual work, and spiritual work can inspire religious flowering.

These are not exactly the distinctions you are making, but I think the notion of generative (en)closure can apply fairly directly to your model as well: it is the establishment of generative (en)closures at different scales that can foster the inter-blending and generation of “surplus coherence” for individuals and collectives that you describe. The focus here being, postmetaphysically, on practices, on modes of participatory enactment.

In my view, a religious generative (en)closure can serve both to provide 'hothouse'-like space for cultivating and encouraging the full flowering of individual practitioners, and – in its religious function per se, if we use your terms – for performing those creative acts of meshworking and translation to foster inter- or trans-genre alliances and fusions.

EDWARD: This is all good, but we should not forget that generation of this surplus coherence depends, in part, on material surplus as well. A collective generative (en)closure may very well be the socioeconomic base.

BRUCE: Agreed; that’s part of it. Whether of the dominant culture, or of a subculture that establishes its own means of support.

LAYMAN: My specification of religion as the infrastructure of experiential (and developmental) cultural abundance certainly requires that the economic infrastructure be well-integrated in order to make its responsible contribution. And we cannot ignore either the direct requirements of material resources or the ideological trace that our resource control patterns exert upon the hive-mind latent in all citizens. This latter factor is extremely significant in the production (or failure) of a “religion-izing” cultural field.

Under Amber regimes the form of economics most commonly related with religion echoes the "sovereign taxation" scheme. Tithing by individuals and states toward the universal church organization under the watchful eye of its symbolic, bureaucratic, and theatrical patriarch.

In Orange systems the tendency seems to be toward personal charitable acts as the main form of religionized economics... but that leaves out the well-known Cult of Money epidemic in such systems. And it leaves out the "religious" nature of public education, housing, opportunities, food, etc. There is no cultural flourishing at any level except by the more-than-adequate arrangement of material resource flows.

In general, regardless of the level of social and cognitive capacity, religious economies ought to mean those which maximize material surplus, produce more robust health among citizens generally, and have the ideological effect of aligning daily work efforts with a
resilient sense of spontaneously affirmed meaningfulness which connects the culture's formulation of its higher values with the material ground of vital affairs.

BRUCE: The way I’d put it is that we need good-enough material surplus, good-enough support, to foster sustained development individually and culturally. Because it is often the gaps, the failures, in an overall field of good-enough support that quickens consciousness, thwarts stagnation, and spurs incremental and sometimes radical growth.

EDWARD: Ray Harris has noted that what's needed is “to facilitate the ethical redistribution of the surplus to best serve the evolutionary requirements of the whole spectrum.” In other words, each social developmental level requires a surplus to evolve to the next level on Maslow's scale. It seems that the socio-economic circumstances of one’s life are the prerequisite for even getting into this game of evolution. Hence it is up to those of us with privilege (time and money) to not only work on ourselves and others, but to create a socio-economic system that will provide enough surplus on these lower levels to enact this process. Hence my focus on those who are working towards creating such a system of surplus on the material level.

However it also depends on what kind of generative socioeconomic enclosure we have. Capitalistic utilitarianism applies material excess to individual consumption instead of applying it to higher needs. This in turn has led to a supply side economics that has to create excessive individual consumption, which leads to enormous systemic waste instead of socially applying its excess to those needs. Hence the emerging collaborative commons as a different socioeconomic enclosure that applies excess towards that progression up the developmental scale.

But with most of the surplus captured by government and the upper layers of society, there’s a lot of inertia. So as to what can really get big business and government to change, well, the people can. What makes the former inadequate is its investment in the status quo, since they reap the benefits of increased power and money. But when they suck up so much of that that not only is there no surplus for the rest, but woefully inadequate crumbs leftover, then starvation for both food and personal power gets us off of our asses and into the streets. Suppression of potential can lead to its own excess: here, the overflow of rage and frustration. Ironically, it’s the very greed of the power brokers that have as usual created such a drastic disparity in wealth distribution that the folk will gather up their pitchforks and retaliate, much like in the story of Frankenstein. Corporate capitalism, including the revolving government door that supports it, are this Frankenstein and their only motivation to change is when we come calling en masse with the pitchforks.

LAYMAN: I have very mixed feelings about this sentiment. It seems, all at once, to be both ideally practical and practically idealistic. Perhaps this double-impression simply results from how starkly it invokes the popular spirit of contemporary "democracy" – in which many obvious liberations and subtle oppressions reside. We have certainly come to expect that informed, mutually-supportive, social action of organized individuals, in defense of their well-being, ought to be the major driver of change. But I also experience a yawning feeling of suspicion when I contemplate it.
Both in "the people" and in corporate and political governing bodies there are many kinds of faulty mechanisms which are constantly contributing to negative results. And structural issues almost never mobilize the people with the urgency to make the changes which would facilitate the capacity of people to cause benevolent changes.

Most of us would agree that political and corporate governance should (and can) be patterned for more general benefit by the organized popular response to the corrupting influence of those who benefit from imbalance. But we need a lot more than vocal fervor to amplify, clarify, and edify the power of such movements.

EDWARD: I share your mixed feelings about “the people,” for it depends on their center of gravity as to whether their actions are likely to be beneficial or destructive. It is the responsibility of those of us that have the luxury of exploring our higher needs to help frame the issues of our time, to use our skills to motivate those who are struggling and suffering to vote and get active in the political system in order to effect the change we want to see. Only then can we begin the process of moving to a more developed socioeconomic generative enclosure that is beneficial to all.

LAYMAN: Right. How do we rely on the mobilization of the People in way that does not leave us prey to their potential ignorance, gullibility, and capacity to be coerced? What distinguishes mass action from mass reaction and mob action? What kind of generative (en)closure will provide the greatest leverage for effecting the collective actions and the changes we would like to see? These are the kinds of questions that should preoccupy us all.

Getting back to what we were discussing earlier: I’d like to run with this notion of religious bubbles a little bit – see if we can put its feet on the ground.

Generative (en)closures are like assholes – everybody's got one. These "magic bubbles" are ubiquitous and universal. Cells, selves, and groups of all sorts are energetically engaged in establishing themselves as unique fields of relatively amplified coherence. These fields are partially set apart from their surroundings by a permeable membrane of physical acts, subjective impressions, communication systems, and shared spirit.

Yet of all the myriad modes of generative (en)closure we find ourselves especially interested in the "sacred" versions of culture. That means we are primed toward events, spaces, objects, and forms of practice-communities that are conventionally associated with religious traditions.

However we cannot take these traditions at face value. Why not?

BRUCE: I assume because of what we discussed previously: the traditional groupings are, for the most part, groupings based on the Amber definition of religion.

LAYMAN: Right. So what can the notion of a "religious tradition" mean to us? Knowing the incorrigible habits of integralites, we can predict that such traditions must appear,
eventually, as metaphorical zones of heightened cultural coherence which are experienced distinctly through the cognitive apparatus of each major developmental layer of human consciousness.

So let’s see how this might look:

**AMBER**

Conventional popular terminology operates a set of associations which connect these linguistic acts with the mentality of orthodox supra-tribal believer-sects. For such people (within us), the production of religious bubbles is normalized into "traditions" which are based upon confessions of membership and the affirmation of standardized nation-like symbolism.

We immediately see that this is the orthodox meaning of famous "traditions" inherited predominantly from nationalistic, racial, sectarian city-state / agricultural-kingdom phases of history... including parts of the world still largely involved in this reality. So Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Shinto, Hinduism, etc., are a vision of generative (en)closures operating at this level and for this type of world.

**ORANGE**

Modern "enlightenment" mentality typically investigates the abstract mechanism-objects which may appear in the mind under various different names. This extra-cultural consciousness already seriously undermines the conventional assumption of religious bubbles as traditions. It supposes that every individual, regardless of their geographic and ethnocentric origin, is free to select from the big "menu" of normally presumed traditions. And we already begin to require those modifiers such as "seems like" and "almost" (which will become even more necessary at more complex layers) in order to fully clarify the experiential acts which are establishing generative (en)closures of the sacred-group type.

**GREEN**

Pluralism begins by alternating between realities. It therefore revalues apparent alternatives, folds in the obvious examples of minimized or excluded "others," and quickly moves to begin appreciating the inter-contextual effects operating at the semantic boundaries between interpretations. It proliferates alternatives and meta-models while deconstructing its options into creative sub-components. Here we require quotation marks around the word "tradition" and expect that a variety of Christianities, Buddhism, Islams, etc., are holding hands with an indefinitely unfolding mixture of neo-archaic, quasi-fictional, or hyper-individualistic attempts to performatively enact a religious bubble. The general ambivalence toward the hegemonic idea of a "tradition" arises quite naturally when our consciousness begins to emphasize background ecosystemic networks and the surprising world of unseen ingredients.

Here the definition of a tradition can only be a kind of game-piece in co-creative exchange. Linguistic habits, divergent states of consciousness, the activation of "neurosomatic brain

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9 Late Orange/early Green pluralist thought becomes enamored with the possibility of a perennial philosophy.
circuitry," and the rise of the relaxed/sensitized universalist ethos requires that: Traditions are "whatever" WE or THEY say they are. We recognize that traditions are culturally co-created, in other words – but still struggle with clearly seeing our own implicit biases.

TEAL

Integrative approaches to religious bubbles must take over and newly explain the complementary validity of the previous phases. It is no longer good enough to imagine that traditions are anarchic mutual constructs any more than it is acceptable to pretend that popular group-designations represent monolithic "traditions" (or even easily comprehended sets of sub-traditions).

A twin task emerges here. We must enfold and validate the previous layers while also asserting a new coherent scaffolding of organic-functional and trans-structuralist "types" which form the REAL traditions.

Religion here must be a temporalized spectrum of transrational tantric holism dependent upon synchronization, creative appropriation of apparent incommensurability, and advanced dialectical sensibility.

We assume that different modules/lines of development probably form the basis for a categorization of types of religious bubbles – enacted in all quadrants and perceived distinctly at each layer of socio-cognitive reality. These basic types are the valid "traditions" when viewed from this level but they must be held alongside the embrace of non-pathological junior levels as well as held open for any degree of pragmatic usage among people whose temperament or prior-level conditioning leaves them instinctively skewed toward inherited styles.

BRUCE: That’s really helpful, Layman. It’s a lot to take in at once, but I admire the prodigious amount of deep and often luminous content you can deliver, seemingly always on-tap. What strikes me here is what sets this account apart from previous integral classifications of religious traditions. Ken Wilber and Dustin DiPerna, for example, have offered several different developmental overviews of the major world religions or religious figures: there is an Amber Buddhism, an Orange one, and a Green one; a Purple Jesus, a Red one, and an Orange one. Typically in these surveys, what counts as a religion remains constant throughout, but it gets reinterpreted, re-decorated, at each stage. They do not seem to have stressed that faithfulness to the inherited groupings is often retention of, and faithfulness to, an Amber-level formulation itself.

LAYMAN: Yes. And of course we already talked about that before. So, to recap:

Traditional consciousness presumes a totalized core – or "real nature" – of a religion. Often this is associated with a book-dogma or particular famous passages therein.

Modern consciousness wants to know what these different tradition-machines do for different individuals. It tries to distill the “truths” from whatever stories ensconced them.
Postmodern consciousness wants to include everything and thereby discovers a sliding scale of identities between all the normal and abnormal options. However this sliding scale does not acknowledge the embodied, anchoring parameters which enable it to operate.

When those are enfolded, a new set of structures appears as the justification of previous forms and suddenly we are required to re-group all the groups according to perspectival and enactive ingredients, and ground them in what seems unavoidably true about the human condition (e.g., the interplay of emotion and reason; the neuro-biological mechanics of state experiences, etc.)

EDWARD: What do you mean by a "sliding scale" between alternatives?

LAYMAN: Consider the following two examples:

A cult of Medieval Buddhists practiced meditation in a very interesting fashion. They called upon a compassionate Buddha-of-Light by Name. He had once walked upon the historical earth but now lived in a heavenly afterworld. By getting right with this figure your soul could be reborn in this heaven. Here the grace of illumination is rapidly and easily attained.

Not only does this sound a lot like what we normally mean by "Christianity," it was also noted by Zen Master Hakuin that a profound, insightful, and hard-practicing Name-Praying Buddhist should be considered to be doing Zen.

The Christian monk named Eckhart prayed to the Virgin Mary in a special way. He made his mind still and empty like a virgin's womb so that an all-pervading and nameless wisdom-power would naturally flow in, impregnating him with a new self – a "christ" who would feel, see, and understand via the christ-mind. That sounds a lot like Zen Buddhism.

Very Buddhist Christianity. Very Christian Buddhism.

Our pluralist consciousness learns to situate people on a sliding scale of alternatives between these major blocs. But we must ask whether or not those blocs are sustainable? If these traditions are so various as to include each other in most practical ways then of what use are they as the reference-group at all? Why situate the sliding scale between them? Why not look for a better grouping? Why not look as a zoologist would look – and not as a record-keeper of names would look?

BRUCE: That's a good question. And your final point, about the discovery of the interpenetration of traditions, takes us quite close to an integral model of interreligious relations that I developed elsewhere. It will lead us, really, to a different metaphor altogether: the wild knot, rather than the generative (en)closure. I’ll return to this later. To offer my own recap in response to what you’ve just shared:

A generative (en)closure is formed through the communal establishment of a "membrane" which serves as a protective, unit- or field-defining boundary as well as a means of
interface, for the enactment of a domain of distinctions (i.e., a worldspace). We might pair the word “enclosure,” here, with disclosure: the magic ring or bubble so established is invocational; it discloses certain beings and worlds (thinking here, for instance, of von Uexküll’s semiotic bubbles). And as a "bubble" or "globe" in Sloterdijk's sense, it also establishes an immunological zone which, the stronger or more vital it is, the more it enables those within the (en)closure to interact with diverse cosmic beings without risk of compromising their health or integrity. While generative (en)closures are fragile and impermanent compositions, they are also ir/reducible in Latour's sense: not finally reducible to anything else, and yet always (through effort, with some loss, always via some 'transformation') indefinitely reducible or relatable to other things. One way to express this is that the irreducibility of a holon or generative (en)closure is found precisely in its indefinite or inexhaustible reducibility. In Edgar Morin's terms, a generative (en)closure (of the kind we are interested in here, such as religious or spiritual generative (en)closures) is autopoietic or auto-eco-reorganizing – self-producing and deeply participatory, in both embedded and enactive senses. Or we could understand this using Bhaskar's frequently paired terms, concrete singularity and dialectical universality. Taken together, they suggest that holons or generative (en)closures are not only irreducibly particular (concretely singular), but also intimately enfolded within and co-present to one another (mutually in-dwelling, in potential if not in actuality for any particular being at a given time).

Turning to religion, we might envision 'nominal traditions' as foam-like identity clusters, or cultural-linguistic clusters, which consist of numerous 'religious bubbles' – partly overlapping, contiguous, or connected-at-a-distance – each of which maintains itself through practices and forms of religious speech. If we take the generation of coherence and surplus meaningfulness as at least two characteristics of spiritual and religious activity (and there may be other important ones to consider), we must also recognize that this coherence itself is a multiplicity of 'coherences’ – of forms and modes of flowering, integration, becoming-whole – that might be sought and enacted by practitioners belonging to any particular religious bubble. The "dharma" of different bubbles may be to attend to and exercise different lines, in other words, or cultivate different states, privilege different perspectives, seek different levels of maturity and visionary-ethical embrace, etc.

But if we consider that 'nominal traditions' may also include 'bubbles' which no longer function religiously, at least from an integral perspective (meaning, they’ve become degenerative); and also that religious bubbles may form well outside the bounds of the nominal religious traditions; and also that different nominal traditions may include bubbles that are rather structurally and functionally similar to (or homeomorphically equivalent to) religious bubbles outside of their own boundaries, then ... well, this foam is quickly getting out of hand!

Keeping this visualization going, we might imagine injecting medical dyes into this giant foamy mountain, with different colors to indicate the 'territory' claimed by any nominal tradition as well as those religious bubble-territories that lie outside of traditional boundaries. Each of these colored swaths might overlap or intersect at various places of homeomorphic equivalency. If we further imagine that the bubbles can be differentiated
along soteriological, developmental, and other lines – the forms and styles of being they seek, the lines they exercise, the perspectives they privilege – then we might dye the bubbles in additional colors, until they all begin to shine with rainbow iridescence, each bubble reflecting all the other teeming spheres. In this foamy topography, we might still be able to pick out differently hued swaths that correspond roughly to the various traditions and lineages we first marked – different continents, islands, and currents of opacity and radiance in the teeming mound – but at the same time, we will be able to discern entirely different strands and masses of color, new geographies which have little to do with the old circles of belonging. Rising up high enough to capture such a global view will likely impact us the way our first vision of Earth did: we can no longer view or inhabit our 'countries' in quite the same way, if we feel inclined to identify with them at all.

This metaphor suggests rather crudely some beginning anthropological passes through a newly discovered territory: a foamy space of religious bubbles that are both contiguous and mutually reflective or interpenetrating. Prepositionally, this is the with/in of co-presence, integral in-dwelling. When we take on the vision of co-presence, we realize that each holon or generative (en)closure ultimately enfolds the totality, or the potential to actualize any aspect of the totality. Traditions remain unique, because each only enacts certain parts of that potential at any time, in its own distinctive ways; and yet each is haunted by all. In “Integral In-dwelling,” I introduced the concept of the wild knot to get at this infinite infolding: in knot theory, a wild knot is a knot that folds infinitely, without final closure. That unfathomable entanglement is what I also try to suggest through this image of bubbles, with their dizzying dye patterns and their Indra’s net-like iridescent co-reflection. The spreading, intermixing dye patterns identify those places we have begun to trace out homeomorphic equivalencies across multiple domains, multiple traditions or (en)closures (a task we are likely never to complete).

So I appreciate your additions here, Layman. In my previous writings, I had argued that the concept of co-presence could deliver a fruitful model of interreligious relationship, allowing at once for the singularity and entanglement of traditions. I assumed this orientation could promote greater willingness to learn from other traditions, if we could recognize in them some of our own latent potentials, while being assured that our actualization of the same would still be unique or “faithful” to our own mythos. And I had used my integral grammatology to explore the complementarity of several different integrative models, and to suggest some useful metatheoretical “pivot points” to bring them into closer relation. But I had not yet formally discussed or proposed the tasks you recommend here: questioning and deconstructing our “received” traditions (a kind of exercise in dis/enclosure), and actually tracing out the enactive practices, lines, and other AQAL (or other) factors across traditions and stages that might really help to identify altogether different groupings or families of religious bubbles.

LAYMAN: Nicely summarized, Bruce. And yes, that task is still mostly ahead of us.

Once we see "bubbles" (in whatever version) we are already standing well beyond the traditionalist worldspace. Probably beyond the modernist worldspace as well. From this vertiginous height, we peer down tentatively at a seething and remarkable panorama. What
do we see? Delicate but robust entanglements of interpenetrating zones. Each one marked at its edges by an ongoing activity of self-reference, attunement, engagement, assimilation, and self-defense. Atop the central spire of the largest bulge we see the flags we have inherited from the modernists – the great "options" which they have discovered in their exploratory journeys between orthodox cultural modes.

We are delighted, intrigued, and provoked. Perhaps we begin a new round of investigations? Our anthropologists start to dispense with the notion of a single hegemonic interpretation at the "core" of a dogmatic text. We rove about asking all the Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews about their experience of their own faith. A great diversity is recorded. Look at all these different types of that one "thing" we are studying... but truly the diversity is excessive! It overwhelms our studies. Our subject of investigation appears where it should not be and vanishes from key areas where we relied on it as a reference. The bubbles proliferate so rapidly we are left with handfuls of sheer fluid... leaking through our fingers.

Vexed, we resolve to climb a little higher and get a "better view." But as our altitude increases the problem only gets worse (although, admittedly, our sense of its "problem-nature" seems to diminish). Now the inherited labels seem arbitrary or misleading as often as useful. They retain no privilege in the categorization of the topology we are inspecting. And yet the result is not a free-for-all. Like men watching the fractals on the surface of a flowing river, we are clearly confronted by recurrent patterns – even by a typology.

As we slowly familiarize ourselves with these previously obscure types of patterns, inventing new terms as we go, there begins to appear an astonishing and imposing vision. These types-of-religion are appearing sometimes near the rituals, practices, and conversations of traditions... sometimes far away... but always in a great mutuality with each other. They are active according to their own natures and from whatever context they emerge from within. Yet they are not independent. From this height it is clear that they are immediately mutually supportive – counterbalancing each other in great variety – and progressively self-similar. Each one that thrive does so by expanding into mutations and assimilations which approximate the expansion patterns of the others. Yes, they are idiosyncratically emerging and diverging, but they are also cooperating with each other and enfolding each other in ways that push them forward toward a seemingly totalized manifestation.

Now we feel that we behold the rise of universal religion – not by the conquest of one nominal tradition nor by their cooperation (although both factors play a subordinate role) – but as a kind of botanical phenomenon operating at a level that more frequently resembles "generic human culture" than "popular notions of religion." And yet its religiousness is amplified, enhanced. It is building a force, and operating through mechanisms, appropriate to the sheer planetary (and perhaps interplanetary) nature of its task.

BRUCE: I’m smiling because those final words would likely be quite disturbing to our brothers and sisters of the “participatory turn.” But my sense is that what you are describing is as much composition as disclosure: a kind of participatory enactment in itself. Something like...
Latour’s notion of instauration comes to mind: the blurring or in/distinction of “discovery” and “invention.” We can’t quite tell whether what we “find” was already fully there waiting for us, or is something newly summoned, a playful and useful enactment.

Is there anything else you wanted to add about religious bubbles?

LAYMAN: Yes, one other piece. In addition to this striated vision of religious bubbles we must be aware that multiple types of bubbles may operate with largely overlapping sets of symbols and referents. This is because the actual activity of generative (en)closing, like the experience of a layer of consciousness, is anchored in the style of the context – the holding – and not exactly the content which is affirmed.

This is especially pertinent when it comes to social discussion. We have to make two critical distinctions: active vs. neutral (or even degenerative), sacred vs. topical.

1. The former implies that any communication (which reinforces a boundary by referencing it) might be vibrating with the freshness of new meaningfulness or basically a mechanical reiteration. For example, the perpetuation of the signifier “Christ” may in one utterance operate to help reinforce the vitality of a particular religious bubble, or it may be indifferent to such a function – used without spirit in a manner whose effects are primarily (if not totally) inert relative to the establishment of the membrane around a field of cultural coherence.

The slogan "no one is neutral on a moving train" reminds us that non-progressive or non-resonant embodiments of zone-establishing signifiers quickly move from the status of placeholder to the status of underminer. Not carrying it forward frequently operates as if it were destructive. And yet it may use apparently the same symbols or rituals, etc.

2. Our second distinction requires that we tease apart the production of "talk bubbles" from "religious bubbles." Clearly there may be all kinds of overlap but it is not necessarily the case that a particular generative (en)closure is being established when it seems to be appearing in discussion and shared thinking. People frequently manipulate conversational TOPICS in order to discuss other topics which are urgent, titillating, or nearby.

Just as any critical discussion of a thinker's positions may be quite valid while not actually pertaining to that person's ideas in any legitimate or comprehensive fashion, and just as the shadow of a celebrity can occupy a place in the politics of cyberspace which has little to do with their actual nature or positions (frequently unknown to the people discussing them), we can find this same pattern of "ghosts in the system" in the study of religious bubbles as well.

Therefore, at minimum, we need to make sure that we do not mistake the transactional economy of conversation – whether populist, academic, or apparently "devout" – for the symbolic and cognitive processes which support the establishment of a generative (en)closure of the religious-group type. They may or may not be the same in any given instance. A great deal of hesitation is required in front of apparently obvious topics. Even
those who appear supportive (and are therefore readily embraced and affirmed) may be supporting a phantom that simply bears an identical name in the discourse.

BRUCE: Yes, I think that’s important. It can be helpful and clarifying to distinguish "talk bubbles" from "religious bubbles" (here, meaning, not only 'practice' or 'ascetological' or 'anthropotechnical' bubbles, but those bubbles which foster integration and spiritual flowering), since sometimes people may talk in so-called religious words but not in a way that is spiritually generative or religious in the sense we mean here. But granting this, I would not like to suggest that "talk" is merely incidental to religious generative (en)closures, or that "talk"/translation can be cleanly separated from "practice"/transformation. While I think Latour's understanding of religion and spirituality is seriously limited (he seems only to reference conventional Catholicism in his reflections), he makes a distinction between religious and other types of language that is useful here. He says that we make a mistake to treat religious language as if it were similar to the scientific language of reference, whether describing this world (which science just gets wrong – the earth is only 6000 years old!), or describing a metaphysical world beyond this physical one. Instead, religious speech delivers "a type of original truth which gives meaning to the predication only if it creates anew the person to which it is addressed" (Latour, 2013). Here, words, concepts, stories, and so on, are not ghostly abstractions 'about' being, but are beings themselves, angels or dakinis themselves: they are part of the assemblage that constitutes a generative (en)closure.

LAYMAN: An important qualification, si, si. We might put it this way: Symbolic referencing (talk, the assumption of normative categories) and social habits (rituals) can operate as elements of the practice of sustaining a religious bubble, or as elements sustaining alternative "talk bubbles," or neither. Talk is religious when it contributes to the production of more "coherence" in the bubble and brings level-appropriate intensified cooperation among contemporary social genres. This is the standard of religious speech as distinct from poetic speech, scientific speech, therapeutic speech, etc.

BRUCE: Well put. I would add that symbolic referencing might serve a third function as well: as a corrosive or degenerative element, leading to systemic decay.

Wilber has often distinguished between twin functions of religion: translation and transformation. But they are neither mutually exclusive nor hermetically sealed. Translative activity can itself be transformative, generative; religious transformation often entails coming to embody the forms for which the translation was a virtual attractor and generative (en)closure; and transformation sometimes results in bubble-rupture or dis/enclosure, necessitating new translations.

EDWARD: I think we shouldn’t forget that the IPS forum has been a kind of generative (en)closure. The unlikely juxtaposition of those three words – integral, postmetaphysical, spirituality – has served as a kind of koan-like virtual attractor that has impelled a 12-year journey of exploration, formation, and transformation. For some of us, it has also ripened into a kind of dis/enclosure: I no longer feel compelled by that constellation of words, and
I’ve moved on to other interests and concerns. But I will always carry the formative traces of our work there.

BRUCE: Well, I am indebted to conversations with you, Layman, and several other core members there for many of my own shifts in thought and perception over the past 12 years. IPS has definitely been a generative (en)closure for me.

EDWARD: Is there anything else you’d like to add?

BRUCE: I think we’ve covered some good ground. As I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, generative (en)closure is a variation on the CONTAINER image schema that has often been invoked in discussions of religious traditions, but we’ve introduced a number of related metaphors that helped move us beyond the typical focus on membership, in/out-groups, orthodoxy, and so on. We’ve discussed generative (en)closure as a cell, an autopoietic body-environment process, a temple, a magic ring or sorcerer’s circle, a cage-like metallophone, an amphitheater or other amplifying chamber, an alchemical cauldron, a planetarium (facilitating cosmic vision), and a fragile, all-reflecting bubble or pearl. Ultimately, we imploded it into a black hole-like wild knot (which unleashes a whole zoo of relations).10

The immunological function of the generative (en)closure mirrors the protective function of traditional religious containers, but emphasizes the interreligiously significant insight that robust immunity allows for greater, more intimate (if sometimes disorienting) interface with the alien and other. The amplifying quality touches an important theme for postmetaphysical spirituality. As Sloterdijk reminds us, the post-Nietzschean life of practice is marked by vertical tension; there is a transcendent pull that calls us ever towards transformation. A successful generative (en)closure amplifies and sustains this vertical tension. And the reflective bubble and knot images remind us that our sacred containers are both unique and entangled, singular and convergent.

I recognize that we got up to some pretty arcane language games in this discussion, likely not to everyone’s taste. I won’t bother to thank the two of you for indulging me, because we all have similar linguistic vices. But I hope our readers will be able to extract something useful from our exchange – and that this text might itself serve something like a generative (en)closure, establishing with its particular demands a zone of intensity that fosters fresh insight into the familiar domains of our bodies, relations, routines, and traditions.

LAYMAN: I have a headache... Seriously, thank you, my friends, for the wonderful workout. I’m grateful for you both, and for the perspectival stretching and play the IPS forum has allowed us to get up to for so many years.

10 Mark Edwards’ (2006) presentation, “An Integral Approach to Relationality,” very helpfully outlines some of this “zoo” of relations, and also illuminates the generativity of the interstitial spaces between generative (en)closures or bubbles. From the perspective of integral grammatology, his presentation – and his later paper, “Inter-Bridging” – quite fruitfully explore the meta-theoretical space that I describe as “prepositional.”
References


Why Metaphysics Matters

Bonnitta Roy

Abstract: A lively discussion about why metaphysics matters in our current Metamodern era. I derive a process model of metaphysics based on Whiteheadian process philosophy. I interweave Gebser’s notion of the mental structure of consciousness into a deeper understanding of the difference between the up-ward synthetic-dialectic of the western mind, and the downward, deconstructive dialectic in the eastern approach. I show how Hartshorne’s process metaphysics resolved both eastern and western dilemmas around the ultimate categories. I end with a description of the problem situation we have of escalating epistemic complexity, and how adopting a process metaphysical praxis can help us renew our ways of meeting the complexity of the world.

Keywords: Complexity science, Dogen, Gebser, hyperobjects, integral consciousness, Nagarjuna, overmining, process philosophy, synthetic-dialectic, Whitehead.

Metaphysics is all about Describing Water to Fish

Metaphysics has acquired a bad reputation. I want to show you why metaphysics matters. Metaphysics means different things to different people. In the history of philosophy it has become somewhat a catch-all for all types of meta-philosophizing. Metaphysics can be reclaimed by examining its roots in mathematics and geometry – which no one would argue don’t matter to physics. Theoretical mathematicians, creating mathematical frameworks that are built up in rigorously logical ways, through complex rules of logic and translation, are the purest metaphysicians of all. Metaphysics in this regard is the study of, understanding of, and creation of conceptual frameworks that can function in a variety of ways: for beauty, for usefulness, for meaning-making, for deconstructing limiting frameworks, for experimenting, for trying something new just for the hell of it, for creating new languages such as writing computer codes or “inventing” non-Euclidian geometry, for creating fantasy worlds in literature or virtual reality.

Metaphysics gets into trouble when it tries to make truth claims about the world. No true metaphysician would make such claims, because the pre-requisite of a valid metaphysics, is that it understands what underlies all truth claims, namely a cognitive-conceptual architecture, i.e., a metaphysical framework. While it may not be possible for the philosopher to reveal the contours of their framework, (in other words, think themselves out of their metaphysical box), a good metaphysician reminds themselves that there is one, beyond the horizons of their capacity to think.

The goal of a metaphysics, contemporarily, is to sew together what Kant’s metaphysics tore apart: the domains of epistemology and ontology. Here I use the simple working definitions that “Epistemology concerns itself with how we know about reality,” and “Ontology concerns itself

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with reality.” Kant pointed to the limitations of the human mind, language, thought and existential conditions as barriers to knowing the world as it really is. He highlighted certain rules of logic, science and judgment that could serve as accurate correspondences to what is real. Ontology was thereafter whisked away from the discourses of theology and theosophy and made subservient to the rules and methodologies of scientific reasoning. Once the post-modern mind began to “see” that the scientific enterprise itself could also be contextualized by deconstructive critique, the very idea of an ontologically real truth was abandoned. The philosopher Roy Bhaskar (2002, 2009) created an entire new philosophy called Critical Realism to redress the postmodern overcorrection. With the word “critical” Bhaskar preserved the deconstructive act of metaphysical examination. With the word “realism” Bhaskar restored the belief in levels of reality that exist independent of human reasoning, positing that there is an ontologically real domain of existence that is not dependent upon epistemological claims. Bhaskar emphasized that this ontologically independent domain is available to examination through methods of reasoning and knowing that generate epistemologically valid truths. Yet, even the epistemologically untapped domain of the real, persistently calls us, to listen at levels deeper than the reasoning mind. This untapped domain, calls to us with what Bhaskar called the alethic truth. The alethic truth is not an epistemologically known or empirically verifiable truth. Rather it discloses itself through our own existential condition, which is an impulse to greater degrees of freedom. This impulse realizes greater freedoms by throwing off the shackles of slavery and bondage, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by acts of pure creation, by presencing what is absent, as, for example, in Charles Eisenstein’s (2013) words, “creating the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible.”

Critical Realism plays an important role in healing the rift between epistemology and ontology. But what of metaphysics? When Bhaskar says that philosophy should “under-labor” for science, he comes close to describing a new metaphysical orientation. Under-laboring means revealing the boundary conditions in which certain scientific truths are (and are not) true. If we do a simple empirical test, let’s say, by dropping a feather and a stone from a tower at precisely the same time, our naïve results might suggest that the “falling force” pulls at selective speeds, depending on the substance. We might conclude that the “falling force” has greater affection for rocks over feathers; or we might conclude that the speed of gravity depends upon the mass of the object. To think of gravity, as Einstein did, as accelerating inertial frames, is an act of pure metaphysical innovation. As such, Einstein argued, the feather and the stone fall at the same velocity and reach the ground at the same time. The difference we see in our experiments are due to the different effects of air resistance. Einstein’s new metaphysics, had such explanatory power, that science switched to his position. Only recently were we able to actually observe a feather and a stone falling (to the earth) at the same velocity and reaching ground at precisely the same time.

Sir Isaac Newton’s Laws of Motion constitute a set of metaphysical assumptions that prove to be helpful. Still, they lock us into a certain frame of reference that limits what can be known about the world. Newton’s metaphysics claims that “an object in motion will stay in motion unless an external force is applied to it.” In Newton’s metaphysics, there is no place for self-animated objects. We are comfortable, then, with not including living beings like ourselves. But what of electrons moving in a copper wire wrapped around a magnet? Here we don’t need a third term that identifies the external force. The objects themselves are participating in this dance of movement.

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2 Similarly Sloterdijk speaks of “vertical tension” that propels us toward future possibilities.
3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E43-CfukEgs
We can choose to separate the objects and the “forces” that move them, in much the way that Georg Ohm’s equations do to describe laws of electricity. Ohm conceived of electricity as “currents” just like currents in a stream. This is an act of metaphorical imagination, which releases the complexity of the equations he needed to describe certain fixed relationships between voltage (intensity) and resistance. What if, instead of creating a third term like “current” Ohm thought of the action of electrons as population dynamics of self-organizing systems? There would be no need for a third term. What he viewed as “currents” would become, instead, the “emergent patterns” of complex self-organizing dynamics. What I want to point out here is that good metaphysics creates greater clarity by improving the precision of the description of phenomena. Mathematics is a language of great descriptive precision. This is the reason why Charles Hartshorne (1983) considered mathematics as the purest form of metaphysics.

Another alternative would be to switch to a metaphysics of self-animated form. Einstein moved in this direction when he reimagined gravity not as an external force “pulling” on objects (mass) but rather, as something that mass (objects) does. Two objects dance around each other, and self-organize a familiar pattern we call “acceleration due to the force of gravity.” Yet, with a metaphysics of self-animation, we have no need for the third term “force of gravity.” I first discovered this query in high school when we learned about electricity. Wrap a copper wire around a magnet, and voila! you get electric current. In the laboratory I would shake my head and ask “But where does the electricity come from?” This persistent need for a third term is a necessary consequence of a Newtonian metaphysics of inanimate objects. It’s the metaphysics that cries out for a third term. You can experience this yourself by watching this video of the world’s simplest electric train. In similar fashion, the term “ether” was posited as a substance that propagated the light wave, in the same way that sound is the propagation of air waves. Hence, there is no sound in the vacuum of space. We now think of light as a wave form unto itself, capable of propagating through space without a theory of an ether. In the procession of metaphysical vies, third terms like “ether” “gravity” and “electric current,” are both presented and absented at different times.

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4 As it turns out, form can be considered "self-animated" because "animation" (the energy-momentum tensor) is what now quantifies the amount of matter, according to contemporary Quantum Field Theory. As Richard Campbell (2015) explains:

   To a great extent, the mass of an atom is simply the sum of the masses of its constituent protons, neutrons, and electrons, but their mass in turn is due to the binding energy of quarks within the protons and neutrons (the generation of mass is thought to be the role of the recently confirmed Higgs boson). In other words, most of what composes the 'mass' of ordinary matter is due to the energy generated by interactions within the quantum fields. ... So in that context, a more general view is usually taken that it is not mass, but the energy-momentum tensor which quantifies the amount of matter. (p. 48) [emphasis mine]

5 For an fascinating paper on the intersection of Nagarjuna and Quantum science, see David Ritz Finkelstein’s Emptiness and Relativity which can be accessed here.

http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.68.4935&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Finkelstein rejects third terms in science, which he calls “idols.” For example, he writes:

   In physical theories so far there have always been absolutes, vestiges of being, essences. Indeed, Einstein first called his brain-child a theory of invariants, not of relativity. What remains now that is absolute? What must we empty next? As we have seen, we cannot always detect important absolutes easily from within a theory. By never moving, idols tend to become invisible. We must step outside the theory and examine both what physicists say and what they do, and especially to the connection between these two modes of action, the semantics of the theory, to discover what absolutes are tacitly
This one metaphysical revision alone would have enormous impact for the reality we come to believe in. It would be a re-enchant ed reality, where every object, at every scale, was participating with every other object, at all different scales. It would align itself with what Graham Harvey (2014) calls Neo-an imism. Suddenly everything would be living and experiencing! There is actually a term for this approach – pan-experientialism. It is a term used to describe the reality that was derived by Alfred North Whitehead’s (1979) process metaphysics. Whitehead, however, was no fool. He understood that he was making things up, creating entirely new ways of thinking and entertaining a really big thought experiment about “reality.” This uniquely philosophical practice is called speculative ontology, and Whitehead was careful in his admonitions to those who might swallow the hook of reification while nibbling on the bait of imaginative reasoning. Right up front in his introduction to his magnus opus, Process and Reality, he cautions us

There remains in the final reflection, how shallow, how puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things. In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement, is an exhibition of folly. (p. xiv)

Whitehead took great pains to outline a practical methodology for speculative ontology. For him, speculative ontology means to form a theory of reality, with a freely acting, imaginative mind. Taking speculative ontology as a serious philosophical pursuit means the possibility of disclosing worlds that could be possible, which otherwise do not seem possible, given the set of constraints on the metaphysics of ontology conventional to one’s domain, culture and/or milieu.

Whitehead believed that speculative philosophy could be productive of important, undiscovered knowledge if one “endeavor[ed] to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience [could] be interpreted” (p. 5). He thought that speculative philosophy, if done right, could be a work-around in lieu of the logical positivists’ efforts to found a metaphysics of reason based on strict categories of logic and mathematics. Instead, Whitehead emphasized imagination, intuition, experience and essence. “Here is what we have in our intuition and experience,” he might have spoken in a casual conversation. “How can we use our imagination to derive a theory of essence that accounts for them?” He could have said, without any special inflection, “Suppose we assume we know nothing about reality. Yet here it is, this existence. It holds together. There must be some essential necessities. And here it is, this inquiring mind, these feelings of curiosity and intimacy. They must be adequate and applicable to them.” Writing alongside the great logical positivists, Whitehead was adamant that useful metaphysical principles were not to be captured by logical reasoning, but rather, through flashes of insight that propagated through “the play of free imagination, controlled by the requirements of coherence and logic” (p. 5). This, “true method of discovery” he likened to the flight of an airplane: “It starts from the ground of particular observations; it makes a flight into thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation” (p. 5).

assumed. … When the question arose whether concepts like a variable matter-space-time law unity had ever been expressed, Nagarjuna’s verses on the Madhyamika (the Middle Way) were cited. From a recent translation of a translation [Nagarjuna (1995)], it seems that they can indeed be read as saying that space, time, matter and causation are relative, with no permanent essence, and that this is inferred from the very fact that we perceive them.
Whitehead contended that the reason why this method of “imaginative rationalization” works, where other methods fail, is due to the fact that influences (what he called factors) that are present yet not presently observed, emerge through the free play of imagination. Here he was anticipating Bhaskar’s notion of how absence presences itself through the alethic truth. What was imaginative rationalization for Whitehead, Bhaskar called “retroduction,” echoing Charles Sander’s Peirce’s notion of abduction. Whitehead writes of the power of imagination to “supply what the differences which the direct observation lacks.” And yet while Bhaskar appeals to a subtle reductionism in his notions of the real, Whitehead remains firmly de-ontological, by staying within the practical “adequacies” of the human imagination and its participation in everyday ordinary experience: “It [the imagination] can even play with inconsistency; and can thus throw light on the consistent, and persistent, elements in experience by comparison with what in imagination is inconsistent with them” (p. 5).

The power of Whitehead, over Peirce and Bhaskar, is that he makes his imagination transparent to his philosophical enterprise. By contrast, Peirce was reluctant to “pierce through” his metaphysical veil and realize that he was examining the features of his own mind. There is a great quote from the movie series “True Detective” that illustrates to me what being around Pierce must have been like. The detective Rustin Cohle, (played by Matthew McConaughey), has episodes of “otherworldly” perception and intuition. In one scene, Cohle says that during these episodes of deep intuitive listening, there were “times when I thought I was main-lining the secret truth of the universe.” This is the overall impression that Pierce can leave us with. Similarly, reading Bhaskar, especially when he is writing about meta-Reality, the astute reader (the reader wearing their metaphysical decoding ring) can discern a subtle residue of the realist’s ontological reductionism to his otherwise imaginative and creative foray into speculative philosophy. The point I want to emphasize here, is the truth about all metaphysical truths: at the end of the day, what metaphysics describes is the architecture of the most fundamental interface where mind and raw reality participate – the finely grained texture of our imagination and participation.

To live in a post-metaphysical world, does not mean to throw the baby out with the bathwater. A post-metaphysical orientation asserts that there is always 1) either an implicit or explicit ontology operating in any truth claim and 2) either a transparent or hidden metaphysical framework that is foundational to that ontology. Metaphysics is like mining – the deeper you dig, the more gold you’re likely to find. For the metaphysician “gold digging” is all about looking for what is implicitly functioning but not yet explicitly known, and the ambitious gold digger wants also to reveal the hidden metaphysical framework deep at the core of any ontology. Whitehead’s speculative philosophy, his process ontology of reality, proved to be a gold mine for a radical new metaphysical excavation. By situating his ontological musings in a process metaphysics of becoming, Whitehead’s process ontology became the bedrock for a radically new kind of process metaphysics. But before we go further, we need to take a look at the relationship between metaphysics and existence.

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7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seu6g2f7aec
The Matrix of Existence

I teach a masters course in consciousness studies at The Graduate Institute. In the first weekend I ask the cohort to agree on a Venn Diagram to illustrate the difference between what is “real” and what “exists” (or alternately, between “reality” and “existence.” Invariably, people agree that existence is the larger set, and within it is a subset called “reality.” It is reasonable common sense to see that some “things that exist” are not “real.” Yet they never turn that argument upside down and say that there are things that are real that do not exist. Following Whitehead, a process philosopher might say just that, since potentials may be real potentials but not (yet) exist where “to exist” means to be “actualized” (become what Whitehead called an “actual” occasion). In process metaphysics, real potentials differ from Bhaskar’s *alethic truths*, because Bhaskar’s subtle ontological reductionism suggest that *alethic truths actually exist*, but in process metaphysics, *real potentials* do not (yet) exist, and maybe never actualize. What is true in both cases, is that the *alethic truth* and the *real potential* both make a causal contribution to what is eventually becomes either 1) *known* in the sense of epistemologically verifiable truth or 2) *actual* in the sense of an actualized existing occasion.\(^8\) To simplify the field, it might be useful to look at the following diagram which I call the *Matrix of Existence.*

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\(^8\) Bhaskar most probably intuited what process metaphysics would make more explicit, and what complexity science would eventually re-imagine as *dispositional states of a system*. The dispositional state of a system entails all the possible future states (weighted differently) as they “juggle their way to a final configuration” in the next adjacent moment (solving problems, as it were, much like the tiling problem in crystallography). In this prior state, potentials are causally implicated in the “deliberation of the final configuration” but neither necessarily realized as actuals (actual causes) or sustained as future potentials. Therefore, in complexity science, as in process philosophy, “origin” or “sources” may have only existed in potential, and...
This matrix says that everything that either \textit{actually} exists or can \textit{possibly} exist, fits into one of four locations. Here existence is not a binary, but a kind of spectrum, from ordinary observable objects (where here “observable” means perceivable through our senses) to forces which we cannot observe, but can infer with the aid of conceptual abstractions, technological facility and methodological discipline. The matrix also includes forces we can imagine in the abstract but have no means of validating them, as well as objects and forces we do not see because we have no technology or conceptual apparatus to reveal them. Finally, the most subtle category in the matrix concerns abstractions and conceptions, logics and mathematics, which have not (yet) been conceived. As long as metaphysics sticks to the right hand quadrants, it is safe from the post-modern critique. Kant described the “stuff” in the RH quadrants as “transcendentalia” — a word whose meaning runs close to Russ Cohle’s description of “mainlining the secret truths of the universe.” Henceforward, we were left with the uncanny prospect of “mapping” instead of inhabiting territories as the number one project of human knowledge building. On the other hand, the post-modernist has completely eliminated the “stuff” in the left-hand quadrants — namely, the concrete objects that exist the same as they do, with or without human conceptualization. Henceforward from \textit{there}, curiously, paradoxically, and rather humorously, the post-modernists have anchored themselves firmly in the RH world of Kant’s transcendentalia and the metaphysics that they so strongly deny. Gotta love that twist!

The matrix of existence helps us define the “existential status” of “things.” It says, quite naively, that all this stuff really exists, but there is a range or field of existence — some of which is concrete and obvious (the UL), some of which is more subtle and less obvious, some of which is so subtle that it needs more “help”, conceptually and imaginatively to bring it into awareness, and some of which is unknown, but none-the-less part of what is “really existent” because everything is mutually interdependent (all causes, conditions and effects are mutually arising), and some of this stuff is so very subtle, that it exists in potential only.

Depending on who you are, and how you relate to different “stuff”, you will assign more or less “existence” to them. Some mathematicians for example, think numbers are really very real, so that numbers, which are UR quadrant stuff, would be assigned a much higher level of existence by them than by your average textile worker. For the mathematician, numbers are more like the territory, but for the textile worker, they are more like the map. Plato placed a high level of existence on ideas, that’s why he capitalized the word. Plotinus set out to create a taxonomy of the Ideas, a project he construed as discovering the language of God. His project was, of course, a great exercise of pure metaphysical creation. A fun parlor game might be to sit with your friends and parse out what fits where in the matrix of existence, and grade them according to the status of existence you would give them. You might discover that metaphysics not only \textit{matters}, but that it can be fun, and can reveal the rich multi-layered textures in the spectrum of existence. Which, actually, is what metaphysics is for.

\textit{as a result the present is not even theoretically} traceable to something like a past origin. Rather, “origin” is in the preservation of the protocol for potentials to advance into the future, whether as realized actuals, realized effects or as “nothing at all.” Given this, it can be said, that while both prior potentials and future actuals are \textit{infinite}, they are \textit{not exhaustible}, since some potentials and some actuals are eliminated from the infinite set. For example, there was a time when there were no elephants, and there may be a time when there are no longer elephants, but there will never be a time when there were never any elephants. There is a cosmological moral imperative to this “fact.”
When we add a process inquiry to the question of metaphysics, we get into some really tricky territory. How, for example, does stuff move through the levels of existence? How do subtle experiences become solid objects that are easily shared? Most people would agree that Leeuwenhoek discovered microorganisms, and that Galileo discovered the moons of Jupiter. We are comfortable with the idea that microorganisms and Jupiter’s moons were always already there, except we just didn’t have the means to observe them. Their existence depended upon particular inventions – microscopes and telescopes. Now consider the atom. Before electron photography was invented, direct observation of atoms was impossible. But the atom was “discovered” decades prior to that invention. In the case of the atom, discovery and invention are more closely intertwined. At first, atoms were partially a discovery, but mostly an experimental and conceptual invention that was ongoing for two centuries! and involved at least nine significant scientific advances.9

Where do we place stuff like “causally effective illusions?” – that, like the rope that is mistaken for a snake, is an observable (rope) improperly entangled within a mis-conception (snake)? What is the relationship between the left and right quadrants, or the upper and lower ones? What is the relationship between invention (as a product of imaginative inquiry and creative response) and discovery (as a product of refined search and discernment)? If it suits you more to say “we invent new ways of discovering,” you are subtly biasing an ontologically real reality, which is a subtle type of Realism that is situated mostly in the LH quadrants. On the other hand, if you are more inclined to say “we discover new ways to invent,” you are subtly positing the realm of ideas and logos as ontologically existent – a subtle form of Idealism that is situated mostly in the RH quadrants. These are all metaphysical considerations and thinking through them illuminates how embodied minds construct thought.

But do embodied minds construct reality, as the postmodernists claim? This poses a metaphysical challenge. First, I would like to take a very close look at the word “construct.” Taking a closer look at the ordinary “naïve” meaning of a word is often a good first step in taking up a metaphysical challenge. It tells us that we can trust words because they evolved without top-down planning. This means simple words help us escape the kinds of metaphysical priming that makes meaning-making so suspect. Later in this article I will explain that making language more precise is one of the four phases of metaphysical work, and this is why the language of science is mathematics, which is a pure form of metaphysical precision. For now, let’s stick with the challenge in front of us – Do minds construct reality? – by starting with a close examination of the word “construct.” I will borrow from Bruno Latour’s (2007) Actor Network Theory (ANT) here by saying, yes, minds construct reality, but that’s not as weird as you might be imagining. Here I want the word construct in the phrase “construct reality” to operate in the exact same way as it does in the phrase “construct a house.” First I search for a suitable forest near a suitable spot. Then I go into the forest and chop down some suitable trees and mill lumber from them. Eventually I build myself a house, but I am not shocked that I have constructed a new reality “out of” the forest. I do not say “where did the forest go?” nor question whether the forest was “really there” before the house “took its place.” It is simply that before the construction, there was one set of relationships in the world, and afterwards, another set of relationships. In between work was being done. What is the work of construction? 1) I have to be able to imagine (LR) how a forest can become a house; 2) I have to be able to envision the steps of construction (UR); I have to be able

9 See https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/the-scientists-who-discovered-atoms
to build it, to manipulate it as concrete objects, and then in the process 3) I stumble across something that is useful in a way that I don’t see, something that would have made a firmer joint or a better blade if I saw it that way (LR) until 1b) I imagine-into-a-seeing-how that something could indeed make a firmer joint or better blade… and round and round we go. Now consider the atom. It, too, is a construction. The atom is constructed through sophisticated work of all kinds, and depends on the ongoing processes and practices of the scientific enterprise. And just like the house which may one day be deconstructed by the termites and, over time, “return to being just a forest,” the scientific enterprise also works such that “things” like “atoms” may one day be deconstructed and abandoned. “Did the atom exist before it was discovered?” can now be seen as a question of the same type as “Did the house exist before it was built?” This is the kind of work that good metaphysics can do.

A Process Model of Metaphysics

When Whitehead (1979) explored a process reality, he exposed something that was sorely missing in the western mind. Western metaphysics is based on substance thinking, thinking in terms of static, independently existing things. This is a metaphysical assumption that is wired deep in our minds and delivers up paradoxes like when we are not so sure if reality is really real if it is constructed, because “construction” tells us that being really real involves a process. This is what Whitehead wanted to correct. Instead of thinking of reality composed of “things,” he thought of reality as ongoing process going on every which way. Instead of existence as a state of being, he disclosed existence as a continuous process of becoming. Even the ordinary things we experience as concrete, stable and lasting, are always coming and going. We can use our four-quadrant matrix of existence to derive a model of how people engage the world in a constructive process that moves “things” through the spectrum of existence.

Figure 2 illustrates the process phases of the human project of constructing reality correlated with the same four quadrants in the Matrix of Existence. It is a model of the work that is being done to generate existing realities for humans. Consider again the “invention-discovery” process of the atom. We can begin anywhere in the circle, but let’s begin in creative imaginaries (LR). At some point in history, people conceive of the atomistic nature of reality (LR). They construct a story that satisfies their speculation; but inevitably, people bump into where the story is either incomplete or inconsistent. They begin to use discernment to make their story more precise. The precision sets up the conditions to gauge the story against what people actually experience. Much of what people perceive will be influenced by the story and subject to confirmation bias. Yet through adequate participation, a few people will discover a new clarity in the world that will resist being assimilated into the old story. Adequate participation may also involve new technologies that improve observation, like microscopes and telescopes. People discover effects that are absent causes, and seek to presence them. In the process, they begin to absent by deconstructing, the old story. Through a process that Peirce called abduction, and Bhaskar called retroduction, we bring new imaginaries to the task. The cycle repeats, as these new imaginaries...
seek new ideas that satisfy them. Many iterations later, people can observe atoms through the technology of the electron microscope and in the process, the “atom” becomes reified as a “thing” – a discrete unit of being that stands in for this long arc of becoming. When we do science, “adequate participation” involves an experimental set-up that provides the necessary conditions for reproducibility, “discernment” means mathematical precision, and “theories” are “ideas that satisfy; while it takes scientists of great genius to supply the creative imaginaries that leap frog over existing paradigms into new realities. Outside of science, the phases are the same, but the standards are not so rigid. Popular stories, cultural narratives, and social memes all participate in creating social realities that correspond with different group identities.

Whitehead’s philosophical method follows this model to a tee. He identified the imagination as the driver of new ideas and as the capacity to presence what is absent. He preached a kind of metaphysical skepticism which was needed to absent the old ideas; and practiced a kind of philosophical humility that was ready to throw away the conditioned habits of thought in order to perceive facts without inferences. He noted that speculative philosophy had both a rational side and an empirical side. The rational side required the speculation to be both “coherent and logical,” hence consistent and complete. The empirical requirement was that the philosophical scheme must be both “applicable and adequate,” hence satisfying and adequately participated in. These two sides, Whitehead wrote, are “bound together by clearing away any ambiguity,” hence the necessity
of discernment and precision. He wrote “A precise language must await a completed metaphysical knowledge.” Cue Hartshorne here, who carries forward Whitehead’s speculative musings toward a precise language of the metaphysics of process thinking.

Whitehead examined experience through the categories of memory and perception and imagination. “In studying memory, perception or imagination,” Hartshorne (1983) writes, “one needs to distinguish between 1) What is observably present in the experience, 2) what is not observably present; and 3) what is observably absent.” Here, he is referencing the UL, UR and LL quadrants of the matrix, respectively. Whitehead eventually integrated memory and perception with his notion of “prehension” as “intuition of the antecedently real.” This suggests that for Whitehead, the Upper quadrants represent the antecedents or “priors” of experience, those concrete occasions that constitute the “past” actuals; while the lower quadrants would represent the carrying-forward into the near adjacent moment of the possibly real. For Whitehead, perception is the body’s prehension, and memory is the mind’s prehension, which puts them in the UL and UR quadrants, respectively. The past is made concrete when perceptions find ideas that satisfy, or alternately when pre-established ideas discover perceptions that fulfill their expectations. Once this happens, a new round of prehension begins. We can imagine a torus-like animation flowing through the matrix (figure 3). With respect to the lower quadrants, where novelty catalyzes creative advance, Whitehead emphasizes that imagination is never merely mental (the LR aspect) but also always involves our body, as “truly parts of the physical world,” and in its way and degree also “revelatory of the world.” In our matrix of existence, the LL is the domain of this revelatory body, as it participates in world-becoming.

Figure 3. Whitehead’s process ontology and the matrix of existence.
Mapping Whitehead’s process ontology onto the matrix of existence, reveals several important new ideas that are derived from a process view (see figure 3). Most people never really understand the radical shift required in a process view. Most people make the mistake of thinking of “bodies” as concrete actuals in the past, and “minds” as imaginative, flexible possibilities of the future. This results in the kind of patently dualistic reality that both Whitehead and Hartshorne rejected. Rather, bodies and minds together extend from the past through a mutual process ofprehension and creative advance.11

For Whitehead, bodies and minds, are not equitable to binary objects and subjects. Bodies and minds of the prior occasion are prehended as perception and memory; while bodies and minds creatively advance as participation and imagination. This means that objective and subjective realities interpenetrate at all “times.” The mental model we create in our heads selects aspects of this processual continuum and categorizes them into a simplistic binary schema where there is a “past” as opposed to the “future” and “bodies(objects)” as opposed to “minds(subjects). For Whitehead, this processual whorl composes a “nexus” – which is the local center of the epoch which entails the entire composition. Identifying this nexus would be like finding the center of a musical whole. We can imagine that as the music unfolds, the meaning infolds, as subsequent notes adapt prior meanings. The epoch is the whole given in its entirety – the interpenetration of the unfolding score and the infolding meaning. In Whitehead’s term this double-movement constitutes an epochal moment in an actual occasion. The movement from unfolding processes to infolding ones, constitutes the movement from “bodies” to “minds” in figure 3 – from perception and participation to memory and imagination. Taken together, perception and participation are called “prehension” in Whitehead’s terminology – the unfolding movement in the epochal event. Memory and imagination are the forces of infoldment, giving rise to the actual occasion. Every epoch has a “duration” – the local center of which is the nexus. The broader the “duration” the greater the amount of reality prehended and enfolded. This gives rise the fractal scalar pattern of reality, in which entities of various durations constitute greater and lesser wholes. At the universal scale, everything prehends and gives new meaning with everything else. The duration of the universal epoch would be eternal.12

Whitehead, began his career as a British mathematician who, along with his student Bertrand Russel, collaborated on the monumental “Principia Mathematica.” Unlike his contemporaries,

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11 In addition to this, Peter Kakol (2009) lists the significance of Whitehead’s notion of prehension:
The profundity of Whitehead’s concept of prehension becomes obvious when we consider that it makes possible the unification of no less than nine different phenomena (1) memory, as intra-bodily prehension of the distant past; (2) perception, as extra-bodily prehension of the more recent past; (3) time, as the passage from prehension to prehension; (4) space, as a complication of time: the prehension of parallel or contemporary prehensions; (5) causality, as the influence (in the sense of necessary condition only) of the prehended upon the prehending; (6) substance, being and enduring individuality, as abstractions from spatial and/or temporal prehensions such that only common features are prehended; (7) mind-body relation, as the interaction between two types of the previous relation – namely, a temporal series of prehensions (the mind) and a spatio-temporal grouping/series of prehension (the body); (8) subject-object relation as the prehension of past prehension(s); and (9) God-world relation as the interaction between the totality of non-divine prehensions and the divine series of prehensions (pg. 17-18)

12 Eternal here implies simultaneity, or absence of the passage of time. It is not the same as “infinite” which refers to the “infinite passage of time.”
however, Whitehead was drawn to the idea of Love as the universal force of creation. At the heart of his Process Reality, is a radical ontology of love as the fundamental universal force. Love, at the universal and eternal scale, manifested as prehension at the local scales, making Love the force of creative advance. Whitehead said that reality arises through a series of moments which feel into the past moment as they feel for(ward) the next moment. For him, the action in-between was nothing at all like the tight wire between the physicists’ cause and effect. Rather, Whitehead thought of this feeling-process as incredibly sensitive, provocative and loving. He construed each individual epoch as the long, long moment of possibility, freedom and choice not only granted to each local nexus, but given as a fundamental property of the universe. Here, prehension is synonymous with sentience, and therefore, each local nexus are sentient beings at all imaginable scales permeating the universal field of feeling (love).13 If you situated yourself imaginatively inside Whitehead’s process reality, you would come to experience yourself as a living center of transformational process without a sense of self. You would feel the act of unfolding and infolding, of both cause-creating-effect and effect-creating cause. In this a-temporal pulsation between antecedent feeling and creative advance – between the love act and her progeny – you would discover vast promise and freedom. Here is where we can see the spiritual chords deep within Whitehead’s speculative ontology. Here is where we discover an ethics of care and concern inside a metaphysics of love as the cosmological force since, by implication, the more one prehends one’s neighbors and relations, the longer one sustains the epochal duration, the more extensive you would become, until you felt the in-becoming of one body through the simultaneous presences of many bodies – the all in one. Here we see parallels with eastern mysticism, since, by implication, the more stabilized one’s prehension, over the long, slow moment of feeling (love), the more expansive you would become, until you realized the eternal – the in-becoming of one novel moment through the simultaneous presencing of many moments.

By starting with prehension as pure experience, Whitehead avoided the contradictions Kant encountered when starting from phenomena, since the phenomena are already objects in the mind.14 To experience the redness of an object requires an adequate duration for the actual

13 Whitehead had a taxonomy of scales which said that at the same durational scale, all nexi (entities) comprised a society. This is often misconstrued, for example, when someone interprets this to mean that their body is a society of cells. This is an incorrect interpretation. It suggests that a society can supervene on its members in the same way my body can walk my cells around the room. There is no such supervenience in process philosophy. The society of human cells is comprised of all human cells, or more precisely, of many societies of different cell type with different historical nexi. As the biologist Lynn Margulis understood, micro-organisms comprise an enormous “society” in nature in ways that are independent of the kinds of classifications that we, as humans, are fond of making. As people and animals die, the micro-organisms go on to transition to new organizations, new ways of making a living and world-building. In process philosophy, a human body is not a society of cells, but a specific habitat or environment, or niche, that cells participate with(in). And like all habitats, the cells participate through a co-creative process of world-building (nich-construction/body-building). It is in this way that process philosophy lays the groundwork for Evolutionary Developmental Theory by interpreting “bodies” as “developmental fields in which cells evolve” in the same way that natural ecologies, cultures, and markets are developmental fields in which species, humans and economies evolve. What “evolves” are the developmental fields. What “develops” are the agents with(in) the participation.

14 There is a similar trap with certain strains of vipassana practices which deconstruct phenomena into “emptiness” without taking into consideration that the phenomena that we are starting with are already mental objects, void of self-existence.
occasion to concretize (whether or not in the mind of a perceiving subject). On the other hand, to have a *perception* of redness requires an act of mind, a pre-positioning of the abstract category “red.” Experience, as Eugene Gendlin, (1997) would say, is first-person *process*, which is prior to perception. In Whitehead’s speculative reality, entities at all scales come and go. The scale of the entity is determined by the duration of this coming-and-going. Light as wave-and-particle is a type of coming and going at the Planck scale, which in Whitehead’s terms, would be considered a “duration.” Duration in Whitehead process reality is the same as “wavelength” in quantum mechanics. Atoms have a very short duration, cells a longer one, and waking human consciousness a longer one still. In this rich imaginary process view, the atoms in my cells come and go at a high frequency. But they come and go asynchronously (or else my body would also blink in and out of reality). As some atoms sneak back into existence, the presence of the other atoms, neatly arranged as my body, mostly guarantees that they will settle into the same groove, and occupy a similar position. Or take another atom’s place. Just like the Buddhist parable of the ship, whose sides, deck, sails, and keel are removed over different times, remains the “same boat,” reality slips in and out of becoming, but asynchronously and at multiple scales, so it “hangs together” despite omnipresent impermanence.

Whitehead’s reality is like a pocketknife one has cared for a long time. One first replaces a few lost screws; and then one day the right side handle is worn and replaced. A few years later, the left side handle is replaced. Eventually one replaces the blade. Despite everything, it remains, in the mind of the owner, the same pocketknife one has carried around “the whole time.”

The Buddhists, of course, tell the story of the replaceable-irreplaceable ship as a metaphor for the self, which can be examined to be the coming and going in and out of existence, riding on patterns of thought. One pattern which has been given a great deal of examination in both the east and the west, is the tendency of thought to move between contradictions. This is called “dialectical” aspect of thought which emerged approximately 3000 years ago, as discussed in the next section.

**Dialectics: East and West**

A new structure of consciousness emerged approximately 3000 years ago. Jean Gebser (1985) called this the Mental structure of consciousness. It gave humans the capacity to create concepts, and to create abstract categories. Plato recognized how powerful this type of reasoning could be. He identified the primary conceptual Ideas as “the language of the gods.” He used the term *diaresis* to describe what the conceptualizing and categorizing mind could accomplish. *Diaresis* means “to separate.” Plato recognized the power of the mind to separate out abstract categories from ordinary experience. He elevated the Ideas (the right hand quadrants of the matrix of existence) above ordinary forms of experience with his parable of the Cave. In this story, ordinary men were imprisoned in a cave of shadows cast on the walls, ignorant of the realm of pure Ideas outside the cave. The ideas were the source of the light of truth and freedom, whereas ordinary phenomena were merely shadows cast on the wall of a cave.

Today we use the word “dialectic” to describe a fundamental feature of the conceptualizing, categorizing mind – that it *moves back and forth between dichotomies, searching for a resolution.*
Since the metaphysical schema of the categories of theoretic mind are ultimately contradictory, reasoning takes on a kind of back-and-forth movement as it searches for a resolution to paradox. This often takes on the form of a “third term.” If for example, I have the category of “man” and the category of “woman” I can use the third term “human” as a higher inclusive category. Some of the most fundamental categories, however, are inherently contradictory. In logics, they take on the form of A, ~ A (not A), and cannot be resolved by a simple inclusion. When, for example, we consider the set [man, woman], we can easily see that the set “human” is an inclusive term. Similarly, I can easily use the inclusive term “counting numbers” to stand in for the set [1,2,3 …]. What happens, however, when we consider the set [A, ~A]? Do they merely cancel themselves out like matter and anti-matter in a sci-fi novel? What happens to our reasoning process when A is a valid proposition, and ~ A is also a valid proposition? Dialectic is the kind of back and forth movement that happens when we attempt to hold both A and ~A as valid truths. Plotinus described this movement as the “up-ward” path, because he recognized how the dialectic mind could shift “upwards” into a higher level of abstraction- what we call a meta-level. For example, we adjudicate the tension between competing theories by building a meta-theory that contextualizes them from a higher, more complex system of abstractions. This up-wards shift into a higher order abstraction (or more complex proposition) could (apparently) synthesize the contradiction in the lower level terms. When people say that classical western philosophy is merely “footnotes to Plato” they are pointing out the form of reasoning that has persisted. My term for this form of reasoning is the synthetic-dialectic – what Hegel identified as the cosmological principle of “sublation,” what Gebser characterized as the “pyramidal” structure of reasoning, and what Ken Wilber would popularize with the phrase “transend and include.” This “up-ward” or “synthetic” movement was one way the Mental structure of consciousness reasoned its way away from its fractured metaphysical basis. It is as if our modern minds forgot the original “sin” of diaresis, or separation, and looked for reparation and healing in the direction toward more orders of abstraction and higher and higher levels of hierarchical complexity.

The Mental structure of consciousness emerged in a few major city-centers and travelled along the great trade routes at the intersection of eastern and western cultures. Its native language was the Indo-European language family that travelled throughout the world, along these trade routes, transforming cultures along the way and seeding the great religious traditions with Platonism in the Judeo-Christian worlds and Indian scholasticism in the Buddhist worlds. However, while the Platonists propagated the “up-ward” path, the eastern scholastics took the opposite turn toward the “down-ward” path. As a result, instead of building their philosophical systems on synthetic approaches to the dialectic, they built equally impressive scholastic systems through deconstructive approaches to the dialectic.15,16 Plotinus had praised the dialectic as the “up-ward

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15 The astute reader will know where this is all going. There is a dialectic between the synthetic and deconstructive methods, and it is this meta-historical dialectic that Whitehead’s process philosophy broke open and led the way for Hartshorne’s process metaphysics which represented the first new dialectical approach in the history of mind. I will take up this part of the story in the next section of the paper. In the final section of the paper I will describe how Peter Kakol, went on to capture the historical implications of Hartshorne’s work with respect to the dialectic between eastern and western dialectics.

16 Gebser predicted that a new structure of consciousness, called the Integral structure, was already evolving, and it is exactly around this lynch-pin of the dialectic that the new structure makes a radical shift. Gebser emphasized that the Integral structure would not have the “pyramidal” form – which is his metaphor for the synthetic-dialectic movement. However, Gebser seemed ignorant of the eastern “deconstructive”
path.” By contrast, Nagarjuna’s fourth lemma bemoans the “endless oscillations” of the dialectical mind (Kakol 2009). In the east, deconstructive approaches supported deeper insights (versus higher abstractions) gleaned from sophisticated states of focused attention in advanced meditation. In the west, synthetic approaches supported insights gleaned from sophisticated controlled experiments. Although the approaches steered people in opposite directions, we can draw a parallel between the outcomes. In the west, the synthetic approach produced higher meta-theoretical complexity, used to explore the nature of the universe. In the east, the deconstructive approach produced deeper meta-cognitive views used to explore the nature of mind.17

Hartshorne’s Metaphysics of Ultimate Contrasts

Charles Hartshorne was interested in metaphysics and religion and was greatly influenced by the theological implications of Whitehead’s process ontology. Hartshorne went on to develop Whitehead’s ideas into what today is regarded as the field of “process theology,” which continues to be expanded both by Christian and Jewish theologians and has recently begun to be integrated with modern Buddhist thought with which it shares some parallels. Hartshorne translated Whitehead’s notion of prehension as “creative synthesis” which he saw as the fundamental cosmological principle, the largest nexus of which is simply “God.” Perhaps even more significant, is that Hartshorne recognized that Whitehead’s work entailed a radically new and powerful metaphysics that seemed to eclipse everything that had come before. What Hartshorne exposed in Whitehead’s process ontology was a new metaphysics – a novel response to the dialectics of categories, that was neither the synthetic, pyramidal, up-ward move that came to dominate western reason, nor did it follow the eastern path of deconstructive analysis. Hartshorne noticed that when you start with the metaphysical categories, they always demonstrate a dialectic that cannot be resolved, because all our thought has been based on ultimate categories that are contrasting terms. In other words, the mind sets up a puzzle that is impossible to solve. Readers of this journal will be familiar with Wilber’s AQAL matrix, for example. It is a matrix of ultimate contrasts: interior/exterior; one/many; subject/object’ singular/plural; inside/outside. Whether or not Wilber considers these deep ontological structures is up for debate, since he seems to represent different positions at different times. To Hartshorne, however, the AQAL model clearly maps out the puzzle we’ve constructed with the categories of our mind. We have constructed in our minds, only a few boxes that are opposites of each other, into which we try to cram all of existence. Hartshorne realized that all our metaphysical categories come in one of two forms: there are dialectic which was equally characteristic of the Mental structure of consciousness, and therefore doesn’t address it in his writing. Although not synthetic or pyramidal in form, it would be a mistake to construe the eastern approach as a feature of the new Integral structure of consciousness, as it is still an outcome of the dialectical tension that results from a metaphysics of ultimate contrasts. Future Gebser scholars should take note of this crucial distinction.

17 There are many different ways to “go meta.” John Churchill, for example, is mapping the higher stages (yanas) of meditation onto levels of development he calls “meta-cognitive” stages. These are insight stages that do not complexify reality, rather the insights that are gained cut through complexity (the mental elaborations) and deliver a more immediate, direct perception of reality as it is. For a discussion on direct perception as adequate participation, see my paper at https://integral-review.org/issues/vol_14_no_1_roy_awakened_perception_perception_as_participation.pdf
relative terms, which he labelled \(r\)-terms, and there are absolute terms, which he labelled \(a\)-terms. This alone was not significant. What is significant is that Hartshorne realized that when you start with \textit{experience}, as Whitehead had proposed, instead of with the categories themselves, whole new insights emerged.

Hartshorne saw that the problem lay in looking at the categories as \textit{symmetrical} contrasts. We looked at them as mutually-dependent terms, or as two sides of the same coin. This made them inherently irresolvable into persistently higher levels of meta-abstraction, or inevitably self-deconstructive when subjected to radical examination. What Hartshorne realized that when you start from \textit{experience}, you discover that the categories are \textit{asymmetrically} related contrasts – that they are mutually inter-dependent, but \textit{asymmetrically} mutually inter-dependent. Let me give an easy example that we can build on as we go:

Let’s take the classic pair of ultimate contrasts that Nagarjuna worked with: form and emptiness. To say that “form is emptiness and emptiness is form” is to look at the categories as symmetrical. According to Hartshorne’s terms, “emptiness” is the \(a\)-term (as Nagarjuna’s system affirmed) and “form” is the \(r\)-term. “But” Hartshorne would ask Nagarjuna, “how did you get to your conclusion in actual experience?” “Well,” Nagarjuna replies, “take any form and subject it to deconstructive analysis….” “Wait just there,” Hartshorne interrupts. “What you are saying is that you \textit{start} with form, but do you ever start with emptiness?” “Well, yes, you can start with emptiness,” Nagarjuna smartly replies, but then has to check himself: “but when you start with “emptiness” that is the “emptiness” which is conceptual, and so it too is a kind of form – a thought form.” “So,” says Hartshorne, “if we stay with the actual experience, we always start from some form, some \(r\)-term, in order to derive the \(a\)-term – “emptiness.” “Yes,” Nagarjuna agrees. “So, in some way, then the \(a\)-term is dependent upon the \(r\)-term, in some way emptiness is dependent on form in a way that form is not dependent on emptiness,” Hartshorne suggests. “Oh yes!” Nagarjuna agrees. And that changes everything!

Consider another example: the example of redness used above. We never actually experience “redness” we only experience \textit{things} that are red. In this example, “redness” is the \(a\)-term, and “red things” is the \(r\)-term. There are many many red \textit{things} but there is only one \textit{redness}. Red \textit{things} are given through experience, but redness can never be experienced – it can only be \textit{metaphysically abstracted from all the many experiences of redness into a category of mind}. Redness is dependent on things in a completely different way than any red thing is dependent on redness. This turns almost everything we assume about the “ultimate” or “absolute” nature of reality on its head, because the tendency of the mind is to think that \textit{because} \(a\)-terms are eternal, they are \textit{more real}. But it is just the other way around. Because \(a\)-terms are eternal, they are only latently real, because their becoming actual depends upon experiencing the \(r\)-term and the pre-positioning of mind that “solidifies” or “reifies” them into an abstract category.

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\textsuperscript{18} In the AQAL matrix, the terms “one,” “singular” are \(a\)-terms, while the terms “many” and “plural” are \(r\)-terms. But the mapping becomes counter-intuitive when considering the other terms. In Hartshorne’s process metaphysics, the matrix doesn’t spread out so nicely in a symmetric way: “subjects” and “exteriors” as well as “bodies” are \(r\)-terms, because they are prehending actors, whereas “objects” and “interiors” are \(a\)-terms, because they are products of the mind that pre-positions them as pehneomena.
If we start with the categories, we tend to assign a kind of model based on containers and what’s contained in them, which is based on the “power of the abstraction” to speak as if the abstract term were larger and inclusive. We use a kind of set-theory mental model to say that “redness” includes all “red things.” But if we talk from experience, we see that it is actually all the red things that include the red. It stands our metaphysical apparatus on its head! Now consider the list of ultimate contrasts that Hartshorne overturned:\(^{19}\)

Table 1. r-terms and a-terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>r-terms</th>
<th>a-terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>relative, dependent, internally related</td>
<td>absolute, independent, externally related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>experience, subject</td>
<td>things experienced, objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>whole, inclusive</td>
<td>constituents, included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>effect, conditioned</td>
<td>cause, condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>later, successor</td>
<td>earlier, predecessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>becoming, nascent, being created</td>
<td>in being, already created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>temporal, succeeding some, preceding others</td>
<td>non-temporal as 1) primordial, preceding everything or 2) everlasting, succeeding everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>concrete, definite particular</td>
<td>abstract, indefinite, universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>actual</td>
<td>Potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>contingent</td>
<td>Necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>a portion, P or process as past</td>
<td>earlier futuristic outline of P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>finite</td>
<td>Infinite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>discrete</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>complex with constituents</td>
<td>simple, without constituents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>singular, member</td>
<td>composite, group, mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>singular event, actuality</td>
<td>individual being, existent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>specific character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>specific character</td>
<td>generic character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>generic character</td>
<td>metaphysical category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>God now, divine state or actuality</td>
<td>God as primordial and everlasting, divine essence and existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>God now</td>
<td>God and the world as they just have been</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Though polarities are ultimate,” Hartshorne (1983) writes, “it does not follow that the two poles are … on an equal status.” When considered merely as abstract concepts or metaphysical aspects.

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\(^{19}\) Hartshorne (1983) *Creative Synthesis* p. 100-101
categories, they are in fact co-relative, mutually dependent poles. When considered from the standpoint of experience, however, a basic asymmetry is involved: a-terms depend upon r-terms in a different way than r-terms depend upon a-terms. Line 5 in table 1 tells us how to map a-terms and r-terms onto figure 3. It tells us that as prior antecedents, perception and memory are a-terms; and as successors, a participation and imagination are r-terms. Line 2 shows us that perception and memory constitute the objects for their subjective correlates, participation and imagination. “That subjects are later (2r, 5r) and objects earlier (2a, 5a), will surprise many” Hartshorne (1983) writes,

It enshrines the doctrine that, both in memory and in perception, the given entities are antecedent events. As Bergson said, perhaps as the first, it is the past which is actual, there to be experienced. The present is nascent, it is coming into being, rather than in being, and there is no definite entity to prehend. Pierce hints at this. Whitehead, so far as I know, is the first thinker in all the world to take the position with full explicitness that experience is never simultaneous with its concrete objects but always subsequent. (p. 109)

What are some of the implications of a process metaphysics? Hartshorne writes:

Causality, substance, memory, perception, temporal succession, modality, are all but modulations of one principle of creative synthetic experiencing, feeding entirely upon its own prior products. This I regard as the most powerful metaphysical generalization ever accomplished. It has many men of genius back of it, including Bergson, perhaps Alexander, the Buddhists, and many others. But Whitehead is its greatest single creator. (p.107)

Process metaphysics reforms both eastern and western versions of Idealism. Both have religiously, spiritually, and metaphysically elevated the a-terms over the r-terms (which it often denigrates): absolute (over relative), cause (over effect), first cause (over proximate cause), universal (over particular), necessary, infinite, and eternal (over conditioned, finite, and temporary.) From a process metaphysical understanding, it means that religious, spiritual, and metaphysical idealism entails the exaltation of objects over subjects – things over process. Yet it would be mistake to conclude that process metaphysics merely reverses the bias. It would be more accurate to say that it transverses the subject-object dichotomy by making process prior to their delineation in a duration ofprehension.

The Problem Situation

*Between two poles the mind has made a swing:
Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing never ceases its sway.
Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their courses are there:
Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on.*

~ Kabir (adapted by author)

Dogen, the 13th century Japanese philosopher-poet, founder of the Soto school of Zen, was known for his preoccupation with the swinging nature of thought. His primary focus was on the metaphysics of oneness and sameness. Dogen’s insight was that the endless swinging of thought was a source of deep suffering. Paraphrasing his illogics (koans) we could say:
If you make the difference, you suffer the sameness.
If you make the sameness, you suffer the difference.

He was telling us that when the mind categorizes, it cuts out parts of reality in abstracting out what is different. And this causes suffering because it distorts the real unity of being. But if we homogenize all beings into the category “oneness,” this also causes suffering, because it negates the infinite display of the myriad beings.\(^{20}\) We see the consequences playing out in our postmodern society today. We see categories pushed onto people, creating a partial “sameness” while simultaneously difference from the other is exaggerated. We have repeated this cycle over and over again for decades, and as a result, the categories have become narrower and narrower. They are, in process metaphysics terms, a-terms for which no r-term actually exists. White, cis male, western, heterosexual, middle age, upper class is categorically not the same as white, cis male, western, heterosexual, middle age, lower class. And we already know the conclusions we are supposed to draw as they are already predicated (pre-dicted) by the categories. Consider how the categories “democrat” and “republican” have not only split apart, but have become ridged and so narrow that no one real individual actually fits them anymore. When I was a youth, the categories “girl” and “boy” were very broad, and could fit a wide diversity of behaviors, styles, and bodies. As these behaviors, styles and bodies changed as we grew up, the categories were expected to accommodate them. Today it’s the other way around – our behaviors, styles and bodies are expected to accommodate the categories! Which means we are habitually and exponentially privileging the object (a-term, abstraction, category) over the actual, living, being-in-becoming person (the r-term). This is something a metaphysical inquiry can help us with. If we refer to the figures in the beginning of this paper, we can see that this postmodern dis-ease is a result of being locked into the right hand quadrants where ideas and imagination create a mutually-reinforcing and reifying feedback loop without checking these against perceptual clarity and adequate participation in the real. Which, in this case, means actually getting to know the person you are speaking with, instead of categorizing people you are thinking about. We no longer pursue questions around what is actually happening in real life situations, in order to have deep, personal and intimate conversations at the intersection of two living beings. Rather, our discourse parasitizes real-life stories to create larger, politically-charged narratives that are distortions of reality that get amplified and played out on a stage of abstractions, poisoned by a partial metaphysics – like players in Beckett’s theatre of the absurd, waiting for the arrival of the abstracted.\(^{21}\) We can never find what we have already abstracted out of existence, parsing living form into thoughts in our heads which, in the final analysis, will always come up empty.

Furthermore, we are beginning to see that western science cannot address some of the most pressing challenges of our times. We can’t seem to solve the problems that matter most to us – some of which pose existential risks. Gebser proposed that each structure of consciousness represents an epoch which begins with a latent phase, followed by an efficient stage, and then enters a deficient stage. We are seeing clear evidence that the Mental structure of consciousness,

\(^{20}\) Of course, process metaphysics readily solves this koan. The myriad beings are r-terms, their one-ness an a-term. Dogen famously said “To study the self is to lose the self,” and here by “self” he means the mind that reifies itself as an eternal (a-term). “To lose the self,” Dogen goes on, “is to be actualized by the myriad things.” This phrase “to be actualized by the myriad things” is identical to Whitehead’s notion of each entity becoming actual through the prehension of all entities.

\(^{21}\) God/Godot
whose efficient stage is represented by modern science and democracy, is now entering a deficient period reflected in the breakdown of science and politics as meaning-making endeavors. Even with the rise of global wealth, health, education and technology, the rates of benefit to risk are rapidly declining. There are two key factors here: 1) The synthetic-dialectical mind now escalates complexity faster than it solves problems; and 2) The metaphysics of causality is breaking down to the point where if-then propositions are no longer helpful. This means we are creating a “run-away-epistemology” and so, it is not surprising that we are abdicating our agency to machines whose AI is better designed to race along with it. Let’s consider these two in more detail:

1. The synthetic-dialectical mind now escalates complexity faster than it solves problems

In his book *Hyperobjects* Tim Morton (2013) writes “going meta has been the intellectual gesture par excellence for two centuries. He asserts it is this attitude, that is directly responsible for our ecological emergency.

*This attitude* is directly responsible for the ecological emergency, not the corporation or the individual per se, but the attitude that inheres both in the corporation and in the individual, and in the critique of the corporation and of the individual. (Kindle Location 2730)

Graham Harman (2011) uses the term “overmining” in a similar vein. According to Harman, “overmining” occurs when one “reduces a thing upwards,” which is to echo Plotinus’ “up-ward path” and the synthetic-dialectic mind we, along with Gebser, have targeted as the sine qua non of modernity (in its efficient stage) and post-modernity (in its deficient stage). Overmining has given us great systems views of the universe, while distancing us from the local and the real. Overmining has led to breakthroughs in science and technology, while exacerbating the problem space into inaccessibly large domains. Overmining has created gigantic objects called “hyperobjects” to wrestle with, objects which today suprervene on human agency the way it has, for millennia, suprervened on the agency of animals and ecosystems. Three millennia of privileging the abstraction, the a-term the “object” over the relative, subjective agent, has brought us to the state where, locked inside an impossibly complex discourse, we can no longer act. Ordinary, inconspicuous acts, like calling the earth “Gaia” is an overmining of our planetary reality, for “Gaia” is a concept, albeit one that was created out of concern for the living earth, but in generating the concept, it lets us off of the hook. Like the retreating God, “Gaia” is elsewhere, impossible to find in my own ordinary acts of choosing what I eat, what I buy, how I treat the land. It was nice to think that “Gaia” prevailed over all we do, balancing things out for us, the way foxes balance the rabbits (and vice-versa). But now, now that the hyperobject “Gaia” has reared her head and become the existential risk “Global Warming” we immediately see the equivalence. We are in a state of subordination to our own thought systems. The same is true for the other hyperobject that represents a real existential risk: Capitalism, and at the end of the day, all three may be equivalent. In the last analysis, a hyperobject is a hyper-system that supervenes on the agent who is trying to cognize it. Every way our reasoning turns, is already curved inwards, back into the logics of the system, in the same way that everything we do to try to alleviate global warming, turns back on itself through the logics of capitalism, into more global warming. Of course, our

22 Stuart Kaufman notes how economies are extensions of human ecology and evolve through the same principles as the biotic.
impulse will be, once again, to “go-meta” on the hyperobjects themselves. But, as we have noted, there are different ways to go meta,\(^{23}\) and hyperobjects are derived from hyper-systemic modes of reasoning, based on the metaphysics of the synthetic-dialectical mind. Is it possible, then, to disentangle hyperobjects, to break them apart into manageable pieces upon which we can reassert our choice and agency, through a new kind of mind? Yes it is possible. But first, I will discuss the second of the key factors that generate our current crisis:

2. The metaphysics of causality is breaking down to the point where if-then propositions are no longer helpful.

Above a certain level of complexity, if-then propositions are not rich enough to resolve problems or cultivate preferred futures. Without if-then propositions, there can be no hypotheses, without hypotheses, no experimentally validating set-up, and hence, no science as modernity has understood it. Today we are witnessing the emergence of a radically new science, called complexity science. Many people are talking about it, but most people actually construe complexity science as a kind of penultimate level at the top of the meta-tier of systems thinking.

One thing the reader should know for sure, however, is that, as Cognitive Edge’s co-founder Dave Snowden quips “Complexity science is as different from systems thinking as quantum physics is from Newtonian physics.” With complexity science, the ordinary laws of causality, upon which Newtonian physics is based, break down. We enter into domains which are more akin to quantum mechanics where uncertainty prevails. We are used to thinking of quantum domains as incredibly small scales, but incredibly complex systems behave more like quantum systems than as systems at ordinary scales. In these systems, measurement is unreliable, the future is radically unpredictable, and causation is hyper-local – everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Complex systems are unknowable by definition, and therefore cannot be made into an “object.” Attempts to do so create our so-called hyperobjects. The key characteristics of complex systems are novelty and emergence. We participate with-in complex domains as agents gathering local information. This requires us to act, and in so doing, we perturb the micro-states of the system. This is a continuous feedback loop happening from myriad agents at multi-dimensional temporal and spatial scales. Complex processes generate stable and unstable, predictably unpredictable patterns that are part of the information feedback loop. We act freely, to amplify some of the incoming (returning) signals, and to dampen others. In real life, the signals are too subtle to know cognitively. Just like we can never know how it is we learn to speak, nevertheless, we learn. The same is true with other complex domains. We can never know, but we can learn. In this case, we must learn (again) to learn intuitively. In other words, – we must become an instrument of perception.

Now we can circle back to the process models of metaphysics (figures, 2 and 3). Local action is participation (LL) but we cannot know by deciding, so we have to choose imaginatively (LR) – together this advances the moment across the next duration of perception and memory (UL, UR). Here perception is pattern recognition, and memory is the infolding of the microstate as the embodied agent.\(^{24}\) Human agency is reclaimed, because it is responding to perception and memory, through participation and imagination. Hence, at each step there is creative advance. This is the same reality that Stuart Kaufmann (2016) hopes to reclaim, to show us the “emergent magic” that

\(^{23}\) See appendix for a full list of meta-moves. Can you add more?

\(^{24}\) In process philosophy terms, “agent” is the nexus at the intersection of this process.
will re-enchant us. “We so wrongly think we know our worlds. We so wrongly believe that we can pose and answer our questions, when we often cannot even pose them adequately” (p. 1)”

Referring to the process model of process metaphysics (figure 3) I noted that “the Upper quadrants represent the antecedents or “priors” of experience, those concrete occasions that constitute the “past” actuals; while the lower quadrants would represent the carrying-forward into the near adjacent moment of the possibly real.” Here is Kaufmann’s version of the same: “We will find a new patter of explanation for the living world: ever-new Actuals do not cause, but enable ever-new, often nonstatable, adjacent possible opportunities” (p. 4).

These examples show how true complexity thinking, exits the causal structure of the Mental structure of consciousness. In the words of Stuart Kaufmann, it shows us that “the becoming of the biosphere is beyond law,” that “reductive materialism as a whole must fail [however hyperbolic its explanations become]” and that “the biosphere [is lawless and] is part of the universe [that] cannot be governed by a final theory” (p. xv). Solidly unified final theories are what the synthetic-dialectic mind has yearned for, ever since, with its inception, it tore reality into pieces. Hence for 3000 years, humans in the east and west have tried to close the gap they themselves keep making, through a metaphysics of separation, and as a result have given us extraordinary “things” – densely interwoven entanglements of ideas, perception, memory and participation – that seem to satisfy, but in the end lead to unsurmountable complexities, or untenable emptiness(es).

A new process metaphysics could change all that and generate a new enchantment with the world. Absenting separation, it would no longer hunger for synthesis or unity. A profound faith in our conjoined nexi of histories, would replace our proclivity to mend the gap, as it were. Our lust for metaphysical unification has become an existential fetish – at once the thing we most desperately desire, and the thing that is most utterly unattainable. Everywhere we look there is a lot going on! To turn it all off, we have to force ourselves to stop looking, which means to cut off perception and participation. Isn’t this just what we are succeeding in doing, with our obsession with screens and preoccupation with the voices in our own heads? Coming from the bad faith of separation we are overwhelmed with being – everywhere to look, there is a lot going on! It is, in the words of Satre “de trop.” We try to look away, to assuage the onslaught of eternal becoming through the refuge of eternally unchanging things, for today it is the a-terms that pacify us. A new metaphysics could change all that, help us turn toward what is most alive, and hence, always coming and going, alive in its passing and advancing. We would learn to cultivate a new compass

25 About “laws” Finkelstein (2003) writes

Some great scientists like Laplace and Einstein have believed in the existence of an absolute law and taken it as the supreme goal of physics. But many Western scientists and philosophers, including Newton, Mach and Whitehead, like many Buddhist and Hindu philosophers, explicitly propose that there is no fixed absolute law of nature, and that it makes sense to speak of a varying law. Bohm’s (1965) expression of this philosophy especially influenced me. He views a scientific theory as a specialized extension of normal human discourse. A theory is something that we tell one another. A final all-inclusive theory is as likely as a final all-inclusive remark. (p. 15)

26 “Things” such as in the western science: ether, space-time continuum, dark matter, dark energy, quantum observation; and in the east: Brahmin, storehouse consciousness, Indra’s web, karmic law; and in religion/quasi-spirituality everywhere: God, gods, goddesses, Ashkasic field and the like.
– one that steers us toward a thriving future emerging from the pure potentials of a flourishing new world.

**Why Metaphysics Matters**

A good case can be made that modernity slipped into post-modernity when theory lost ground to meta-theories which contextualized them. Religion and science were put on equal grounds by postmodern structuralism which saw them both as historically contingent language games that had garnered significant political clout on different points of a spectrum. What post-modern meta-theory is actually concerned about is underlying values. Underlying values that drive religious belief. Underlying values that drive the scientific enterprise. Underlying values of capitalism, consumerism, communism and fascism. The values around which groups garner their identities, including nation, class, age, ethnicity and race. All the friction in the world was traced back to the incommensurability of values. It was hoped that an adequate meta-theory of values, would be able to adjudicate between competing worldviews and settle the accounts once and for all. There were a hundred thousand perspectives. The search, much like the search for a grand unifying theory in science, was to derive a meta-theory that could merge them into a single higher-order view. The metaphor used was that of altitude. Individual worldviews existed at the bottom of the mountain on different sides, with different perspectives. The meta-theorist was looking from the top of the mountain, where they could see that all the perspectives were true but partial. Given a clever-enough mind, one could derive a higher-order perspective that transcended and included all the others. Unfortunately, people soon discovered there were a hundred thousand mountains upon which to establish different meta-theories. To make matters worse, meta-theories have two particular drawbacks that theories do not. One drawback is that meta-theories tend to exit the domain of inquiry. A good theory of labor, incites action; a good theory of ecosystem interdependencies, facilitates change. On the other hand, a meta-theory that contextualizes all political platforms is not doing politics; a book that contextualizes all possible perspectives on ecology is not doing ecology. In a very real sense, meta-theory parasitizes action, it leads to, as the popular phrase has it “analysis paralysis.” The second drawback is even more pernicious and results in endless debate cycles. Scientists had long known that ordinary theories could be ranked by which theory could derive everything in the other theory and then provide even more explanatory power. Two different scientists could fight it out until one scientist’s body of knowledge exhausted the others, while still having more to say than the others. This proved not to be true of meta-theory. Competing meta-theories could “hold” each other’s entire body of knowledge, by contextualized it through its particular meta-theoretical lens. Not knowing this leads to ongoing and often vicious struggles between competing authors, who, because they can see the other’s perspective from within their meta-view, gain confidence in the validity of their own view. The problem is, that both debaters are experiencing the exact same feedback loop. Ongoing debates merely build more confidence in each disparate camp. And the game plays on and on. From a certain perspective, one can see that this inner game of the mind parallels the outer game of late stage finance capitalism, whose financial instruments complexify like the meta-theories now complexify into meta-meta-theories. Both are accumulating their own kind of debt. Ken Wilber called the kind of debt that the mind issues “an IOU to the universe,” which he saw to

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27 For example, between Ken Wilber and Roy Bhaskar. Most of the debates we see on youtube have this problem, for example when Jordan Peterson debates Izra Klein, or Sam Harris debates just about anyone.
be an inevitable unintended consequence of the mind’s efforts to know. Everything today seems to be slipping towards Armageddon, moving like the arms race of yore, except at exponentially faster speeds. What I want to point out is that it is this – this peculiar feature of our Metamodern era, is not a consequence of mind, but a consequence of a certain kind of mind. This is of course the type of mind that is predicated by the synthetic-dialectic – which now has entered its deficient stage as it shifts into hyper drive.

The crucial distinction here that has to be made is the difference between epistemic complexity and ontological complexity. The deep ecologist Arne Naess said “Nature is elegantly complex.” The key features of elegant complexity are 1) rich, textured, diverse environments and 2) deep, satisfying coherence. One might say that epistemic elegance is thought that simultaneously satisfies what is true, good and beautiful in reality. Epistemic complexity is like the noise we dial through to find a radio station. Ontological complexity is the coherence that we attain when we tune to a signal with high fidelity – the sound becomes perfectly clear. Because our thought systems are not 100% coherent with the real, (lack of fidelity) we add epistemic complexity to the situation. Consider for example a patient coming to a doctor for help (the scenario works equally well with a medical physician or a therapeutic psychologist). The patient’s body-mind is already a complex system. The doctor, who applies an epistemic lens to the system escalates the complexity the system entails. This is particularly true of western approaches to medicine and therapy. It is also the case when we as humans attempt to “manage” ecosystems and climate. Whenever our epistemic system does not have the requisite variety (rich, textured diverse) or fidelity (coherent with the real) we add epistemic complexity to the system. Ontological complexity manifests itself as complex, coherence patterns. These patterns are generated from simple yet profound protocols. This is tricky. Protocols are not “laws” of nature. “Laws of nature” are stable patterns that emerge through the self-organized complexity of multiple agents who are feeling (prehending) their way to their future selves. Protocols are the values and means of discernment that guide the agents from choice to choice, from anticipation to satisfaction in a field of creative possibility. The richer the environment, the more the environment affords novelty and coherence at a higher level of complexity. Epistemic complexity results when we try to work at the level of the emergent pattern,

\[\text{28 Which is not the same as agreement or alignment. The wolf and the elk are coherent, and this makes the rivers and the forest coherent, too. see How Wolves Change Rivers at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q}\]

\[\text{29 A new science means that we use our whole body-mind, to discover new points of fidelity – high coherence between the world, and our affective-perceptual-cognitive states. These respectively, account for the real (world) the good (affective) the beautiful (perceptual) and the true (cognitive).}\]

\[\text{30 Consider the ways we have understood planetary movement. Ptolemy was working at the level of the pattern that could be seen from the vantage point of the earth. This resulted in an overly complex system of epicycles. The shift in view from a geo centric to a heliocentric solar system, greatly reduced the epistemic complexity. But the planets themselves didn’t all of a sudden jump into a simpler configuration. The ontological complexity remained the same. Newton worked at the level of “laws” that governed the planets. The planets were de-animated objects subject to certain laws and forces. Einstein shifted closer to the notion of protocols, where mass itself self-organizes planetary systems through its own essential protocols. Mass becomes self-animated agency in the universe.}\]
which is a category error. A paradigm shift in complexity science is to discover the key generative protocols at the core of the emergent pattern that we seek to understand.\textsuperscript{31,32} **

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So, why does metaphysics matter? We need a new mind, and metaphysics can help us sample and create new architectures of thought. The new architecture would cut out the epistemic complexity and more perfectly cohere with the rich elegant complexity of the real. By adopting a process understanding of reality, metaphysics could become a suitable guide for a Metamodern praxis, one which integrated perception and participation with the free play of imagination and memory. The task at hand is radical. It would be like swiping a hard drive clean, and uploading completely new software, from scratch, mostly through trial and error, gesture and response, sensing and acting our way forward until the moment when the reality we are situated in, collectively satisfied our dreams of the future “our hearts know is possible.” It would not be a task we could formulate beforehand, or even know afterwards. It would be something that, like human speech, would realize itself through processes of creative becoming. It would never be something we could know, but it is something we could learn to do. Thus, it would take more than intelligence to pull it off. It would require a highly conscious species, to realize this learning journey. Such a consciousness certainly exists as a potential future state of our infinitely creative universe. Will this consciousness rise up in us?

\textsuperscript{31} Important steps and key indicators of weaning ourselves from the high epistemic complexity of systems thinking are detailed in my article here http://integralleadershipreview.com/16031-releasing-complexity/

\textsuperscript{32} For a taste of a new approach to facing complex issues, see my interviews with Daniel Thorson on source code analysis on the Emerge Podcast here: https://anchor.fm/emerge/episodes/Bonnitta-Roy---A-Source-Code-Analysis-of-Power-e23gle
Appendix

*Here a meta, there a meta, everywhere a meta meta*

We can distinguish modes of “going meta.”

1. Meta-synthetic: Modes associated with the dialectic-synthetic “up-ward” path that characterizes the Mental structure of consciousness and the models of adult development that are based on hierarchical complexity and differentiation-integration models.
2. Deconstructive: Modes associated with the eastern, “downward path”, negative dialectics, and illogics.
3. Meta-cognitive: Creating an observational “gap” between knower and known by making an object out of prior subjective contents, i.e. the “Kegan move.”
4. Orthogonal: Modes that shift to different cognitive architectures, such as process philosophy, aesthetic judgement, or aeskesis/practical judgement.
5. Simplexity: Modes that seek to identify source protocols or “deep code” inside the epistemic architecture, to release complexity of the problem situation.
6. Holistic (meta-complexity) orientation: Essentially a non-epistemic mode that engages embodied “back-ground” processes to carry experience forward: “critical reflexivity,” “meditation in action.”
Resources

   http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.68.4935&rep=rep1&type=pdf
   (Retrieved 12-29-2018)
Abstract: This is an edited summary compilation of my work in several Ning Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality (IPS) forum discussion threads listed in the bibliography. It will lay out the slow decline and endgame of capitalism, while also highlighting the emerging new socioeconomic system of the collaborative commons. It also criticizes the notion of clinging to conscious capitalism, as if capitalism could be redeemed if only the right consciousness were applied. While conscious capitalism may indeed be a healthy transition step toward the collaborative commons, in itself it is not enough and to the contrary retains many of the inherent elements from a bygone and no longer effective socioeconomic structure.

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How is Economics Spiritual?

While each domain like spirituality or economics is a self-contained holon with its own autopoietic structure, nonetheless as the image above depicts holons also intersect with each other and share some spaces between. Hence we can discuss the spirituality of economics and vice versa. It is in this light that I make the case below where those domains intersect.²

Pope Francis said in his Encyclical (2015): “[T]he most [...] astonishing economic growth, unless [it is] accompanied by authentic social and moral progress, will definitely turn against man” (para. 4). He goes on to expound on what type of economic progress is deemed moral. As one example, there must be a social mortgage on all private property in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them. It is not in accord with God's plan that this gift be used in such a way that its benefits favor only a few (para. 93). He suggests that the study of ecology requires the interrelationship between living organisms and their environment, the latter including the social and economic milieu. And both are integrated within of the broad rubric of the spiritual (Chapter 4). Furthermore, our current socioeconomic system is one of personal conquest over nature, extracting its abundance for personal gain and not for any common good (Chapter 2). In order to serve each other in a more caring and humane manner we need a more spiritually oriented economic system.

Michael Lerner (2017), a Rabbi and leader in the progressive Jewish faith, brings a spiritual perspective to economics. Spirituality in a broader sense is how we bring those principles to the daily bread of, well, daily bread: How we get enough bread to eat, how we share our bread with our neighbors, how we provide it if they can't afford it, etc. Recall that bread is a key ingredient in Holy Communion, how we share in the body of the Divine, and how we nourish our physical bodies in preparation for cultivating our more ephemeral bodies. His organization's Spiritual Covenant promotes loving and caring relationships, recognizing that everyone is part of, and contributor to, the sacred energy of the universe. It requires social responsibility in democratizing our political economy to achieve a living wage, reduced work weeks and meaningful participation in work. Spirituality requires that we act in the economic sphere to improve lives or it is just more empty rhetoric.

Otto Scharmer (2013) discusses how the self can be alienated from the environment, society, and ourselves. All three domains are inextricably related. The spiritual divide is not from some divine being or reality as such but “between the current self [...] and the emerging future self.” He correlates the spiritual divide with our current governance systems not giving voice to the people or defending private property rights. He demonstrates that all of the above disconnections are tied to our economic paradigms. Economically we are moving spiritually toward awareness-based collective action and commons-based ownership.

Christian Arnsperger (2008) makes an explicit connection between existential reflection and religious/spiritual values. He considers such values as the very foundation of economic thought, since the latter is directly concerned with the liberation of humankind from oppression and enslavement, so much so that economics is “less a technical-operational domain than an

² Also see Alderman in this Issue for a fuller appreciation of this phenomenon.
existential-spiritual one.” He even goes so far as to see Marx, Keynes, and Hayek literally as “the most influential theologians of the 20th century.” Hence the subsequent examination of economic systems and the transition from capitalism to the collaborative commons is of utmost spiritual concern, where the rubber of spirituality meets the road of its material enactment.

What could be more spiritual than helping people earn a living wage to feed their families? Than addressing income inequality so that people have a fair shot at creating enough money to meet their basic needs and have some surplus time and energy to devote to needs higher on Maslow's hierarchy, like spiritual pursuits? And I don't mean just traditional religion but so-called integral postmetaphysical spirituality (IPS)? It seems most of us that are into such spiritual pursuits are already privileged with enough surplus in the lower levels such as survival, membership, individual autonomy and other basic needs that we take for granted, while most of the population is struggling to eat and pay the rent. If you are in the latter group you will not focus on much of anything else, let alone IPS. So a key spiritual question becomes which political agenda best enables people to meet their deficiency needs in order to fulfil their higher needs? Barring that, how realistic is it to expect ordinary people to even approach something like IPS?

Just preaching IPS to the choir of already relatively wealthy elites is a circle jerk. Taking the prime directive seriously means taking action to lift everyone up to achieve their highest potential, not just in financial terms but all the higher needs. But we can't get there without addressing real sociocultural problems. And it matters a lot which political agenda is in power. I'm also reminded of Wilber's (2006, p. 34) contention, and with which I agree, that the predominant factor in an individual's level of consciousness is the economic system. Recall the recent proclamations of the Pope above about trickle-down economics being a major factor in subverting one's religious obligations to the people. Or Jim Wallis (2017), who sees economic budgets as moral issues, how we enact our moral and religious beliefs in treating each other. At IPS forum we've long included political and economic issues as part of an integral view to achieving spirituality.

**Capitalism, Conscious or Otherwise**

First let’s examine capitalism. Dictionary.com defines it as:

An economic system based on a free market, open competition, profit motive and private ownership of the means of production. Capitalism encourages private investment and business, compared to a government-controlled economy. Investors in these private companies (i.e. shareholders) also own the firms and are known as capitalists.

Noam Chomsky (2009) explains that laissez-faire capitalism is an ideal that has never existed in practice. Existing forms are dominated by oligarchs who buy legislators that intervene in the economy on their behalf. A free, competitive market is more a talking point that in reality must be avoided at all cost. Instead Chomsky prefers economic democracy where workers have control over their workplaces and economic institutions, more like the collaborative commons.

On a positive note Jeremy Rifkin (2014) defends capitalism. The first two industrial revolutions required vast amounts of capital to build its infrastructure. It also required vertical integration of huge organizational structures with top-down hierarchical control. He notes that while greed,
deregulation and corruption certainly played a part in what capitalism has become, he also asserts that this structure was a natural process for the sort of communication-energy-consciousness regime that provided a general increase in the standard of living for all. However, its own drive for ever-increasing productivity at lower marginal costs has now resulted in it being nearly obsolete.

Wilber and Parlee (2009) claimed: “If you shop, have a job, or own any investments, you're a capitalist. But are you a conscious capitalist?” This presumes that if you engage in markets and business, or exchange money you are a capitalist, which is an erroneous and revealing assumption. Cannot one do all those things without engaging in capitalism? One most certainly can. Just because monetary investment is involved doesn’t make it capitalism. The latter is a specific economic system as defined above. So what do their assumptions reveal?

Technically capitalism means private ownership of the means of production. We can just as well make money, shop, have a job and engage in competitive markets in a system in which the workers can own the means of production and operate businesses democratically. Co-ops are but one example, the Mondragon Corporation being the largest. This is Marx's (1948) move from capitalism to democratic socialism. I'd add that some of the most democratic and happiest countries have some degree of democratic socialism, like Iceland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden (World Happiness Report, 2018).

Wilber (2006) said the following: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their reality but their economic-material realities that determine their consciousness" (34). He of course qualifies this claim, but he agrees that the economic system is an incredibly strong factor is shaping the consciousness of most of society's individuals. So one of the strongest reasons people support those who oppress them is because they have to make a living. Making minimum wage or not much beyond is better than starving to death. And the latter is not just a fanciful hypothetical but a daily reality for many Americans, not only the poor but increasingly the middle class as well. It's hard to have an ideology when you're working overtime and/or a second job to make ends meet for your family. Given the above, many of us do not have the time or energy to be educated about political issues and/or to get involved in that process.

Which is of course the intent of global, corporate capitalists, for they realize an uneducated, overworked, underpaid workforce with the apparent freedom to vote is much more easily manipulated with ads and political framing. Hence it is the ideology of those in power, generally those with the most money who want to keep it that way, that program us with scientifically proven linguistic techniques specifically designed to get us believe in something that is against our own self-interest, i.e., getting out of the cycle of poverty or slave wages. There has been a lot of research on framing and, according to Lakoff (2016), capitalists have been on to this for a long time and have manipulated public opinion to vote for policies that further enrich the already rich and further impoverish the already poor. Obviously they hide the reality of this process within political frames that spin a story that their agenda is all about opportunity, jobs, and lifting the poor and middle class. But it is well-designed misdirection that has been exposed time and again; the programming is so strong and insidious that those so programmed refuse to accept the cognitive dissonance of facing that they've been so manipulated.
Now of course some integralites also buy into this false story that if anyone just tries to work hard enough, and are smart enough, they too will succeed financially and become healthy, wealthy and wise. Thing is, most of us integralites have grown up in more upper middle class households and already started on third base, to use a well-worn metaphor. We don't realize that many others don't even start at home plate but never get the opportunity to get into the game. I'm reminded of kids that don't have enough to eat so cannot learn well, so even though they're given the equal opportunity of an education it's not sufficient. Their parents are both working low-wage jobs and still don't have enough to buy adequate food to feed their families. Also lower-class schools have inadequate supplies and an insufficient number of teachers, their budgets having been slashed by capitalists lying about a shortage of funds yet unwilling to get those funds via reasonable taxes from those who can afford them. Again, part of the plan to keep lower and lower middle classes under- or uneducated to perpetuate the cycle of wealth flowing to the top. Most of us privileged integralites never had to experience such conditions so we unconsciously buy into and enable such exploitation, thinking if we just educate leaders about integral ideas then the above problems will be somehow corrected, when in reality such training just gives leaders better tools to keep the deception going.

In some integral circles there is the notion of consensus between liberalism and conservatism, which presumes that they are both legitimate worldviews of equal worth, complexity, and development that just need some balancing and integration. But is the presumption accurate? I think not. I agree with the general idea that the liberal worldview is a higher cognitive development than the conservative (Wilber, 2006b, p. 22). Granted there are exceptions and contextual caveats but it's valid as a generalizing orientation. And I also agree with Wilber (2000, p. 221) that worldviews are what he calls transitional structures, i.e., that development entails the replacement of outgrown worldviews with new ones. For example, in moral development one does not simultaneously hold an egocentric and worldcentric morality, and they are not balanced or integrated. The latter replaces the former. And so it is with worldviews. However basic elements are indeed included from different domains, as we’ll see below.

We do not have to balance or integrate conservative with the liberal worldviews. We can though mix-and-match elements from capitalism to balance with more equitable ideas from a more developed worldview. It is important to make this distinction. Even though we retain some of the healthy elements of capitalism in moving to the collaborative commons, retaining capitalism as a guiding worldview has severe real-life consequences for society by continuing the inequities of a system that has outgrown any usefulness it might have had previously.

Another assumption is the following: “Capitalism can and will evolve as the consciousness of the people composing it evolve” (Wilber, 2009). This is the consciousness in conscious capitalism. But again, this assumes that a higher consciousness, presumably integral consciousness, will continue to express through a lower socioeconomic system. That somehow the latter can be redeemed if we just think about it differently. It also presumes that this integral consciousness has somehow balanced and integrated the prior liberal and conservative worldviews in a higher synthesis. But recall the liberal or progressive worldview was not a balance or integration of the conservative but its replacement. And if there is such a thing as an integral worldview it too is not an integration of liberal and conservative worldviews but their replacement. Granted some
elements of a previous system can be included, but they are reconstructed and interpreted within the new worldview.

That the integral view tries to balance and integrate capitalism with a so-called higher consciousness reveals a few things. It is antithetical to its own principles of the transcend-and-replace nature of transitional structures. Confusing how enduring structures are included with transitional structures that are replaced is indicative of the type of egoic-rational cognitive structure that cannot make this very distinction. It lends further support that integral conscious capitalism really is not so much an evolved worldview but more of a conservative, capitalist, Republican socioeconomic view dressed up in newer, more glamorous clothing-rationalizations. It’s a view that has yet to go through the so-called ‘green’ progressive worldview with its social and democratically run markets.

Mackey (2006), another proponent of conscious capitalism, seems oblivious that the ruling form of capitalism is State capitalism, and such corporate control of government will not be changed by a few sincere but naive idealistic capitalists like him promoting positive change by example. He will not even be noticed by the power elite until and unless he starts to cost them one penny in profit; then he will be crushed. In the meantime such power brokers no doubt silently nod in approval while he promotes capitalism in general, as it keeps the masses from appropriately directing their anger at the iniquitous system that is creating their turmoil.

Granted there are positive elements in conscious capitalism to be included, like dedication to the triple bottom line: profit, people, environment. It attempts to balance all three stakeholders so that profit is not the only motive. The latter by itself is what is considered to be the culprit in the downsides of capitalism and they’re right on that count. However there are other aspects of a capitalist worldview noted above that are accepted unconsciously which also get in the way of a more equitable and humane economy.

The 2015 Integral Theory Conference

In an Integral Leadership Review interview Sean Esbjörn-Hargens (2015) said:

[T]he theme of the conference, which is around 'Integral Impacts,' is simultaneously a statement and a question aimed at exploring the issue of whether integral approaches are more impactful than other non-integral approaches? The narrative that we tell ourselves in the integral community is that it is. It logically has to be. And yet there aren’t a lot of examples that really make that case. If push comes to shove, I think we as a community are hard-pressed to actually demonstrate that.

One way of addressing that is educating ourselves and others of the consequences of end-stage capitalism, of facing our unconscious assumptions that lead us into accepting and enacting its outright pernicious tenets. To have an impact we have to drop the pretense of civilized debate and just fight against what is wrong. Sometimes the former is a way to capitulate to the hegemonic power structure, to succumb to its premises while politely disagreeing. Which in effect doesn't change that structure one iota. I'm thinking here specifically of the ITC debate on capitalism, where Stein's opening statement (2014) makes clear we should not accept capitalism's own terms, for to
do so, no matter how 'integrimately' dressed, really changes nothing. Moving beyond conscious capitalism requires more than polite and respectful disagreement. It's a fight that requires strong language, and yes, even polemic, that motivates us to personal and collective action in order to change a defunct and destructive system. We can't politely watch climate change destroy our lives and planet from an ivory tower burning to the ground. If we don't fight now we all die, and that's not a metaphor or hyperbole. This is not an academic debate befitting of its rules of engagement; this is a fight for our very lives.

Stein (2015), in a video clip linked below, reiterates some of the points in his 2015 ITC paper. The weak argument is that integralists should at least become informed of the nature of capitalism, to date under investigated. Conscious capitalism ignores its history and its deeper implications. This is necessary for his stronger argument against it: If you stick to integral metatheory then at the very least it should be post-capitalist, and even anti-capitalist. He finds calling anti-capitalism a 'green meme' a poor excuse for actual thought, a misuse of developmental theory to dismiss something that hasn't been thoroughly thought through. He then discusses transitional and enduring structures, arguing as I have that capitalism has to be transcended and negated. Not everything is included in transcendence.

He goes on and sees conscious capitalism as a transition to a post-capitalist form of economics. He's not opposed to conscious capitalism, just that form of it that sees no alternative to capitalism or that thinks it is the integral expression of the most evolved socioeconomic system. Capitalism is inherently a paradigm of endless profit and growth, unsustainable for the planet and for people. This addiction to profit and growth requires the exploitation of labor and the environment. And finally, there is a relationship between markets and violence; wherever there's a market there's someone with a gun.

Also consider one of Michael Schwartz's (2015) points in his IPS Facebook integral myth thread, that no matter one's cognitive level on developmental tests, once we are within the system the system itself starts speaking and acting through us. It challenges the notion that all we need do is attain integral cognition, or try to inculcate the integral model into the system. The system itself will appropriate those cognitions and models for its own purposes and proceed along virtually unchanged. We need to also enact new socioeconomic structures in alignment with our cognitions and models. That is what the collaborative commons movement is doing. And apparently organically, without AQAL models.

Political and social revolution arises from the external socioeconomic system, the mode of production. This agrees with at least that part of what Wilber (2006a) spoke to as the predominant way most people move into a new level overall: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their reality but their economic-material realities that determine their consciousness" (part 3). The difference is that he thinks more developed individuals create the new systems from the inside out. I suggest that it's more individuals being affected by the emerging tech and modes of production that then instills the value logic. Development is accomplished not by having a 'higher' model to which one must conform, but by the actual practice of operating within the sociocultural practice of democracy. This is what transforms individual operators in a value logic supporting the notion of the public good in distinction from the dysfunctional notion of individuality espoused tirelessly by the regressive capitalists that prefer oligarchy. Again, it's the social practice that inculcates a
working system for democracy against oligarchy, where the inside-out model has yet to have even a minuscule effect on this stated goal.

I know, the AQAList might argue it's not one creating the other, it's all of them tetra-arising at the same time. But as another example, Habermas (1994) using Mead determined that it was the cultural system that creates and inculcates the individual ego in the first place. Without it, despite the hardware, one remains an egoless wolf boy. Vygotsky's (Edwards, 2004) work supports this notion as well. They directly contradict the Piagetian notion of inherent inner structures that shape external stimuli to fit that structure. It's a very metaphysical system that I examined in depth in the IPS “real/false reason” thread. And again, it's not that the inner/outer, individual/social all tetra-arise simultaneously. That certainly provides for a nice apparent 'balance,' but that is an imposed systematic assumption that presupposes such a balance that does not match the empirical facts on the ground, instead trying to match the facts to the created metaphysical system. It is a hallmark of the capitalist system to do exactly that.

Stein (2014) recommends that a key goal of integral activism should be to replace capitalism with a new economic system. In that light let's now explore the collaborative commons.

The Collaborative Commons

Jeremy Rifkin (2017) discusses how the capitalist paradigm is phasing out and the collaborative commons is phasing in. The transition will inevitably take time but it is already forming a hybrid economy. He predicts the transition will be complete by 2050, with the Commons dominating but capitalism will still exist on the margins as a aggregator of network services and solutions. The major impetus for the decline of capitalism is near zero marginal cost. Marginal cost is that of producing additional goods and/or services once the investment costs are covered. Due to technological advancement and efficiency, marginal cost is approaching zero, thereby making goods and services virtually free after investment costs.

Given the loss of return on investment, capitalists are losing out to a new way of creating goods and services. People who were once consumers are becoming prosumers, using advanced tech at near zero marginal cost to produce their own goods and services and sharing them with each other for minimal cost or free. They are forming collaborative teams in the social commons to create projects that can scale up to handle large, complex projects. "The Collaborative Commons is already profoundly impacting economic life. Markets are beginning to give way to networks, ownership is becoming less important than access, and the traditional dream of rags to riches is being supplanted by a new dream of a sustainable quality of life" (Rifkin, 2017).

There will still obviously be significant expenditures needed for initial start-up infrastructure. That can be generated through City, State and Federal government investment paid by our taxes. It can also come from collaborative sources, like crowdfunding, for smaller projects.

Rifkin (2014) proposed that each phase of socioeconomic development entails coordination between communication and energy systems within the prevailing societal paradigm. Hence capitalism was appropriate at that particular juncture of development because the first two industrial revolutions required vast amounts of capital to build its infrastructure. It also required
vertical integration of huge organizational structures with top-down hierarchical control. This paradigm provided a general increase in the standard of living for all. But the capitalist structure has reached the point where its disasters outweigh its dignities. And its own impetus for ever-increasing productivity at lower marginal costs has made itself near obsolete.

Capitalism was the age of privacy and individual autonomy, whereas with the collaborative commons there is much more sharing and openness. Throughout much of history humanity did things much more communally and publicly, like eating, sleeping and even excreting waste. With capitalism we moved many of these functions indoors and into our own private rooms. This “went hand-in-hand with the enclosure and privatization of the commons” (Rifkin, 2014, 75).

The emerging collaborative commons needs a new, unifying narrative or worldview, heretofore having to navigate within the capitalist paradigm or regress to old notions of the commons. It found its theme in the ecological sciences, where the focus was not so much on individual species but how they interacted within environments. And most importantly, how all the environmental niches interacted with the biosphere as a whole.

Rifkin (2014) describes how this ecological emphasis manifests via the collaborative commons. We shift to renewable energies that can be installed on our individual homes or businesses. Such energy sources, while intermittent, can be stored in new battery technology or hydrogen fuel cells. Since we will be increasingly connected to the Internet of Things we can sell excess energy to the grid that someone can use on the other side of the globe. 3D printer technology empowers local businesses and governments to produce goods that don't require expensive and polluting long-range transportation. Education is conducted more on a collaborative basis where teachers facilitate students to participate and create innovations instead of just learning by rote, and often at lower tuition if not entirely free. Such sharing and exchange of energy, information and products is indeed conducive to a collective and collaborative commons.

This worldview of global consciousness is the democratization of everything. One of its early expressions was the free software and open source movements, both dedicated to making information accessible to all for minimal to no cost. It was based on the notion that everyone could share, change, and mix knowledge in a collaborative endeavor where no one person or company could claim ownership. All of which transpired in the global commons of the internet beyond blood ties, religious affiliations and national boundaries, thus enacting global consciousness.

Empathy within an ecological consciousness expresses as spiritual awe at our connection with everything. We transcend our individual selves in this embodied, embedded, enactive and extended union while still retaining our individuality. This opens the possibility for an individual developmental growth that also realizes the ecological connections and integrations within the various parts of our self: reason, emotions, feelings and sensations. At this stage our empathy can transcend the individual, the tribe, the religion or the nation and enact caring relationships with the entire ecosphere. We are indeed arriving at the beginning of our collective enlightenment (Berge, 2017).

This view is replacing the capitalist invisible hand, which was itself a holdover from a theological God in control to rational, self-interested individuals in control. Lacking a systems
view it replaced God with the invisible force of a marginally less superstitious autonomous Market. Backed by ecological and other scientific advances, it is now being replaced with the visible systems view of the global eco-social commons and redefining our place within it.

Note that the invisible hand of the market is still metaphysical in that it must posit some autonomous agency that operates on its own if we but focus on our self-interest, i.e. the market will take care of itself. Moving into systems science and ecological consciousness thus naturalizes this process, making previously autonomous agencies like Gods or markets 'visible' and understandable, and reconnecting us with ourselves, our peers and our environments, but in a postmetaphysical framework. This also applies to the sort of instrumental rationality inherent to 'enclosure' of disciplines of study rather than to interdisciplinary cross-sharing more indicative of Habermas' collaborative, communicative action. It is not by chance that Habermas (1994) calls this latter form of rationality postmetaphysical (Berge, 2014).

Paradigm Shift

George Monbiot (2017) is right to assert that one's worldview narrative trumps all other considerations, like adherence to facts. Such stories organize how we see everything through their lenses. Monbiot notes that the two major narratives of our time are social democracy and neoliberalism. While having different means and goals they both have the same narrative structure:

Disorder afflicts the land, caused by powerful and nefarious forces working against the interests of humanity. The hero – who might be one person or a group of people – revolts against this disorder, fights the nefarious forces, overcomes them despite great odds and restores order.

This notion of a hero has to go; we the people collectively and collaboratively become the initiators and maintainers of the story, not some special class of enlightened ones. We work together to enlighten each other, and it is in that collaborative interaction where the enlightenment resides, not some special individual achievement.

He explains why we can't simply go back to the earlier story of social democracy to overcome the current story of neoliberalism. Among other reasons, the earlier story assumes continuous economic growth with the same consumer lifestyle, devastating to the environment and more fuel for climate chaos. So we must create a new story ASAP. This story must be based on our evolutionary capacity for mutual collaboration and aid. It's one that rejects the narrative told by neoliberalism of "extreme individualism and competition." Instead we share ownership and stewardship in community, respecting and honoring each other and the environment.

We will develop a new economics that treats both people and planet with respect. We will build it around a great, neglected economic sphere: the commons. Local resources will be owned and managed by communities, ensuring that wealth is widely shared. Using common riches to fund universal benefits will supplement state provision, granting everyone security and resilience.
Monbiot shows how this story has already been taking shape and having positive effects. Sanders' campaign was one huge water mark. It organized numerous small networks via the internet and got most of its spending money from a large number of small donors. Such tactics were used successfully by Corbin in the UK. The Indivisible Guide grew out of this learning process.

Jeremy Lent (2012) sees changing paradigm shifts in the dominant societal metaphor for nature. He begins by referencing Lakoff’s work on metaphor, in that metaphor is how we use embodied experience to understand more abstract thought. Metaphor also indicates our underlying values. Hunter-gatherers saw nature as a giving parent. Agricultural society saw it as a divinity to propitiate. Monotheistic religion saw it as subject to man’s dominion. The scientific age saw it as a machine, which gave us further dominion over it, to treat it like an object which we could exploit and from which we could extract whatever was necessary for human purposes.

There was then a transition to seeing nature as still property but within an ethos of stewardship, to considering our responsibilities for the consequences of our use. This metaphor though still entails our control of nature and our right to prioritize humanity’s use thereof. This transitions to seeing nature as a valued ecosystem that humanity manages responsibly, but still retains a monetary valuation for environmental resources. The next metaphor sees nature as a geo-engineering project, using science and technology to solve climate change, but still assumes never-ending economic growth without any change in consumer lifestyle.

Systems science offers the most recent and best-to-date metaphor akin to the collaborative commons. It sees nature as a collection of self-organized dynamical systems in an ecological interaction with each other. And it is their interactions within the broader ecology that is the significant factor. The predominant metaphor is that nature is a fractally connected organism, each level connected with the next. This puts humanity in its place as just one dynamic system embedded in the larger ecosystem, not transcendent over it. Humanity realizes that as part of nature we must care for it like we care for ourselves. The paradigm shifts to the collaborative commons.

The Developmental Argument

A point of clarification is in order before proceeding. No individual or group is at a level of development (Mascolo, 2015). We individually and collectively enact different levels in different contexts at different times. So when using developmental levels we must keep this in mind, particularly with entire socioeconomic structures. It’s not like there is a pure capitalistic society; there are mixes of elements from earlier paradigms like feudalism as well as later developments like socialism involved. Again recall the above symbol on how holons intersect.

Another thing to keep in mind is Otto Laske’s (2013) socio-historical account of developmental models. He questions the scientific or ‘objective’ facts claimed by developmentalists and sees them more as a product of their unconscious societal biases. One of those biases is that very blindness in accepting the modernist (formal) premises of a pure objectivity apart from more subjective biases, as if science or math could get outside of context and determine the final ‘truth’ of things. Such a blindness then doesn’t even recognize the societal shifts necessary for personal transformation, instead assuming that it’s all a personal quest and responsibility, the very values
inherent to the status quo, modernist and capitalist system that only accepts personal responsibility as legitimate via this formal and metaphysical logic. All we need do is get them to personally grow and send them back into the shark-pit of the capitalist workforce, as if they then have the personal power and will to overcome it.

Another example of that is the incessant obsession with classification, and the belief that those classes are rigidly structured with clear dividing lines: You’re either in the classification or not. Laske doesn’t see this as a representative of dialectical thinking but a continuation of formal logic. And this maintains the hierarchical status quo of business as usual, with the ‘leaders’ in charge as they should be. However once we ‘enlighten’ them with personal growth this will of course trickle down to the rest of us and make our lives better? Instead it reinforces the very formal and modernist notion of hierarchical business relationships in the first place and completely misses the actual next phase of societal development, the collaborative commons.

Given the above caveats, Wilber (2003) notes that social structures set up the latest and best paradigm and create laws to enforce them, in effect creating the best-to-date attractor as ideal and by which the society strives to attain despite its actual status. Even within that mix there is a dominant paradigm that serves as goal post. So let's take a look at some examples of developmental analyses which provide the hallmarks of the different levels of socioeconomic paradigms to date, with some speculation on where we might be going.

Rifkin (2014) looks at worldviews from feudalism to capitalism. He starts by noting that worldviews justify themselves as the ways things are, either by divine or natural order. The feudal Great Chain promised salvation by knowing one's place in the hierarchy and doing one's duty. In the transitional medieval market economy this shifted to one's hard labor, earnings and property as signs that one was favored by God, which shifted to a more secular notion of one's autonomy and worth as equivalent with one's property.

When the market economy transitioned into capitalism there arose much more vigorous defense of individualism tied with private property as inherent to human nature. Utilitarianism became the defining worldview justification. This led Herbert Spencer to twist Darwin's ideas into social Darwinism, a justification for ‘survival of the fittest.’ Darwin was aghast at such a torturous distortion of his work.

Nonetheless Spencer saw the way of things as follows: “...all structures in the universe develop from a simple, undifferentiated state, to an ever more complex and differentiated state, characterized by greater integration of the various parts” (Rifkin, 2014, p. 64). Therefore only the most complex and vertically integrated business should survive, as this was natural to evolutionary development. All of which leads to oligopoly with its hierarchical and centralized command and control. This remains the dominant and regressive Republican (and corporate Democratic) view today in the US.

Rifkin (2010b) proceeds to show the changes in society from past to present based on empathic development. In forager-hunter societies communication was limited to shouting distance within the local tribe. Empathy was extended to the tribe while those outside it were considered aliens. Writing emerged in agricultural civilizations which allowed our empathy to extend to religious
groups. With the industrial revolution and electrical communication our empathy is extended once again, this time to a larger organization called the nation-state. Now new technologies like the internet are providing a framework that allows us to communicate with the entire world, thereby extending our empathy to the entire biosphere. It is this last development that provides a foundation for a collective, planetary collaborative commons.

Now granted there are existing cultural memes already setting the stage. As noted above and below worldviews are co-instituted with stages of human development and their socioeconomic formulas. Some developmentalists suggest that modern egoic rationality is the first stage of equality for all and capitalism is most certainly not about that. I suggest that democratic business, like democratic politics, is indeed an example of this stage. And that capitalism is still a regressive holdover from the aristocratic feudal period. In other words, the politico-economic line in our culture is lagging behind other developments. Capitalists are still the privileged aristocrats that do not want equal opportunity but to maintain their privilege. So when governmental forms shifted from the old aristocracy to democracy with a vote for all they fought tooth and nail to subvert that process by refining quickly the art of rhetoric backed by the science of linguistics. And of course coupled with a heaping pile of bullshit to feed an already abused mass starving for promises of hope.

Some in the FB IPS anti-capitalism thread have also suggested that being anti-anything, let alone anti-capitalist, is not so-called second tier. Stein (2014) discusses Hegel's 'negate and preserve,' discussed above as the difference between 'transcend and include' and 'transcend and replace.' The latter is akin to Hegel in that basic structures are included, whereas transitional structures like worldviews and morals are replaced. So a valid critique of the capitalist worldview is necessary and warranted to negate and replace those elements within it thwarting further development. We discussed transitional structures in detail in the Ning IPS “ladder, climber, view” thread.

Elza Maalouf (2014), an associate of Don Beck who practices his Spiral Dynamics Integral (SDi), examines evolutionary democracy. She provides a rundown of appropriate political forms for different countries. Of note is that the US needs to expand into social democracy (green), while Germany and northern European countries are entering functional democracy (yellow). A characteristic of the latter is a "distributed intelligence model." Interestingly, Rifkin is working with Germany on his third industrial revolution plan, aka the Commons, which no doubt is a big factor in this move into yellow. Maalouf asserts that holonic democracy (turquoise) is a couple of centuries off, so not likely to be at all like conscious capitalism.

Bruce Gibb (2014), an organizational psychologist and SDi practitioner, reviews Rifkin (2014). His premise: "[Rifkin's] analysis proceeds from a yellow, Stage 7 (S:7) stance." He notes that while foundations are built upon and not eliminated, nonetheless a "more adequate theory replaces a less adequate one" (my emphasis). Also of note is the emphasis on how socioeconomic infrastructure is what drives our evolution: "[Rifkin] recognizes that life conditions – and in particular the sources of energy and the technology of communication – are the drivers of cultural evolution."

While Gibb admits near the end that biosphere consciousness is turquoise, he also said right before that statement that the collaborative commons is a horizontal extension of green consciousness into all sectors of society. He led up to that conclusion by noting that green's psychological consciousness extends empathy to larger associational ties to include like-minded
others. His own logic doesn't follow here, as the collaborative commons goes beyond associational, like-minded ties into biosphere consciousness, given its expansion of empathy to all people, beyond associational ties, as well as to the entire biosphere.

Also he doesn't provide a description of an SDi yellow cultural mode. His progression seems to indicate we can jump from associational communities (green) to the biosphere (turquoise) with no yellow in between? Granted he's following Rifkin's empathic levels here, which don't account for what Gibbs describes as yellow. But Gibbs doesn't account for a yellow cultural stage either.

Said Dawlabani (2014) discusses 2nd tier functional capitalism as arising in a yellow and turquoise value system in its incipient phases in parts of the US, northern Europe and Germany. It is distinguished by a distributed biological intelligence manifesting in economic systems. It requires all stakeholders to participate in its design. He notes that such an economics must be spearheaded by those displaying that value level and sees Senator Warren as an example of it. "The next system of governance sees right through the incompetence of the current political system and its complicity with lobbyists and corporate interest." I'd add Senator Sanders to that category. The article though does promote Whole Foods and conscious capitalism as yellow business examples, still maintaining the CEO with such values as the leader of a top-down organization that guides it. Per above that falls far short of the standards set by the collaborative commons and its peer to peer dynamic structure.

In Spiral Dynamic terms I'd put conscious capitalism in the orange exit/green enter phase. It still mixes and matches their elements. Yes, it's better than the kind of global capitalism he criticizes but it's not yellow by a long stretch. The emerging neo-Commons is the transition into yellow or so-called 2nd-tier socioeconomics. Dawlabani rightly characterizes the latter with distributed intelligence. I'd say Rifkin's economics is more green exit/yellow enter phase, whereas stable green economics would be more like the social democracies of northern Europe on the verge of yellow. Hence those countries are amenable to Rifkin's agenda. And conscious capitalists apparently are not.

Dawlabani (2016) updated his view by noting that the distributed intelligence of the next system follows no ideologies, including capitalism. That end of ideology is the “rise of the collaborative commons.” It is open source, highly networked and depends on the wisdom of the crowd. It integrates the individualistic and communal value systems in an intelligent network. “It is more Allometric than it is Holocratic. Allometry is from the biological sciences and here’s what it means: It preserves the high functionality of its different sectors, (the specialized organs in an organism) that create innovation, (specialized functions) while relying on the Network for fair and equitable distribution.”

Dawlabani (2018) still sees Whole Foods’ original intent as integral, but when its bottom line of profits fell the investors decided to change its business model, especially after Amazon bought it. “This real Orange threat forced Mackey to start thinking differently.” Hence Mackey’s “long-term prospects of continuing a culture of Conscious Capitalism at Amazon are highly unlikely.” As I noted above, the dynamics inherent to capitalism tolerated his conscious approach only as long as he made them money. When competition drove down its profits and share price the forces of capitalism drove out the conscious aspect in favor of its own inherent values. As expected,
Mackey lost the bargain with the devil capitalism, as any such bargain inevitably will as long as it remains wed to it.

Arnsperger (2007) makes the point that an integral economics must provide not only a critique of capitalism's material reductionism, endless growth orientation, and competitive markets, but a positive vision of how a more evolved economy should work to provide an environment for the development of its citizens along as many lines as possible. We might therefore take some clues of what he considered more evolved economic systems of the past, like Soviet Russia of the 60s or Cuba of the 70s. They had developed a more social and communal way of life that provided basic needs to all citizens like lodging and health care. He even suggested that we incorporate some of the great religions' moral-based tenets to “delineate paradigmatic ideals of economic organization and economic agency towards which conscious evolution might be geared in a liberation-oriented economy,” akin to comments above about setting our ideals as an attractor to strive for.

**Conclusion**

There is ample evidence that the collaborative commons is not only emerging but already has a solid foothold in the transition away from capitalism. It also seems to be growing organically via its peer to peer principles, changing the very ethos of what it means for a system to organize. It integrates hierarchy with heterarchy in a distributed, networked format that transcends capitalism's dominant hierarchical, top-down structure. This format is where organizational levels no longer evolve in a strictly linear fashion of an ever-increasing complexity of growth but via the evolution of a folded, meshed, ecological sustainability, akin to what I've come to call hier(an)archical synplexity. Again, the symbol at the beginning is indicative of this meshwork. Given the inherent and multiplicitous connections in the shared spaces between all of us, there can be no more spiritual quest than to provide the material, socioeconomic basis needed to allow for humanity’s progressive development. Without such a basis most of us will remain trapped in a...

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3 Also note Dawlabani (2018) where the collaborative commons is the end of first tier centralized ideologies.
4 Hier(an)archy is a term coined by Caputo (2006). It basically means not anarchy but hierarchy that leaves open the possibility of something other and outside itself, a transcendental condition in excess of our conceptions. “There is always an ontological excess, withdrawn from immediate relation” (Alderman, forthcoming). The origin of the suffix *plex*: Latin -plex, -plic- (akin to plicare to fold, bend, plectere to plait, braid; see -fold) + -s nominative singular ending.

The origin of the prefix *syn*: Greek, combining form representing sýn with, together with. Hence synplexity is folded together with.

Hier(an)archical synplexity is thus an image-schematic, pre-positional folding together of the actual with the transcendental.

Note that a transcendental condition is not transcendent “but rather what must be presupposed about the nature of the world in order for our scientific practices to be possible. As Deleuze reminds us, the transcendental is not to be confused with the transcendent. The transcendent refers to that which is above or beyond something else. For example, God, if it exists, is perhaps transcendent to the world. The transcendental, by contrast, refers to that which is a condition for some other practice, form of cognition, or activity” (Bryant, 2011, p. 42).

See the Bibliography for the IPS thread on “States, Stages, the Wilber-Combs Lattice and the Fold” for a taste of how this worldview supports the collaborative commons.
struggle for survival. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to work toward creating and sustaining a collaborative commons that allows for and promotes those possibilities of our future growth.

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THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA
The First Postmetaphysical Spiritual Hero

Layman Pascal

“Apes don’t read Nietzsche!” – Kevin Kline as Otto
“Yes, they do, Otto – they just don’t UNDERSTAND it...” – Jamie-Lee Curtis as Wanda

(A Fish Called Wanda, 1988)

Introduction

In the late 19th century, Mr. F. Nietzsche (now deceased) transcended his previous romanticism, humanism, and nihilism in the form of an epic, complex, and hilarious philosophical rap-novel that introduced the first overtly postmetaphysical spiritual protagonist in Western literature. Thus Spoke Zarathustra (subtitled: A book for All and None) burst upon the brilliant, idiosyncratic depth-philosopher like a visionary revelation while he was hiking in the high Alps.

Half-conscious and half-unconscious, this multi-level metaphorical prose-poem might have been called a “subtle realm teaching” if the mustachioed Germanic sage had lived in a different cultural epoch. And why not? The writing of this book involves a disembodied ancient guru revealing a new doctrine through his devotee. Sri Zarathustra’s teaching concerns health, empowerment, and the emergence of a transcultural civilization based on the proliferation and intensification of “peak experiences” and “flow”. This is a developmental teaching which treats meaning as something we grow towards through exercises that unfold and spiritualize the self – practices instead of beliefs, humor instead of idealism, ecology instead of heaven, and the daring to see beyond our conventional metaphysical assumptions.

Nietzsche is notoriously easy to misinterpret. His work is cryptic, rhythmic, and aphoristic. It is specially designed to reveal layers of truth and travel across multiple, even contradictory perspectives if we are capable of “listening with the third ear” and avoiding the trap of assuming

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1 Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him -- this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress -- He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.

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the normal positive and negative social implications associated with wild terminology. If, for example, Nietzsche calls someone a damned liar... well, you don’t yet know whether he thinks damnation and deceit are criticisms or praise. It is a lot of work to read Nietzsche properly and in a balanced fashion. He repeatedly insists that his books are NOT for either the public or the universities. They are for a special class of adventurous, growth-oriented transperspectivalists who – he laments – might not even exist yet in the 1800s. But we 21st century integralites might even be the “new philosophers” and “free spirits” for whom Herr Nietzsche was writing. Certainly we, like he, are deeply concerned to embrace and go beyond relativism, to blend our intellect with our dancing spirit, to merge spirituality with cultural vitality and authentic health – and to evolve past the nihilism of flatland.

“Our task – to see things as they are! Our method – to look through millions of eyes!”

(Nietzsche, 1888)

When the first few chapters of “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” poured like a torrent of bliss into Nietzsche’s troubled soul, vibrant like a new Gospel or a Beatles song waiting to be recorded, he was astonished to find within its curious fractal rhythms the answers to the philosophical questions he had been pondering for years. Questions like: How can culture be mythically revitalized without regression from Reason? How can science, art, and subjectivity work together to intensify truth? How can we create a meta-value system that privileges health, promotes “peak potential” and provides an operational ranking system for the relative utility of all values? And how can we guard ourselves against the constant encroachment of non-actual phenomena, impossible thoughts, metaphysical self-satisfaction, and self-destructive drives?

As he would later describe in his satirical autobiography Ecce Homo, Nietzsche was converted by the whole mood of Zarathustra and his subsequent books were merely the unpacking and deployment of the profoundly happy insights which stared back at him from the pages of this revelation. The joyful, cynical, supra-humanist, and evolutionary attitude of these late works is what primarily inspired people like Aurobindo, Maslow, Jung, Freud, Deleuze, Teilhard de Chardin, Ouspensky, and many others whose own works flow into the river of integral philosophy.

What I intend to do is to provide a brief overview of the plot of Thus Spoke Zarathustra with a few general indications that will allow an interested reader to explore that text with an eye toward the interplay of integrative sensibilities, spiritual development, and postmetaphysical worldviews. But before going any further we must get a quick sense of what “metaphysics” means for Nietzsche:

1. Metaphysics is not specifically religious. Nietzsche critiques metaphysics from a point of view that includes mythic dogmatists, rational scientists, and progressive social pluralists. They are all metaphysical thinkers in their own ways. His famous phrase: “We will not be rid of God as long as we have faith in Grammar” speaks to his universal and syntactical perspective on these matters. Even when we examine his most famous passage (“God is Dead”) we find that it is mostly concerned with critiquing the naiveté and gullibility of so-called atheists who blithely assume that they no longer believe.
2. Metaphysics can be healthy or unhealthy. This is what we expect from a balanced postmetaphysical perspective – not a wholesale dismissal (as if that were even possible) but rather an intelligent and experimental re-examination. Not all metaphysics, nor value systems, are equally effective, true, or benevolent for human beings. Some unproven ontological assumptions are empowering and workable, helping us to thrive in a world we can never completely comprehend while other metaphysical notions about reality might be insidious and self-destructive quite regardless of how much we personally like them or how well they allow us to get along within our cultural groups. Some good-looking houses have asbestos in the walls and rotten floors – but not all good-looking houses.

3. Metaphysics is anti-evolutionary. I almost wrote “irrationally continuous.” Nietzsche is deeply concerned to get beyond the notion that an effect must have a cause that is qualitatively similar to itself. The metaphysical mind assumes that if we find Order in the universe then there must have been an Ordering Power at the beginning. If there is goodness it must come from the Original Good. This is profoundly anti-Nietzschean. He sees virtue evolving as the spiritualization of sin. He sees truth emerging downstream from ancient lies and order arising from chaos. Qualities are complex, non-dualistic, and emergent in the great flux of self-overcoming and energy that constitutes reality.

Thus to be postmetaphysical and spiritual in the Nietzschean sense means to treat spiritual virtues as a refinement and evolution of our lower qualities, to tease apart the healthy and possible from the unhealthy and impossible within our own highest values and worldviews, and never to rest in the idea that our current understanding of reality is free from the illusions, ignorance, and superstitions of the past.

The Two Saints

Zarathustra begins his journey at a point beyond the plot of most novels. The Jungian search for Self has been already accomplished at the very beginning. He is “enlightened.” This is the reincarnation of the ancient Persian saint Zarathustra (aka Zoroaster) who is often credited as the inventor of the idea of a cosmic dichotomy between Good & Evil.

An aeon before Judeo-Christian and Islamic moralities arose in the West there was already a social doctrine that sought to cultivate and sculpt the human soul through its metaphorical participation in a cosmic battle between the God of Light and the God of Darkness. Who then would be best suited to help humanity evolve beyond the epoch of conventional morality? Who but the very man responsible for its promulgation across the Earth. So Zarathustra returns to help give birth to a trans-morality for the age of planetary civilization and inter-cultural crisis.

We join our hero, Sri Zarathustra, in his cave atop the spiritual mountain. He has been living the life of a yogic hermit for decades with only the company of his animal spirits – personified as an Eagle and Serpent. His exercises and meditation have yielded a remarkable new stage of consciousness in which transformational insight and ecstatic moods fill him continually and spill over into the world endlessly. Yet his awakening is just the beginning. He is soon filled with a strange mood and urgency. Overfull of luminous attainment and clearly aware that he is experiencing it and framing it in a unique manner quite distinct from traditional doctrines,
Zarathustra resolves to descend from his Alpine hermitage and give his teaching-transmission to the world. He is the bearer of a nondual, naturalistic illumination-beyond-beliefs.

The first person he meets descending the mountain is a holy man whom he met briefly, years earlier, when Zarathustra was first climbing up to find his cave. This is a genuine religious saint with a nourishing radiance. They are peers. He recognizes that, like himself, Zarathustra has undergone a radical transformation of consciousness. They see it in each other’s eyes.

Passing a pleasant evening together, they ponder Zarathustra’s plan to begin teaching publicly. The saint is astonished at this scheme and avers that people generally do not wish to receive wisdom. They are not ready. They are busy and overwhelmed by options. Even a true teaching is only another burden or superficially exciting idea to them. Holiness cannot be conveyed in the market or given to crowds. It is based on the individual’s private relationship to God.

Zarathustra does not challenge his friend’s opinion but later, after dinner, he says to himself: Can it be? Has this old saint truly not heard that God is dead?

This is our first glimpse – and Western literature’s first clearly spelled out exemplar – of postmetaphysical spirituality. It is the opening salvo of a soul that is spiritually illuminated without a traditional ideology. A critical, participatory mind in a complex social environment yet with full access through practice to the ancient human heritage of redemptive states and higher stages of consciousness.

The classical metaphysical apparatus that is epitomized in the idea of The God (the Guarantor of Reality who links being & knowing) is no longer necessary in order to attain the highest levels of truth, energy, and salvation possible for human beings.

**Flatlanders vs. the Ultra-Human**

Pop culture is waiting in the Motley Cow. The Motley Cow (or: incoherent herd) is the name of the mythical city to which Zarathustra hies in order to make contact with the popular mass culture. He sits in the marketplace to observe and interact with ordinary folks – seizing every chance to preach his radical doctrine. Inner and outer life are both evolutionary, he tells them. Forget about heaven and emptiness and focus on the transcendental fullness of this world, this nature, this body. We are expressions of the multidimensional self-overcoming that characterizes all forms of energy in the cosmos. We have emerged from apes and one day something ultrahuman or transhuman will emerge from ourselves. Look beyond yourself. Intend to participate in the creation of something greater than yourself, greater than anything yet imagined by human beings.

Many of our values are contaminated. Although they provoke “high sentiments” and “ascending aspirations” they may actually keep us trapped in a flat circle of life because they either propose untrue visions that devalue reality by comparison OR because they fail to emphasize the growth-mentality that encourages actual development. Living values are grown by our efforts. When values are assumed to be pre-given or equal or based in nonexistent other worlds (or in nonexistence itself) then we are deprived of the organic conditions that provoke meaning and
depth. The image of the ultrahuman being which might transcend and include humanity is the epitome of what we could create by a naturalistic discipline of growth and self-transcendence.

I implore you, my brethren, REMAIN TRUE TO THE EARTH, and believe not those who speak unto you of supra-earthly hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not.

Despisers of life are they, decaying ones and poisoned ones themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them! Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy; but God died, and therewith also those blasphemers. To blaspheme the Earth is now the dreadfulest sin, and to rate the heart of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth!

Once the soul looked contemptuously on the body, and then that contempt was the supreme thing:--the soul wished the body meagre, ghastly, and famished. Thus it thought to escape from the body and the earth. Oh, that soul was itself meagre, ghastly, and famished; and cruelty was the delight of that soul! But ye, also, my brethren, tell me: What doth your body say about your soul? Is your soul not poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency?

Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream without becoming impure.

(Zarathustra’s Prologue, 1883)

The crowd is not impressed. Obvi. Why would they be? Surely we must be already fairly “evolved” to understand a doctrine of spiritual evolution. They mock or ignore Zarathustra. This continues until, later in the day, a tightrope walker performs high above the crowd’s heads, demonstrating the kind of ambidextrous balance and risky consciousness that Zarathustra has been preaching – for humanity is also a kind of high-wire act from the beast to the God, the primate to the ultra-human. The whole scene comes to a climax when a malevolent dwarf darts out upon the same tightrope, vaulting the balancing artist and causing him to tumble to his death on the pavement below.

Zarathustra realizes that the old saint was correct – the public is not the place for a spiritual teaching. Carrying away the body of the fallen gymnast. he tries to preserve some sanctity for the corpse and then reconsiders his approach to spiritual transmission...

**The Enlightened “I” and the Depressing “We”**

*Beyond the Collective: The Hyper-Personal. Another Preliminary Observation. A feeling to be overcome: Discouragement.* (De Chardin, 2008/1959)

Having been disappointed by the marketplace of ideas, Sri Zarathustra resolves to teach only a small handful of specially prepared pupils. People who are already bright, well-balanced, integrative individuals who can explore his teaching intelligently and spend personal time with him to receive wisdom and energy-transmission. Many talks are recorded as he addresses every aspect of life and history from the point of view of his realization. Especially in helping them to
re-envision the world as more vibrant, more worthy than metaphysics where the notions of unreality and emptiness and a better universe exemplify our tendency to devalue the actual.

Things go a little better and years pass but slowly Zarathustra realizes that this form of life among the devotees also has an insidious limitation. It is impossible for his devotees to fully realize this new consciousness simply because HE is the limitation. They cannot become enough of themselves when they are busy trying to receive his wisdom and understand the blossoming of his individuality. In the end he has no choice but to close up shop and send them away – telling them to return when they have outgrown him.

Alone again, Zarathustra sets out on a spiritual adventure where he befriends pirates, fools, and adventurers whose rugged life, experimental orientation and sturdy self-esteem impresses him. He travels among exotic islands seeking an answer to the problem of the conveyance of wisdom to humanity.

He begins to suspect that the problem is not with human beings but rather with his subtle antagonism toward them. A disgust with humanity lingers in his soul. As profound as the effect he has upon others can be, his personal illumination cannot become transpersonal awakening for others because of his instinctive nausea that he (and we) feel for the great, wrong-minded masses of petty fools. It is while pondering this that he undergoes his great revelatory dream which he later recounts to his shipmates. What he realizes in this dream is a solution to his disgust with humanity.

In the dream he encounters again the dwarf who killed the balanced acrobat in the town square. This dwarf is the Spirit of Gravity and he guards the gate of infinity. From this portal all time splits, spreads, and repeats itself endlessly. The vision of the Eternal Return comes upon Zarathustra in which every object, every event, even ourselves are plural infinity in which each experience is repeated endlessly. Are we horrified or liberated by the endless return of different versions of the Same? Have we the health to affirm such a world? But then the howl of a distant hound leads Zarathustra to discover a sleeping shepherd in whose throat a poisonous snake has lodged and bit deeply. Trying to pull the snake out of the man’s throat accomplishes nothing but pain and waking the shepherd but then something truly remarkable happens. Zarathustra advises the man to BITE and he does – biting down on the snake’s neck – spitting out the serpent’s dark body and leaving the head within himself.

And then he laughs...

Zarathustra’s weariness with “man” is but one example of the kind of depressing implication that the world contains but which, in eternity, recurs forever, cannot be escaped. The solution, integrating aggression, is assimilate the very head of the serpent – say yes to the negative. And by this method is produced an ecstasy that exceeds the human condition.

This is the climax of the novel. Although we must work to decipher it, it is singled out by Zarathustra as the solution to both his questions and to redemption of humanity in the context of the ultrahuman. The journey that begins with enlightenment still must solve the problem of other
people, of the world. After that he can begin to evaluate what actually works in terms of a prescription for the future of us all...

Listen, you daring ones around me, you venturers & adventurers, whoever has embarked with cunning sails on unexplored seas! You enigma-enjoyers! Solve this enigma that I beheld & interpret to me the vision of the most lonesome one! For it was a vision and a prophecy – what did I behold in that parable? And who is it that must come some day? Who is the shepherd into whose throat the serpent crawled? Who is the man into whose throat all the heaviest and blackest things will crawl? The shepherd bit as my cry had admonished him; he bit with a strong bite! Far away did he spit the head of the serpent and sprang up. No longer shepherd, no longer man – a transfigured being! A light-surrounded being, that laughed! Never on earth did a mortal man laugh as he laughed! O my brothers, I heard a laughter which was no human laughter – and now it gnaws thirsty in me, a longing that is never allayed. My longing for that laughter gnaws at me. How can I still endure to live after this but after this could I endure to die! (Zarathustra III:46, 1890)

The Dionysian Mood

After overcoming his disgust with actual humanity, Sri Zarathustra returns to his cave and arranges a celebratory party for all the greatest and deepest human souls. They are numerous different kinds and qualities of people but they have in common the fact that they transcended the ordinary ego and established radiant new depth and force-of-being. They are the best fruit of the species but Zarathustra still sees how far away they are from the ultra-human that he has foreseen.

He no longer suffers from them, no longer is heavy with the necessary limitations of the human condition, no longer confused about the way forward. He gives them food and drink and in the midst of the party goes outside to spent a little time with his old friends the animal spirits.

When we returns, he finds the “higher men” are drunk, hilarious, and pretending to worship a donkey. Zarathustra is not displeased. This mock celebration of the YAY-saying animal, this Ass Festival, is a glimmer of the ultrahuman future.

He tells them that although they are still a long way off from the emergent supermind beings of the ultra-human, their best approximation of the way forward is to combine irreverent mockery and play with their own serious spiritual work on themselves.

Think of your favorite president making jokes at the annual Correspondents Dinner. Think of Christ laughing. Think of what Osho Rajneesh called Zorba the Buddha. In his first book, The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche looked toward a “Musical Socrates” as a figure of redemption. Think of Confucius dancing. Think of Gandhi playing like a child. Think of the Pope burning down the Vatican.

This double image of authentic saints and creative irreverence, of profound sobriety and light-hearted intoxication, of natural chaos combined with the discipline of human development is a means of approximating the “dionysian” mood that leads us toward the ultrahuman.
Spiritual discipline works. It does not require beliefs and it should be blended with skepticism, humor, artistry and playful sacrilege. Imagine a world that is overfull of its own transcendence and lacks any “other realm” in which to spill. A world in which spiritual ascent is not an idealism that moves away from materiality and worldliness and negative emotions but which embraces, enfolds, and assimilates them like the snake head left inside the shepherd’s body. The paradigm for the spiritual transformation of individuals is that of adventure, exploration, discovery – not obedience, escape, or purity.

If we do not make this orientation more and more real in our experience then our “balancing act” will be destroyed by the Spirit of Gravity. Zarathustra is the prophet of Levity. Zarathustra is an embodiment and teacher of pro-ecology (“Remain true to the Earth, O my brothers!”), an exemplar of skeptical, embodied, rational-poetic, good-humored, individuality-cultivating, multidimensionally engaged, postmetaphysical integral spirituality.

So he is... OUR hero.

References

Nonduality – Non/duality – Many-One Duality

Oliver Griebel

Abstract: This paper explores the fundamental logical and metaphysical difference between first an either-or dualism, which posits a fundamental alternative, divide or antagonism, second what I call an either-or-and-neither nonduality, which posits a fundamental alternative and at the same time negates it, and third a both-and duality, which interprets a fundamental distinction as an ultimate complementarity. More specifically, the holistic “one/many” complementarity, between Being as a whole and the many beings parts of it, is different from the “emptiness/form” nonduality in the Heart-Sutra/Nagarjuna tradition. Even in spiritual post-postmodern, postmetaphysical, integral approaches there still is a major worldview choice to be made about what the spirit or consciousness of Ultimate Reality is: Is it self-conscious, intentional and caring, about its coherence and beauty, worth and life within. Or is it non-reflexive, transrational, “empty?”

Keywords: Buddhist logic, dualism, duality, emptiness, many-one, nonduality.

Among post-postmodern philosophies, many if not most are in the broadest sense spiritual. Not all of these are trying to make strong theses about what spirit ultimately is. Be it Spiral Dynamics, Edgar Morin's complex thought, Hanzi Freinacht’s metamodernism, or Jorge Ferrer’s enactive Participatory Thinking – they are all, each in their own way, avoiding Ultimate Spirit. One reason for this, I think, is that while unconscious spirit is something of a contradiccio in adiecto, it nevertheless is very speculative to talk about the spirit, consciousness or even mind which Ultimate Reality may possess. And often speculation only paraphrases dogmas about divine spirit which one happens to have inherited from one's respective religious or mystical backgrounds. Not being a member of any (mono-)theistic creed, being skeptical about Eastern-mystical reductions of the Divine to meditative experiences too, but also believing that we experience the Divine in meditation, I hope to be relatively immune to this kind of bias.

What motivates me personally is the gap that I feel dividing Madhyamaka Buddhist ideas about an “empty” divine spirit (and the many Western-spiritual ideas inspired by it), and my own philosophical intuitions which tell me that a person's mind is “full”, that is, intentional, “directed toward” itself and its place in the cosmos - and that an ultimate spirit encompassing the whole cosmos can only be holist, thus again: not “empty”. Indeed, holism is about a whole “putting in context” its parts. How should an Ultimate Wholeness be able to do this with the body-minds of the persons it encompasses, unless it possesses itself much more consciousness and self-

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consciousness than limited persons' minds can have – more than an “empty” “witness” consciousness in any case?

I do not pretend to be able to find a point of reference everyone can accept – this clearly is impossible. All I try to do in this paper is to, say, remind people that it is not so easy, even in a post-metaphysical worldview family, to eschew the notion of Being-as-a-Whole, nor to conceive this wholeness as “empty” of reflexive, intentional, insightful … spirit. In my view, a “full” wholeness of Being conscient of Itself is a postmetaphysical option too, beyond the authoritarian, substantialist, determinist or reductionist ideas we connote with the notions of metaphysics in general, and theism in particular. It's rather a panentheistic “Fullness” which we as natural, limited beings are entangled with, co-creating the world, participating in it.

The concept of an ultimate “Emptiness,” and an “empty” ultimate spirit often is integrated in a bigger picture stating a so-called nonduality of form and emptiness. According to this position, form and emptiness seem to be fundamentally different, contradictory, dualistic from a reasonable, philosophical and scientific point of view – but they really are “paradoxically” one beyond difference, and beyond the mind which cannot help making (up) this kind of differences.

I will try to make the case for a different kind of nonduality, which in fact is a … duality. I will claim that the post-postmodern and postmetaphysical problem to which nonduality is meant to be the solution, really are not dualities, but dualisms. I will argue that a nonduality of “emptiness” and “form” which is supposed to be ultimately neither of them, in fact is a, say, crypto-dualism itself, opposing the seemingly many persons' selves to the one true or real “empty” self. As an alternative to this seemingly-many-really-one dualism, I will sketch a many-one duality. In this quite different concept of nonduality, which really is a no-dualism, it's not true that we ultimately are all just the same ultimate self; instead we are persons as real as limited beings can be, “with/in”, that is, embedded in and entangled with the one Being, cosmos, spirit, God.

The Eastern-inspired, but in reality Western-neo-Eastern notion of nonduality seems to be the translation of the Hinduist notion of advaita, which literally means “not two.” This notion refers to the ultimate identity of Atman and Brahman. But the fathers of Western-neo-Eastern perennialism, like Aldous Huxley and Alan Watts, popularized an idea of not-two-ness which is syncretistic, where all Eastern mysticism, notably Hindu and Buddhist varieties, comes down to one and the same metaphysics and spiritual experience and (kind of) soteriology:

The metaphysic that recognises a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all Being – the thing is immemorial and universal. (Huxley, 1945, introduction, p.1)

It is striking how this idea omits differences between Hindu Atman-Brahman unity and Buddhist rupa-shunyata (“Form”- “Emptiness”) identity. But it is fair to say that the Form-Emptiness dichotomy is dominating contemporary nonduality thinking, so I will concentrate on this meaning of nonduality, leaving aside Hindu advaita. Let me just say that the idea of Atman-
Brahman unity is not denying personal selves and the intentional and self-reflexive nature of consciousness, the way Form-Emptiness nonduality does. Just compare the teachings of Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna with Hindu thinker Ramanuja's *vishishtadvaita* and even Shankara's *advaita*, both insisting on the existence of the soul/self, and thus the difference between Hindu and Buddhist teachings.

It is interesting to discuss a Buddhist type of nonduality, famously introduced by Nagarjuna, in relation with Immanuel Kant's thing-in-itself, which is supposed to transcend dual categories too. However, Nagarjuna was an anti-philosophical philosopher, whose thinking tried to dissuade people from trying to understand Ultimate Reality, encouraging them rather experience “It” by objectless meditation. Kant, in contrast, claimed that what for him were basic ultimate features of reality like freedom of choice and eternal afterlife, be “intelligible,” grasped at least by practical reason.

This being said, there is one problem common to both thinkers, which can be illustrated by Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself. It is the problem which Kant's contemporary Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi pointed out when he said:

… because I constantly was getting confused by the fact that without this assumption [the thing-in-itself] I could not get inside the system, and with this assumption I could not stay within it. (Jacobi, 1787, p. 304) (translation by myself)

Indeed, if the thing-in-itself is transcending categories of our thinking as radically as Kant claims, then how could it be qualified as just one (“the”), as the one entity (“the thing”) and as the one entity as it is (“the thing-in-itself”)? Similar threats of self-defeat keep on haunting contemporary nonduality teachings leaning on Nagarjuna's ideas, especially its *shunyata-rupa* basis.

I hesitate to say “emptiness-form” basis, which would be the standard translation / interpretation of *shunyata-rupa*, because in the famous Buddhist text known as the Heart Sutra, with which Nagarjuna shares his terminology, these Sanskrit terms rather seem to mean “lack of essence/substance of its own” (*shunyata*) and “body” (*rupa*). Here the latter arguably means simply the human body in terms of what modern science would call its anatomy, physiology and biochemistry. The body is named as merely one of several features of persons (*skandhas*), all of which the Heart Sutra says are lacking essence/substance of their own:

The noble bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara, being engaged in practicing the deep transcendental wisdom-discipline, looked down from above upon the five *skandhas* (aggregates), and saw that in their *svabhava* (self-being) they are devoid of substance. (translation from Sanskrit according to http://www.dharmabliss.org/audio/heart-skt-audiotext.html)

It seems to follow that what is not meant here by the word *rupa*, is the whole and structure of manifest reality or the cosmos. Of course, thinkers linking nonduality with a transrational identity of emptiness and form are free to define these terms as they wish; they just cannot, in a
discourse respecting scientific standards, appropriate mystical traditions and their concepts for themselves without critical discussion.

For the sake of the argument, however, I will leave aside these authenticity and legitimation reservations, and grant “form” (rupa) to be a name for all of the cosmos with all its coherence and meaning, history and individuals. Indeed, this is what Nagarjuna himself seems to have had in mind ... or would have had in mind, had he possessed our basic modern natural philosophy vocabulary. I will also grant that shunyata can be taken to mean not just a lack of essence/substance of its own, but an ultimate reality which is “empty” of consciousness, that is, lacking intentionality, reflexivity, personhood. I dispense myself from proving or attesting that Buddhism, Madhyamaka and Nagarjuna make such a claim, which seems more than plausible. I think this is fair enough, given Nagarjuna’s evasive and at times, by modern scientific standards, arguably sophistic argument:

If I had any position, I thereby would be at fault. Since I have no position, I am not at fault at all. If there were anything to be observed through direct perception and the other instances [of valid cognition], it would be something to be established or rejected. However, since no such thing exists, I cannot be criticized. (Brunnholzl, 2004, p.218)

With the above interpretation of shunyata and rupa, we get one famous and central Heart Sutra phrase, “Emptiness is form, and form is emptiness,” as a statement about Ultimate Reality and Spirit. A more cautious reading, in my opinion, would be “The human body is lacking essence/substance,” that is, in isolation, apart from the whole of Being; which is unproblematic, almost trivial in any post-postmodern/postmetaphysical context trying to transcend Aristotelian or theist or materialist or otherwise substantialism and essentialism.

The empty-spirit-cosmic-form(s) reading, in contrast, is a very strong and questionable one indeed. Questionable not only because it seems to conceive as the ultimate reality what prima facie is a withdrawn, disidentified, “self-forgotten” state of mind induced by a special kind of meditation. Questionable also because this Ultimate Emptiness is claimed to be identical with a cosmos full of forms, among them life forms with a consciousness not only shaped, but partly constituted by their body and environment and – in the case of persons – also formed by their self-view and worldview. How should the living “forms” which are part of the cosmos be able to know, understand, self-reflect, “view the world” in a way the supposedly “empty” cosmic spirit cannot? This limitation put on what spirit ultimately is seems evident, given the opposition against all person-like divine qualities which is essential to all the Buddhist (and Buddhism-inspired contemporary) spiritual teachings built on the foundation of shunayata.

In its Nagarjuna version, the emptiness-form dichotomy becomes even stranger, an infinitely regressing apophatic oscillation: neither emptiness, nor form, nor both, nor neither, nor both and neither, nor both nor neither, nor … – an oscillation which is supposed to hint at some ultimate nonduality of emptiness and form.

Philosophically and logically, this may be stranger even than Kant's thing-in-itself. And the infinite regress, a bottomlessness which in Western thinking is considered an ultimate logical vice, here is considered as a ultimate translogical virtue. We are left with a no/thing (or
anti/concept). This should alert at least scholars of Western humanities, however sympathetic with meditative awareness. Is this nondual no/thing tractable at all by founding and linking concepts and by justifying and testing arguments? But after all, nonduality arguably was designed as kind of an anti-philosophical koan, not so surprisingly after all, coming from Buddhist Nagarjuna. The purpose, quite obviously, was to discredit “form” qua language and concepts and philosophy, suggesting that these just cannot grasp ultimate reality.

Yet, the nondual neither-nor premise cuts both ways so that, ex hypothesi, “emptiness” qua objectless meditation cannot grasp ultimate reality either. This is quite a problem for both Buddhist logic and Buddhist emptiness non/metaphysics. Not only are we dealing with a neither-form-nor-emptiness argument, but also with a closely related epistemic neither-reason-nor-meditation argument. It was certainly not Nagarjuna's intention to attack emptiness as experienced in meditation, but to defeat reason, logic, and philosophy with its own weapons. His aim clearly was not to relativize emptiness/meditation in the same way he tried to relativize form/reason. His strategy was to show, in a first move, that basic worldview concepts had basic counterparts, so that the pairs were contradictory, either-or, just one of them, and hence NOT NEITHER. But then he also tried to show that NEITHER of them could reveal qualities of Ultimate Reality.

This reductio ad absurdum strategy might make sense, if indeed he were trying to suggest that we better let go of basic concepts altogether, and open to shunyata. But according to the Heart Sutra, shunyata itself is one of the basic worldview notions, indeed the most important:

Here, O Sariputra, all phenomena of existence are characterized by voidness.
(Sanskrit original: iha śāriputra sarvadharmāḥ śūnyatālakṣaṇā. Translation according to http://www.dharmabliss.org/audio/heart-skt-audiotext.html)

Concerning the translation, mark that the dharmah (plural of dharma) the Sutra is talking about are all kinds of factors of truth, existence, phenomena, ideas. But if so, then how can shunyata escape the fate of other basic worldview concepts? Because it isn't a concept, but a practice? It may be useful for zen meditation to lead reason astray in the iterations and oscillations of (what is called) Buddhist logic, in order to get aware of emptiness. But logically, it doesn't matter if you call emptiness a concept, a practice or otherwise. Once you use it in logical phrases like “(n)either form (n)or emptiness,” you have to accept the logical consequences, or ought to refrain from logical arguments altogether.

I am not sure whether Nagarjuna was aware of how self-defeating, how close to sophistry his strategy seems to be: neither form, nor emptiness, nor both, nor neither … . Certainly Nagarjuna didn't have in mind a non/entity named nonduality missed by both form and emptiness, which Ken Wilber recently has tried to, say, point at or give directions to:

But the Ultimate is different, precisely because it is not different from anything. It is the only 'referent' that has that quality (although that quality, too, is formally denied to it). The reason is that any mental concept makes sense only in terms of its opposite (spirit vs. matter, form vs. formless, light vs. dark, infinite vs. finite, conscious vs. unconscious, etc.).
But ultimate Nonduality has no opposite, and thus no concept can accurately represent it in principle (including that one). (Wilber 2012, p. 32, 33)

Instead, I suspect that Nagarjuna, in contrast, being an emptiness believer anyhow, was only interested in deconstructing philosophical reasoning from within, not caring if his either-or-and-neither paradox formally hit emptiness too, nor if it formally entailed an Ultimate beyond emptiness and form.

If Nagarjuna really had wanted to do justice to form and reason too, he could have tried to show how emptiness and form complement in Ultimate Reality, how the Ultimate is both emptiness and form and more … a both-and which precludes either-or and neither-nor. Why not try to unveil a both-emptiness-and-form duality behind what seems an either-or-and-neither nonduality? Nagarjuna and Wilber don't even seem to consider what is sometimes called a many-one duality, which is polar, complementary, interdependent, and therefore anything but a dualism. Understandably enough, since as I already emphasized, it is quite difficult to explain why and how an “empty” ground of being and ultimate consciousness should complement with all the forms and cosmic coherence of beings, and especially with the intentional mind of human persons and even the environment-oriented sentience of living beings, both of which, whatever they are, are not empty.

The idea of an ultimate self-conscient spirit, so different from Ultimate Emptiness, surely is difficult too. And I will return to this question briefly in a concluding reflection. Let me first prepare it with a number of considerations, some of them a bit logical, about the difference between duality and dualism, which is crucial for my argument. I will set out the concept of a both-and duality in contrast with either-or dualism and a what I call either-or-and-neither nonduality.

Since we are talking about basic logics, let me begin with an analogy taken from modal logics. The concept of necessity can be “defined” by possibility (plus negation): Something is necessary if and only if its opposite is not possible. But possibility can be “defined” just as well by necessity (plus negation): Something is possible if and only if its opposite is not necessary. What we really have are two terms defining each other, with any reduction in one direction being arbitrary and misleading. Also, some call “dualism” the wave-particle duality in physics, where position and momentum can only be co-defined, context-defined. Again, what we are dealing with here, isn't an either-or dualism, but a both-and duality.

Before I contrast this both-and idea with emptiness/form nonduality, I will contrast it with the either-or idea of dualism in its classical meaning. There are very few dualisms which are balanced, that is, which really put two “realms” on an equal footing, and which are fair and honest in the sense that the pairs of concepts they oppose to each other are really meant as balanced opposites. Normally, dualisms are biased from the outset, one side of the dualism being considered as illusion, epiphenomenon, mere abstraction, by-product or dependent creation. (Manicheism may be one of the rare exceptions.) For instance, a body-mind dualism normally is advocated by people who either think that body/matter is secondary, or conversely, that mind/spirit is.
At any rate, in any remotely coherent, let alone holistic thinking, a balanced and pure dualism, that is, contradiction or antagonism or mere incidental contact or indifference between essentially independent “realms,” just doesn't make sense. That is one reason, I think, why most so-called dualisms are intended as choices to be made (“either-or”), leading to some kind of monistic reduction. Since pure monism, however, is just as counter-intuitive as pure dualism, most often this will be carried out as a near-reduction resulting in a near-monism, that is, an overwhelming dominance of one side with a total submission of the other side, rather than its annihilation.

In current Western spiritual thought, one such near-monistic example is the talk of the real divine self (or emptiness) versus the merely seeming egos, which are seen as mere “perspectives” of the one self. Many think they can avoid an – arguably just absurd – monist nonduality, by explaining that in the absolute realm, there really is only one self, but in the relative realm, there really are many selves. In order to distinguish this view from a nonduality proper which doesn't accept any kind of ultimate twoness, be it complementing or antagonistic, I will call “non/duality” this view, which grants a many-one duality but supposes it to be relative-absolute.

Yet I think that even this non/duality idea of the absolute Ground of Being looking onto itself from many relative perspectives ultimately is a reduction, leading to a near-monism. One essential of many-one thinking as I see it, is to deny any such reductive metaphor, which the talk about “perspectives” just seems to be. After all, perspectives don't add anything to the overall picture. And if in our context of divine self personal selves are supposed to be more than literal perspectives, why call them “perspectives” at all, with the inevitable reductionist connotations? I admit that I am unable to make sense of this idea.

Mind you, I don't advocate here a pre-modern and pre-postmodern, theistic divine person, into which we project the limitations of humans persons, due to our human condition. What I am advocating instead is a not-less-than-personal Spirit of Being, of the cosmos itself, in terms of understanding itself, of making sense of itself, of framing all that is, of caring about all that is.

Let me now try a conclusion, or maybe better, prospect. Why is it so evident to so many spiritual people that Ultimate Spirit is “empty”? I think that the problem is not a supposed emptiness/form near-monism or nonduality in Ultimate Reality itself, but rather a contemplation/thought dualism in many people's minds, something which, I suggest, we can learn to … heal, make whole. However, this would mean radically rethinking some major Western-neo-Eastern mystical premises. What we experience in the dreamless state (if indeed there is such an experience of ours), in objectless meditation, in a partial withdrawal from personal self-consciousness, would not be all of the Ultimate, although we are getting in touch with it most intimately.

In modern and postmodern and most post-postmodern thinking alike, the notions of a totality of Being and of a personal Ground of Being are thought to be relics of a premodern metaphysics, are almost anathema. I think we ought to reconsider this supposed common place. Thinking and envisioning and feeling ourselves as beings entangled with and participating in a self-conscient wholeness of Being can be a postmetaphysical option.
I am well aware that it is a daring program to develop an idea of an ultimate, all-encompassing and self-conscient spirit which is consistent with modern, postmodern and post-postmodern insights and knowledge. But I think that Buddhist-inspired emptiness / nonduality option too has to be challenged so that it starts to deal with essentials of Western both classical and modern philosophy of mind/self/soul (and Hindu too, by the way), some of which I have tried to emphasize in this short paper.

One last perspective beyond the scope of this paper: I do oppose an either-or-and-neither nonduality of emptiness and form, but not any kind of a both-and duality of emptiness and form. Indeed, a complementarity of the freedom/emergence/random nature of the beings embedded and entangled with/in the coherence/timelessness/necessity of Being makes very much sense to me. Thus, the “emptiness” aspect of ultimate reality could be linked to the beings, seen as the many “meshes”, and the “form” aspect be linked to Being, seen as the one “knitting pattern” of Being.

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Theses on Any Future Philosophy of Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality

Michael Schwartz

The postulate of integral post-metaphysical spirituality (IPS) was introduced for the first time in a substantial formal publication by Ken Wilber in his 2006 volume Integral Spirituality. Among the most exciting and robust explorations spurred by this notion has been an online community, featuring editors of this special issue, the complexity and brilliance of their posts and exchanges defying easy summary or explication. Others have also taken up the theme, including Wilber’s own return to the notion in his 2017 volume The Religion of Tomorrow, where he reframes IPS in a more cautious manner – less as a post-metaphysics fait accompli and more as a “minimalist metaphysics,” which does accord better with the positions he has been advancing for over a decade.

In the following I propound what a philosophy of IPS would best address, including its relation to a wider field of transformative and transfiguring practice, where the latter alters experience and therein pressures received views of what constitutes reality and the human place therein. These provocations are intended at once as: (1) bald, definitive, and dogmatic pronouncements, (2) open-ended invitations to ongoing discussion and mutual learning, and (3) expressions and formulations conscious of their inherent inadequacy as to the nature of the domain of inquiry.

I

What might be the role of a philosophy of IPS? In integral circles there is talk that the map is not the territory, while the actual walk often makes it seem that there is in essence the map. Philosophy – as centered in what theosophy calls the mental plane – is to be more like a humble helper, an underlaborer, for an IPS that itself is centered in transformative and transfiguring practice and the ongoing results of such practice – philosophy serving to clarify senses of possible “directions to travel” (proper to a map) without exhausting the “directions” that can be explored (again, like a map); providing an open-ended View as orienting dynamic.

To echo Wittgenstein – philosophy offers us a picture; one, however, that should never hold us captive.

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II

Of the three terms that constitute the phrasing of IPS, it is that of “post-metaphysics” which presents the most nuanced challenge. There are many philosophical positions in modern and postmodern thought as to what metaphysics is — and many senses of what might count as being post-metaphysical. One powerful lineage of thought, inclusive of Heidegger, Derrida, and Sallis, sees “post-metaphysics” as an ongoing project of “overcoming,” “deconstructing,” and “twisting free” from the binding force of the metaphysical tradition, where it is difficult to discern in any given instance whether one has achieved some categorical break or not from metaphysics. We must add to this the rising impetus, grounded in critical assessment of both the insights and limitations of post-metaphysical projects, to move “beyond” post-metaphysics itself — without lapsing into pre-critical positions and assertions about the real. Any future philosophy of IPS must patiently suffer through this triple knot of (1) multiple senses of metaphysics, (2) post-metaphysics as an unfinished (and perhaps unfinishable) project, and (3) the conatus to move “beyond” the limits of post-metaphysics itself — honoring the problematics as internal to philosophy, and not to reduce without remainder the issues involved to cultural memes, social pathologies, and other metaphilosophical concerns.

III

In classic integral it is often stated that there is a circular relationship between the philosophical discourses of phenomenology and ontology, in the end the distinction between the two dissolving. More pointedly, many spiritual practitioners and teachers move seamlessly from phenomenology to ontology in their making pronouncements about the real. Phenomenology does not however automatically lead to a sufficient ontology; for as Bhaskar has shown, in the domain of nature the real is stratified and phenomenology on its own is inadequate to articulate the nature of nature as proper to scientific experimentation. Collapsing, equating, or not properly differentiating these two philosophical discourses readily flirts with the epistemic fallacy — that modes of human knowing determine and exhaust, rather than condition, what we can say about the real — and readily ends up in a view that is anthropic (anthropocentric + anthropometric), with humans as the pinnacle and measure of evolution. Even as phenomenology and ontology become more entangled as regards the noosphere of the human socio-cultural (where acts of interpretation are caught up in the interpretative nature of what is being interpreted), and even more so with regard to expanded states of being-consciousness (what Bhaskar calls the metaReal), entanglement is neither identity nor circularity. Said otherwise, feeling like God as the source of all that is does not mean that one is God.

IV

Considerations of: (1) communal access, (2) causality, (3) genealogical clarification and metaphilosophical explanation, along with (4) transcendental argumentation are therein essential to a philosophy of IPS. To give an example. A person sees the appearance of a luminous being of rainbow colors located in the corner of a room. This being is not of the order of physical perception, as the being appears even in the dark. Others in the room see/sense this being as well. Moreover, this group can conduct a discourse about the being – even interact with the being such that the being responds.
Furthermore, interaction with the being, or a spontaneous act by the being itself, has causal consequences – transforming a member of the group, or offering guidance on how to approach an ecological issue (which turns out to be quite fruitful). Where the absence of the communal encounter with the being suggests that such welcome changes and events would not have taken place; that the being is involved in some manner with causal powers, even if the precise generative mechanisms are not immediately clear.

What then is the ontological status of such a being? – autopoietically self-standing?; or perhaps a product of the collective resonance of brainwaves, the latter being sufficiently explanatory, hence the appearance of the being to the group as illusory artifact? This latter way of putting it, rather than a quirk, is what haunts thought today; that we are, by and large as a culture, inheritors of a “Cartesian ontology” (not to be reduced to Descartes) that posits certain regions of being, inclusive of mind, body, and at times some expansion of the sense of mind as Consciousness (which itself might be linked to pan-psyche notions of God), while being nervous about other ontological domains as having their own self-standing status.

The hegemony of this ontology in our culture engenders, on the one hand, regressions and slippages to pre-rational and non-philosophical assertions about non-Cartesian ontological domains in order to make sense of and legitimate experiences like the one presented above; and, on the other, animates and underwrites research which deploys methodologies grounded in this ontology in an effort to “prove” there are domains of being beyond this same ontology! Genealogical clarification of this ontological inheritance, and metaphilosophical accounts of what has shaped its trajectory, become crucial for overcoming its hauntings.

Foucault, in the last phase of work, discerned on his part what he called the “Cartesian moment” as a diremption between philosophy, as a discourse on being and truth, and spirituality, as a set of practices that transform human being so as to be able to access truth. For Foucault, spirituality in modernity yields to “method,” which now has less to do with the transformation of the self and more to do with an outward techne. Reformulated, self-work became much more restricted in philosophy to the mental plane (as in university training), marginalizing other modes of experience that a wide array of transformative practices had previously enabled. If development occurs, it is now more limited to the mental plane (which continues to reverberate in certain integral circles with its hyper focus on cognitive stage development). Radical transformation is no longer deemed to be a necessary precondition to enhance the self’s capacities to accede to the truth, in that in the main everyone already has access to the mental and bodily planes.

Any future philosophy of IPS must fold consideration of communal access, loci of causal powers, genealogical clarification, and metaphilosophical explanation into transcendental inquiry about what being must be like for such and such to be the case.

V

For all its stress on mental development, classic integral has theorized and practiced a less than mature dialectics, with the result that it generates an overly universalizing discourse which suppresses the singular.
It is said that there are deep structures which support a multitude of surface structures – surface structures as the particulars of the deep structural universal: the latter said to be what endures in evolution, hence what really matters and deserves our utmost attention. What is not entertained in any sustained manner is how the surface structures differ from one another – with the universal unable to account for these differences – therein disclosing the particular’s singularity.

The notion of types comes closest to any sense of singularity. Yet it is another mode of universal, often of a limited set (e.g., the nine positions of the enneagram), and itself is posited as an invariant through changing developmental waves. While deep structures, surface structures, and types are a most welcome and innovative constellation of concepts, an allergy to and insufficient engagement with postmodern thought has prevented classic integral from citing irreducible differences. “Second tier” must pass through postmodernism and adopt a mature dialectics that is able to engage what Bhaskar has called the concrete universal <-> concrete singular, where other philosophers (e.g., Deleuze, Desmond, Nishida) offer parallel resources for this maturation in thought.

This overly universalizing tendency of classic integral (justified as “generalizations”) has deflected it from countenancing leading-edge practice fields that do not immediately confirm its picture of the real. Here we mention four such transformational communities: (1) that of the Finders Course founded by Jeffery A. Martin; (2) the Shamballa School of the Trans-Himalayan Lineage founded by Bruce Lyon (the book *Earth is Eden* explores the relation of this school’s views to those of classic integral); (3) VortexHealing founded by Ric Weinman; and (4) the Spiritual Unfoldment Network (S.U.N or SUN) founded by Irving Feurst. Each of these communities propound reality-schemes that to varying extents diverge in important ways from that of the classic integral View. In that these communities offer Views that are well-developed, nuanced, and grounded in profound practice, a philosophy of IPS needs to take them into consideration.

For example, Martin has conducted a more than decade-long research project into awakened states of consciousness, what he calls Persistent Non-Symbolic Experience (PNSE), mapping a wide spectrum of locations (in classic integral, called state-structures). There are four basic locations, progression of which is in the end about increasing well-being. There are additional locations which are far less common, where the spectrum divides after location four into transcending and incarnating paths. One can land initially at any number of locations, and one’s location can shift over time, in cases to earlier locations when there is a “preference” as such – hence locations are at once progressively stage-like and qualitative types.

Location two is non-dual, location three is a very subtle mode of duality (a kind of witnessing), and location four is an even deeper non-duality. This calls into question the classic integral map of witnessing leading to non-duality; where integral’s two-location model does not account for the numerous locations mapped by Martin. Any philosophy of IPS worthy of its name needs to fold Martin’s research results into its underlaboring.
Turning for the moment to the SUN teachings, its trans-lineage approach to the religious traditions offers overall maps of the real while strongly retaining the specificity of the various religious lineages, in theory and in practice enacting a dialectical dance of universal and singular. This entails a fractal sense of the interconnecting of the various lineages, where over time, through practice, that fractality becomes a manner for the lineages to generate novel combinations and permutations proper to a plane of being. Like classic integral, SUN posits a hierarchical scheme of the real, regularly if not always drawing on theosophical models, a scheme however that sees the various planes as also interpenetrating one another, non-hierarchical orders as potent and irreducible folds proper to and transversing hierarchy. The SUN scheme is also profoundly non-anthropic, as it posits two main currents of Life – an evolutionary path that is focused, if non-exclusively, on ascent (the humanoid, inclusive of the human), and an involutary path, that is focused, if non-exclusively, on descent (the devic, inclusive of the angelic). As with the Trans-Himalayan lineage, which likewise draws upon theosophical models, the human is only one kind of sentient being in a vast reality of beings of all kinds in all sorts of domains who are co-evolving and co-involuting. While not presented in philosophical or meta-theoretical ways, the SUN teaching has a mature dialectic sense of universal, particular, and singular, a “trans-hierarchical” view of hierarchy and non-hierarchy generated through the interpenetration of hierarchical planes, and a non-anthropic positioning of the human within a boundless reality of evolving and involuting sentience.

A hallmark contribution of classic integral is its notion of perspectives, which extends to expanded state-structures via the injunctive notion of the “1-2-3 of Spirit.” That said, confusion reigns on the status of the 2nd person.

A typical formulation is that 2nd person is in the end a we – that I plus you, via shared values and resonances, generate a common we-ness. Obviously, we is the 1st person plural, and this formulation posits the 2nd person as in essence a kind of meta-Subject. Positing I-you as transcended and included (negated) by we-ness is another instance of marginalizing differences and singularities, here of perspectival networks.

Not only is I-you non-reducible to nor subsumed by we, you is also not Thou – rather, Thou is a special modality of the 2nd person. You is a normal shifter. Peter is in one moment an I and then, in the same circumstance, shifts to being a you; with the tacit sense all along that I and you are reversible, proper to the taking of the position of the other.

Thou is different in kind, the I-Thou relationship as irreversible and asymmetrical. I can never become Thou. Thou is always Other. Thou is not a being in withdrawal, in the Heideggerian sense, retaining an ontological surplus that might move from sub-sisting to ex-isting. It is not a potential to be transcended and embraced by a vast I AM, where the first person is the not-too-secreted ultimate perspective of the 1-2-3 of Spirit which moves to achieve ever greater “wholeness” and “unity” (as yet another impulse towards one-sided universalizing), or to be forgotten in the 0
perspective of pure-being-consciousness. Thou is the breaking into actuality of pure Otherness – always already intimate and non-separate – gifting deep communing and pure merging.

IX

Lyon, Weinman, and Feurst all claim that the teachings they are offering come not from themselves but from ascended sentient beings: named DK in the case of Lyon, Merlin in the case of Weinman, and TK in the case of Feurst. And in all three cases the founders of these schools are in significant locations of PNSE. What goes to the heart of these claims, whatever their validity, is a welcoming of Thou and an honoring of difference and singularity without compromising unity states of consciousness.

One result is that these three schools effectively alleviate contemporary widespread tendencies towards spiritual narcissism, self-inflation, and the syndrome of the beautiful soul (what Feurst calls “glamour”). They decenter humanity from a privileged place in reality, expand profoundly the sense of an enchanted reality beyond the human, honor high cognitive capacities while seeing the mental plane as a quite limited form of intelligence available to humanity, and offer robust and complex schemes of reality (in cases replete with mature dialectics) that go beyond simplistic views of hierarchy.

Any future philosophy of IPS needs to assess the uncommon reality-claims of these (and similar) teachings, all of which are grounded in repeatable practices; never losing touch that the map is not the territory.
Can Anybody Hear?

Layman Pascal¹

The Separator is the Connector

How the semantic gap between Ontology & Epistemology can be generalized to provide a metaphysics-of-postmetaphysics which not only yields a univocal conceptualization of pluralism, integralism and evolutionary nondualism but also resolves the superficial impasse between the “integral” and “critical realist” styles of metatheory.

Overview: The Rocky Marriage of Knowing & Being

Young school children have, for generations, tried to tickle each other’s funny philosophical bone with a seemingly naive question: *If a tree falls in the forest, and nobody is around to it hear it, does it make a sound?*

Older children (all of us) continue this playground game in many curious ways. Just think about how much of our collective mindspace has been used or abused wondering, for example, whether quantum-scale observations can be said to exist before they are observed. As soon as human beings get a little education and free time, they are at risk of slipping into the endless quagmire of being, nonbeing & protobeing.

This is a particularly relevant issue for the intellectual wing of integrative culture because it touches on the relationship between fundamental facets of reality such as subjectivity and objectivity. An integral model is a metatheory that attempts to functionally integrate the greatest diversity of types-of-perspectives. Although there are many ways to begin such an effort, with persistent development metatheories seem to converge upon a common set of basic existential fault lines presented by numerous philosophers under various names. One such common result is the relative independence, but deep correlation, between subjective and objective aspects of reality. In the popular integralism of Ken Wilber this “hard problem” is associated with the so-called Quadrants. The proposal is a tidy way of tracking the idea that objective phenomena do not arise

¹ **Layman Pascal** is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him -- this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress -- He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.

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prior or apart from communities of subjective experiencers but always in tandem. This \textit{tetra-arising} of internal, external, singular and plural facets of being is a constitutive element of Wilber’s model. Yet another cluster of metatheorists, drawing inspiration from the history of the physical sciences, has challenged this “correlationism.”

Critical Realists, Bhaskarians & Object-Oriented Ontologists are among the names associated with a doctrine about the intrinsic existential status, and independent dignity, of objects. External facts are believed to have a self-nature that stands prior to and does not depend upon being perceived, measured or observed. This is the fundamental assumption that guided the enormous success of the physical sciences from the 17th century until the early explosive arguments about the significance of quantum phenomena. It is a robust and productive assumption that is shared, in practice, by every being. We all behave as if objects existed prior to our detections of them. The mere fact that we can make discoveries seems to imply that “something” is “there already” to be discovered.

The primal independence of objects AND the profound entanglement of subjective-objective reality are both very attractive concepts which seem to be at odds with each other across the playing field of emergent metatheory.

Or maybe every discovery is secretly a kind of “inventing”?

METATHEORIST A: Reality is always a participation between observers and objects. They arise together. To be is to be experienced. Nothing is known outside of moments of detection. You really have no evidence of non-detected realities. And, morally, it is essential to keep subjectivity in the picture at all scales and in every vision of reality.

METATHEORIST B: The mere fact that we can discover things means that Reality behaves exactly as if it already existed before it was experienced by us. This is the higher understanding. It escapes the narcissism and metaphysical prejudice of people who believe, like infants, that the cosmos is here only for their own consciousness. The universe was made from electrons for billions of years before human consciousness was aware of electrons.

METATHEORIST A: You missed my point. Humans are not the special observers. Every holon is subjective. Electrons are a community of holonic observers. They experience each other. External and internal arise together at every scale. This has nothing to do with mere human psychology and sociology.

METATHEORIST B: Actually, you missed MY point! Even if electrons are conscious there are still many things at their scale of reality that exist unbeknownst to them. And even when an electron experiences (sic) another electron it only imperfectly or approximately knows that that other electron really IS. Every “something” is more than what I perceive and stands prior to my partial knowing of its nature...

And that’s where the argument stood until, unfortunately, I entered the picture. In a typically verbose and cavalier I began to propose that quadrants (i.e. internal/external) are simply the wrong aspect of integral metatheory to address this slippery problem. Both the Objectivists and the
Correlationists struck me as being unduly fixated upon the notion of subjectivity and objectivity. They made good points but got nowhere because they were arguing in the wrong terrain and therefore could not see how they were trying to make the same point from different angles. Instead of having an argument about how internal and external lenses of reality are related to each other, I suggest that the debate should shift by taking serious the ontological status of what integral theory calls “the states.” In particular the structure of the Causal and Nondual states – when they are broadened beyond the mentality of meditators, spiritualists and psychedelic explorers such that they each form a full, four-quadrant and always-present dimension of every moment of existence – provide a key concept that allows us to organize and simplify our vision of reality. At the end of this essay I reproduce my cheerful old diagram demonstrating the world-picture that unites “Wilberian” and “Bhaskarian” types of metatheories. However, in the meantime, we must dive more deeply into the many little streams that feed this undulating river.

**An Exegesis of the Tumbling Timber Problem**

What does it mean to be “pre-detected?” Before we ask whether there ARE or ARE NOT any pre-detected things, we need a sense of what we are even talking about. This will start to sound like a Zen koan (What was there before anything detected anything else?) but try to keep your intellect online until the end.

One thing that “pre-detected” could means is just nothing. Really nothing. If you aren’t registered by interaction with any other phenomena at all then you are essentially nothing. Not just an empty space of potential (for that is also “something”) but really, really nothing. Not-existent. Unreal. Unthinkable. No.

Alternatively, a pre-detected “something” might actually exist, out there, irregardless (yeah, that’s right) of whether we know anything about it or not. That’s pretty close to the entire premise of Science. After all, the fact that we detect things means they had to exists prior to our detection. If they just came into existence at the moment they got encountered then what was it that came into existence and what was it that did the encountering???

Let’s go back into that childish primeval forest where trees fall silently into the verdant moss of the forest floor. Think it through carefully. DOES a tree make a sound if no one is there to hear it? There is no human around. You are not there. No animal nearby has any ears. There is not digital recorder stashed nearby for later listening. Nothing noticed this tree falling. Not a single squirrel flinched. Not a single mote of dust in the air was wiggled by sound ways. Not one atom was displaced. No entangled quantum information was nonlocally exchanged. NO DETECTION WHATSOEVER.

Nothing registered or was changed by the event in any way.

So did it happen?

We are up against some very basic problems. We find that we are not totally clear about what “it” and “happen” actually mean. What is the rule for saying whether or not something exists? Well, perhaps this problem is not as nebulous as it first appears. Let’s put on our Heidegger caps...
and think about the assumptions anyone would be required to make in order to determine that an “it” exists or not:

a) Operational distinction. We need to assume particularity. It is not some other it. The “it” is not interchangeable. Whatever we mean by “it” has to be specifically the “it” that we mean.

b) Ontological Comparison. We need to have already assumed that existing and nonexisting are options. These are two paths that our particular situation might end up travelling. It may be 0 (doesn’t exist) or 1 (exists) or some superposition or gradient between those two conditions. To ask “Does it exist?” means that we posit a comparison-of-being. The possibility of being or not being is presupposed. Either it totally exists, totally doesn’t exist or – like a measure of temperature – operates at some mixture of existing and not-existing.

So if we want to inquire into the status of “objects” prior to detection by any subjective consciousness or community of observers at any scale then we are, implicitly, trying to get the results of a specific comparison between being and non-being. All practical comparisons in the world already implied things that have been detected. But even things that haven’t been detected can only be thought about by means of comparative potential that can end up in at least two different states.

At the everyday level, detection means that something stands out (to somebody) from its background. Yet at a more bizarre and fundamental level there is already a comparison between being-able-to-stand-out OR not. Suppose I leave the forest and walk down the beach. As I stroll along in the breeze, I find that I am evaluating the beach as it passes into the ocean. Where is the moment of transition? Where does the beach end and the ocean begin? Am I dealing with sameness (still the beach) or difference (now the ocean). The shoreline is a gradient field of same-difference. Every possible detection falls somewhere between

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Notice that we could phrase the comparison in reverse order. We might want the word “difference” to mean that our “it” is different than itself (therefore non-existent) or that it is different than something else (therefore existing). In either case we are utilizing the same operation.

Reality is constituted by the minimum possible comparison.

If there was no possible comparison then there would be no possibility of either existing or not-existing. Yet if the comparison was more elaborate then it would cease to pertain specifically to the question of existence. To inquire of existence is to focus, by definition, upon the lowest or most basic possible comparative potential.

This may seem like digression from the main theme but it is quite essential. In order to make sense of how the Causal and Nondual state-domains provide a key to resolving the metatheoretical
impasse of “objects themselves” we must get a sense of precisely how reality behaves and is structured at its most primitive.

**If a Three Falls in the Forest...**

Two apparently diverse streams of human wisdom have concerned themselves with the most fundamental ontological possibilities. Both have proceeded through rigorous introspection, contemplation and intensified coherent conscious inspection of the patterns of the world. One group is typically described as mystical or meditative. Their focus is often on the most primitive fact of their own self-awareness. The worshippers of pure awareness, the I-beyond-the-"I", the mindspace between and prior to thought, the zero-degree of Self. Alternatively there have been mathematicians, logicians, philosophers, geometers, et al, who have spent their lives clarifying the precise moment of equality or inequality of reasoning, the ultra-abstract fact of identity, the quintessence of why 1+1 “is” 2. There is really nothing less mystical or profound about higher mathematics but the historical friendliness of math and technology has made it seem foreign to many spiritually-oriented people.

I AM THAT I AM. IS-NESS. “=”. All those who fall in love with this most primitive existential intensity are involved in an attempt to contemplative the nature and results of the minimum possible comparison.

\[ 3+3=6 \]

That is true. It is as true as possible. We know the answer is 6.

We could say, “Who knows? Maybe anything is possible!” but when we personally check for ourselves we come up 3+3=6. Everyone who checks comes up with that answer unless they go to such elaborate and complicated lengths that it no longer seems as if they are answering the same question. Even machines come up with the same answer. 3+3 DOES equal 6. Flip it over, take it apart, run it backwards and forwards – this is an extremely reliable piece of information. If anything can be said to be true, to have the “force” of “actually existing” then it is the equals sign which indicates that two abstract quantities are equivalent. Everything we’ve achieved as a species depends upon this intense and practical degree of veracity.

Still, you could doubt it. A least a little. I mean you do have “shift your attention” from one side of the equation to the other. You leave the 3+3 behind and arrive, a nanosecond later, at the 6. Even if we said 3=3 (I am that I am!) there would be a vanishingly small bit of wiggle room. How do you really, totally, finally know that those two 3s indicate the same thing?

Does it achieve 100% verification? Does it pass the existential comparison utterly and absolutely?

Of course the answer is Yes and No. Duh. We are dealing with (a) the most true possible thing (b) non-total certainty. These facts, together, describe the situation. We are not facing absolute absence of all possible doubt but we ARE facing the least possible and vanishingly small and endless irrelevant possibility of being incorrect.
In the matter of $3=3$ or $3+3=6$ we infinitesimally likely to be wrong. INFINITEmially. If you more toward it, you never get any closer. It is the horizon. It is the vanishing point. It is not 0 but rather 0.000000000......

When we say “ABSOLUTELY” we mean “ENDLESSLY POSITIVELY APPROXIMATE”. It never gets there. It goes forward. It is infinitely true because you can never get out in front of it and find a spot where it ceases to apply. It runs forever like the digits of pi. We may say that something is real or false with infinite practical certainty but it does not sit there like a discrete lump. It flows toward (not TO) eternity.

Thus we do not particularly care whether something is true or untrue. We care in rather a more elegant and pragmatic fashion that something is “as true as possible” or as “untrue as possible”. Or else we admit that we cannot, at this time, determine it maximally. “=” is not total truth. It is maximum truth. The essential is-ness potential, the ontology self-identity of anything is a maximum.

So if we want to explore the question of whether a “something” can “exist” prior to detection, then we are pondering it’s potential to occupy a position within the comparison between maximum self-approximating validation and minimum self-approximating validation. To potentially exist, to be checkable-for-existence, is to be pre-supposed to be on the spectrum between vanishingly-small-confirmation and vanishingly-small-disconfirmation. Between almost totally real and almost utterly non-existent. This is the situation of the ontological comparison. It is the condition that makes possible the question, “What is Real?”

Reality IS the condition that makes possible the question “What is Real?”

Realness is the opening to the unlimited comparison between “more real” and “less real” unto their endless self-approximating and incompletely achieved extremes. A spectrum of approximate comparison running from the least to the greatest confirmation.

**ONTOGONY & EPISTEMOLOGY: Marriage counselling**

It is commonplace to say that ontology studies the condition of being & epistemology studies the condition of knowing. What exists AND how do we know things? Two great questions.

When integral theory is accused of metaphysical correlationism, it is precisely these two questions that are leveraged. People want to know: does the integral theorist make the obvious mistake of conflating “knowing” and “being”? Surely you are not even dealing with ontology when you talk about tetra-arising? The external world is not what is known or perceived about the external environment! Do the four quadrants not merely refer to four lens of knowing? Do they not actually *ignore* the true real of objects by substituting in their place the “external knowing” of the Upper Right quadrant which is really just a form of epistemology? What about what really exists whether anyone knows about it or not????
To which the integral theorist replices, placidly, that if we say it really exists then... aren’t we knowing about it? Isn’t every situation an onto-epistemological situation? Don’t we always find both of them interblended into everything?

This is a restatement of the basic metatheoretical divergence that this essay is confronting. We are seeing, again and again, two issues:

a) the critical assertion of the independence of objects (and “others”) from our perception and interpretation

b) the integrative assertion that being & knowing move hand-in-hand at all scales

One class of metatheory implores us to remember, both practically and philosophically, that others/objects always exceed what we know about them. They are more than just “in relationship” to us. We can be wrong about them. An excess, a surplus, a remainder will always exist. No matter how well you know “something” it must actually consist of more than just how it appears to your brain, your eyes, your measurement devices, your knowledge. **Being exceeds knowing.**

Another class of metatheory reminds us sagely that **Being and Knowing can never be fundamentally separated**. Beings are knowable beings & knowing is always knowing-about-beings. Ontology is the ontology we know about. Epistemology is what we know about ontology. Reality is ambidextrous. These two brain hemispheres must operates in tandem. Every outside has an inside. Every inside has an outside. Knowledge presupposes a world. A world MUST appear as interactions, knowledge, detections or else it does not appear at all.

a) ontology, compared to epistemology, exceeds, withdraws, escapes, transcends

b) epistemology, compared to ontology, is always present, always tracking, always relating, always interacting

They are in comparison to each other. Even to say that one is MORE REAL (i.e. that beings are most fundamental and modes of knowing only ever potentially and partly encounter them) is a comparison.

(a) **ONTOLOGY** asserts that reality consists of **DETECTABLES** whether they are detected or not. In order to enter into a relationship of being known, something must already exist.

(b) **EPISTEMOLOGY** asserts that reality consists of **DETECTIONS** because there is no proof of existence other than in relationship and via interpretation. Things do not enter into relationships of knowing but always already occur within such relationships.

You will see that neither position is **thinkable** on its own. Only detectables can get detected. Only detections prove that there are detectables. They are complementary. Mutually required. Variant angles upon the same situation. The reason Ontology and Epistemology are traditionally paired in academic discourse is, at its most basic, because they only be defined relative to each other. The comparison between them is presupposed by the idea of either of them.
To know is to know ABOUT something. To be is to be distinguished from what is merely
known. The comparison both separates and connects them. A common root structure makes
available the degree of their independence and, at the same time, the fundamental entanglement of
their shared operational identity.

We have come again to the same observation:

A most primitive existential comparison – allowing for variable outcomes of sameness-and/or-
difference on a scale between maximum-but-not-total & minimum-but-not-total – is implied.
Existence, per se, is indistinguishable from this comparison. It is presupposed by the question of
whether a being “is” and it appears at the most basic conceivable thresholds. This operators is
implicit between two sides of a balanced algebraic equations, between ontology & epistemology,
between being & nonbeing.

And it is performatively affirmed by everyone who takes a position about the relationship
between Knowing and Being. To be prior to being known, to be and be known at once & the being
of knowing itself are all variants of the same comparison. It is this ambidextrous and fertile
comparison, rather than detections or detectables, that constitutes the most primitive or abstract
facet of Reality. We begin with same -differences. We begin with is/n’ts. We begin with the
necessary enabling condition for the possibility of beings and relationships.

Now we are describing reality in a manner that suggests the unique characteristics of Causal
and Nondual experience.

Wars for Subsistence

In his Response to the Critical Realists, Ken Wilber attempted to clarify his version of integral
metatheory by calling upon the distinction between existing & subsisting beings. He asserted that
tetra-arising worldspaces, while being inherently both subjective AND objective, do not limit
reality merely to what is known, perceived and interpreted. That which ex-ists (“stands out”) in
relationship to perceivers is only a small subset of the total number of entities that sub-sist
(underwrite) the world.

Here Wilber (subsisting vs. existing) makes roughly the same distinction as Bhaskar (transitive
vs. intransitive) and Badiou (belonging vs. inclusion) among others. This is what we would expect
if we assumed that metatheories converge over time as they fleshed out by various philosophers.
However we should not be hasty in assuming that similar things are identical. Are these thinkers
really making the same distinction? Clearly they all involve the difference between a large class
of entities that could be presented and a smaller class of entities that actually are presented. Wilber
argues YES but his position is guided by a desire to demonstrate that all positions are already
incorporate into the basic framework of his integrative model. Alternatively, certain Critical
Realists who are incompletely satisfied by his remarks have felt that he is not naming the same
distinction.

Let us take a closer peek at Wilber’s distinction:
He specifies that entities (e.g. atoms) may subsist in primitive, low-information worldspaces even if they do not exist for communities of interpreters and observers at that level of cultural and cognitive development. There is much more to reality that is known by any particular set of perceivers. He happily agrees with the Critical Realists on this point, he says. The problem in his view is not simple correlationism which treats only “detected” entities as real. Wilber’s difficulty is that a mix-up between “levels” and “quadrants” is occurring. While he accepts that ontology contains more than is known in the epistemology of any given community, he nonetheless rejects the precedence of ontology. Knowing is not predicated upon a prior condition of being. Neither is being dependent upon the prior existence of knowers. They co-emerge. Their relationship is in parallel – not a relationship of levels or emergent states.

Thus he is careful to attack both the “epistemic fallacy” (reality is dependent upon knowers) AND the “ontic fallacy” (reality is independent prior to knowers and cognition is a late epiphenomenon). There is no priority in this relationship. It is synchronous at every level and every scale of the cosmos. So the official (sic) integral position is not that there are not unperceived beings, no beings apart from relationships, but rather that neither beings nor relationships of knowing can be characterized as first or more basic.

Sounds good but it does not entirely remove the problem that is triggering the object-emphasizing metatheorists. They might feel that Wilber is still being a correlationist, still committing the epistemic fallacy but just in a sneakerier way. After all, isn’t he just shifting the role of the perceiver and keeping the same game going? What does that mean?

I am aware that quarks exist within the bodies of sharks. The sharks are not aware of this. So when we say that the quarks subsist even though they don’t exist – aren’t we really saying that they’re reality is dependent upon MY perception? We’re still saying that quarks didn’t exist until the knower-of-quarks emerged. All we’re doing is stipulating that we are knower-of-quarks and the shark is being “considered” within OUR universe. Still sounds an awful lot like universes are real only when they are known.

On the other hand, this maybe makes no difference. Both versions of metatheory are saying that objective reality, as considered by us, contained more than is being evoked by the methods-of-knowing used cognitively and socially by any set of knowers. Arguably this IS the same position. It could be accepted but it generally isn’t accepted. Why? Because, according to me, the issue was never about the relationship between knowers and entities, detections and detectables. Wilber’s internal and external quadrants are a decoy. Attacking them will not bring the problem to light. Defending them will not resolve the problem. The two forms of metatheory we are considering have come to a stalemate by arguing over the wrong football.

Object-emphasizing metatheorists are concerned, whether they articulate this well or not, that objects/others are inherently MORE than what can be known through any given method of perception. However, they make the mistake of supposing that – in integral terms – they are claiming that the external quadrants cannot be reduced to the internal quadrants.

Tetra-enactive metatheorists (Wilber, et al) argue that objects and knowers already occur together at every level and scale of reality but that every level involves more entities (and more
dimensions of entities) than are known – as is revealed when one grows into higher worldspaces and retroactively real-izes that such additional entities and additional information was present all along. However they make the mistake of thinking that they need to defend the mutual irreducibility of ontology and epistemology which then turns out not to address the main issue.

The main issue was the MORE of objects. The relationship of the external to the internal is not particularly relevant to this impasse.

Metatheorist A: There is implicit entanglement and synchrony between internal and external realities.

Metatheorist B: Entities are MORE than can be known.

These are complementary positions.

The In(de)finite Excess

We’ve already spent some time discussion the infinitesimal nature of some aspects of Reality. Certain real entities or functions operate as if they were a “vanishing point”. Zero. Infinity. Pi. Although they are very real and functional, they nonetheless do not present themselves to us completely. We move toward knowing them. We get better and better. Yet we never arrive.

We discussed how “=” in mathematics and “self-identity” in mysticism both have this flavor of being maximally true, endlessly true, but never finally and ultimately true. The force of the absolute is not a given chunk of proof (as it was perhaps conceived in earlier, more concrete epochs of human thought) but rather an equivalent force expresses as an indefinitely intense approximation.

Everytime we said “100%” we really meant “99.999999999...%”.

I am just reminding us about vanishing points. Why? Because, very interestingly, this is what everything looks like if we strip off the factors that are added by knowers, perceivers, observers, detectors, interpreters, etc.

We are down at the beach, still quite near to the forest where the tree fell silently, and we are looking at a rock. A simple, plain and sturdy beach rock. What do we know about this rock?

- It is blue-grey. Or, rather, it isn’t. It absorbs every other frequency of the visible spectrum of electromagnetic radiation and rejects only that one which our culturally indoctrinated eye-brain system hallucinates as blue-grey-ish.

- It is heavy. Or, rather, it isn’t. It’s presence in the Earth’s gravitational field accelerates its mass to create the temporary illusion of “weight” when measured against a scale whose results are displayed as units of distance which are now known to be relative to the motion of the observer through space-time.
It is made of all rocky subcomponents. Or, rather it isn’t. Much of the rock is invisibly shed on the ground nearby. It is filled with empty space that vastly dwarfs the meagre amount of matter which makes up the rock. And it may be permeated by antimatter, dark energy, vacuum flux, nanoscale organisms, et al.

As science has progressed, we have learned more and more about how the most solid and pragmatic measurements are still relative to the mechanisms and methods of the observers. Our perception of the physical world was revealed to be a neurological and cultural phantasy and then the most basic phenomena of mass, time, space were revealed as complex and relative calculations. Today many of the top physicists argue that “being in a particular state” is only a temporary epiphenomena of the vast, uncertain and pluralistic nature of physical reality.

So what would happen if we removed everything that was added to reality by the observers? If every relative measure and relational calculation were stripped away – what would remain of any thing?

What would the rock be without brains to perceive it? Without the Earth to pull upon it? Without the geometry of space-time to give it motion and position? Without a Higgs field to give it mass?

It would be... nothing? Virtually nothing.

You can see whatever the rock “really is” outside of its relationships must be analogous to a vanishing point. It withdraws its essence. If it is anything at all, on its own, for itself (prior not only to what we know about it but to the knowable quantities made available in relationship to other entities) then this identity must recede to infinity. Or, more precisely, it must zoom to almost nothing. Almost. It is 0.0000000...x

If we initiate a philosophical striptease in which we try to identify the essence of an object or entity beyond what is our could be known about “it” by others, then we encounter this absolute but incomplete purity. An infinitesimal. We want to know what it “is” that can, through interaction, give rise to perceptions, knowledge, interpretation. But as soon as we encounter any fact whatsoever, we have already encountered knowledge, perception, interpretation.

The MORE of ontological objects, prior to correlation with observers, has the character of a particularized vanishing point. It becomes a particular version of the minimal existential comparison. Any qualities are evoked by interaction between entities and observers. The ontological status of entities prior to these interactions is real but eludes characterization by any qualities or quantities.

This seems abstract but it is the heart of the matter:

The excess of objects (asserted by object-emphasizing metatheorists) is perfectly compatible with the fact that all observables are co-evoked by behavioral and cognitive interactions (asserted by tetra-arising metatheorists) IF the ontological essence of any “it” or “other” is assumed to be analogous to an infinitesimal.
To simultaneously affirm that the internal and external quadrants co-evoke all “detections” AND that every “detectable” is more than, beyond or prior to any detection simply requires that there be a class of entities who possess self-identity as a structural vanishing point or indefinitely receding process.

And integrative metatheory already has such a class of entities...

The Four Ontologies

Integral metatheory follows the lead of many other attempts at Western trans-rational supersystems by affirming the validity of multiple states of consciousness epitomized in even very ancient historical literature as waking, dreaming, deep sleep & transcendence. The terms Gross, Subtle, Causal & Nondual are employed. While these words are over-associated with spiritual and mystical practices they can be readily generalized to describe whole legitimate facets of Reality. I will employ the term state-domains to indicate that I am treating them as not merely “inner states” but as distinct, co-equal types of Being that show up in across many philosophies under many diversely suggestive names.

The four classes of ontological entities, grouped into their state-domains, are these:

- Resistant Bodies
- Evocative Bodies
- Logical Bodies
- Blended Bodies

Or, to bring it back to what we have covered in the previous section:

- Concrete Beings
- Qualitative Beings
- Infinitesimal Beings
- Transcendental Beings

These are all strange and unfamiliar terms. We will try to use a variety of phrasings for these four state-domains of ontology so that we can both set a “sense” of their nature and also open ourselves up to how they might appear, differently phrased, in many seemingly unrelated areas of philosophy and scholarship. This is akin to what we did earlier in trying to inspect what the mystics of self-awareness and the higher mathematicians & logicians have had in common over the millennia.

While the “four quadrants” – internal and external – may be treated as lenses of knowing, four styles of detections, these may be treated as four ontologies or types of detectables. These types are revealed, like a lump under the carpet, by the basic options by which entities could enter into relational evocation of perceptible “apparent facts”.

Let’s ponder this categorization more closely.
Detectable entities could exert forceful resistance upon other entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Substantial Ontology (Gross Ontology)

Other detectable shapes could exert an evocative influence upon other entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Qualitative/Morphodynamic Ontology (Subtle Ontology)

Some detectable differences could exert an indefinitely intense logical constraint upon other entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Syntactical Ontology (Causal Ontology)

Some detectable in-differences could exert an uncannily satisfying blending of entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Functional-but-Indistinct Ontology (Nondual Ontology)

All four classes of ontic/ontological factors play a role in all real situations. For example:

When I eat a banana it pushes back on my mouth because it is a physical body. There may be much about the banana that my senses do not detect but whatever is potentially physically detectable has some capacity to resist my own physicality. Yet whatever complex of elements forms the “real banana” also enables my experience of banana-ness. And it could not do either of these things without some implied syntactical parameters that enable reality to operate as a field-of-different-things. But differences are not enough. They rely upon having enough in common in order to be compared - they are the same enough to be different. And that commonality-in-difference is something I might miss, minimized or interpret in numerous different modes.

These four ubiquitous forms of detection suggest four entangled options beyond or prior to any particular detections. They might be considered as four co-present aspects of pre-detected detectables that can be “known” in any of the external or internal epistemological quadrants.

A Sidenote on Mystical Reductionism

We will spend a little more time thinking about what these state-domains are like and how they, especially the Causal and Nondual, pertain to the basic status of “being-a-thing” which is situated between the two schools of metatheory whose impasse provides the jumping off place for this essay. But first let us make a short digression...

If these four state-domains constantly co-exist – rather than being a particular historically-favored sequence of internal “states of consciousness” produced by conventional spiritual practice – then we would expect not only to constantly encounter them under different guises but also to
observe unique patterns of imbalance, specialization or peculiarity where a person attempts to favor one of these state-domains in their own attention, thought and life-practice.

Just as the reductionism of all quadrants to one particular quadrant is considered a well-known problem by Wilber’s model, let us expand that principle and consider reductionism in terms of state-domains. I will use the term “mysticism” from now on to refer specifically to the exaggerated emphasis of one state-domain at the expense of the others. This is not a pejorative term because there is no reason why you shouldn’t have favourites and specializations. Rather it is a descriptive terms which simultaneously conjures attractive and frustrating elements of such specialization.

An individual who focuses their theory or practice on one state-domain may make impressive gains in the force and sophistication of that aspect. A potent mystery of insight and self-development will appear. Yet, at the same time, the realities of that state-domain will seem vexing, ungrounded, incoherent or insignificant to people situated by their attention into other state-domains. The result is that both a profound positive mystery and a frustrating mystification occur together.

Here are four kinds of “mystical” experience emerging immediately from the notion of four ontological state-domains:

- The physical universe is all that really exists.
- A subtle realm of Luminous Living Nature exists beyond physical bodies.
- An infinite, dimensionless realm of Invisible Clarification (differentiations & truths) exists on its own even without any “things” to clarify.
- An “already perfectly complete” yet novel and unfolding commonality exists between and among all apparently differentiated entities.

Although altered states of consciousness may allow us to examine any of these realms in totalizing intensity they cannot be fundamentally disentangled. From a philosophical point of view we must think these domains in their most universal applicability – not in the poetic and pragmatic terms used to celebrate them or guide aspirants toward mystical experience. The job of philosophy is not to take such phraseology at face value but to elucidate the principles which permit such experiences to be articulated in any number of different ways.

*Philosophical mysticism* would mean to isolate one of these domains of ontology as THE REALITY of which the other three are veils, semblances, illusions, covers, etc. produced epistemologically by the knowing of other beings.

- Common sense realists are philosophers who take the physical entities as the ontology and presume that both qualities and logical differences (and their blends) are “just” abstractions made in the psychology of experiencers.
- Artistic-Idealists take the flavors and forms to be primary while reality and logic are “limitations” imposed by the psychology of experiencers.
- Badiou takes mathematics (or meta-mathematics in terms of a Set Theory of the basic preconditions of the thought of any universe) as Ontology, per se. This is very attractive. It
gives us a universe that “really is” differences and has both semblances and solidities manufactured by the interactions of experiencers.

− And some radical nondualists take “transcendentals” or univocal dichotomy-embracing commonalities as ultimately real such that differences and the appearance of differences as objects and qualities are considered as illusory epiphenomena.

A Closer Look at the Causal/Nondual

We have tried to get a sense of the nature of a real being. From various angles we has re-arrived at a the “causal” essence of beings – infinitesimal, indefinite, transparent, like pure syntax, eternal, a vanishing recess toward the original, pre-relational, pre-qualitative, pre-quantitative difference that constitutes the is-ness of any particular being. This was what we called the minimum existential comparison in an earlier section. If all relational and observable qualities are removed or looked-past in order to locate the prior nature of the “detectable” then we find it must be so stark, so naked, so minimal, so potential that it must operate like the most pure seed of any possible cognitive encounter. A causal entity is n-dimensional. It is like that place where the digits of pi flow toward endlessly but never arrive. It is always already arrived in that incomplete, self-approximating, minimalistic absoluteness. It is the “it” that makes perceptions of itself thinkable, doable, possible. A causal entity is a proto-detection.

And anything that has this nature could be called a “causal entity”. We could cite the “=” or the “isness” of anything. We could point to the “self” of self-nature or the perfect stillness of an ultra-precise data-point that withdraws to the limitless horizon but is already presented as this withdrawal.

Any pure boundary condition is a causal object. The ontological nature of anything prior to the subtle and gross observables which are generated by its interactions with other entities. Any “distinction, per se”. And that includes the distinction between the state-domains. It makes perfect sense that the differentiation or boundary-condition between the state-domains IS their causal nature. And the capacity for them to interact with each other, to simultaneously be differentiated and blended, is their nondual nature.

While the causal state-domain is primarily languaged in apophatic, cancellative or absolutizing terms (the most, the one, nothing, emptiness, infinitesimal, isness itself, eternal, beyond form, beyond quality), the nondual state-domain is generically described in paradoxical terms that simultaneously affirm & disconfirm oppositionality (neti neti, neither this nor that, both/and, form/less, all & none, the unity of the many, the general particular, shared uniqueness, radiant void, transparency, diaphaneity, luminous form, abiding as non-seeking, dynamic stillness).

This linguistic distinction is very clear if we simply consider the difference between saying EMPTINESS versus saying WHATEVER EMPTINESS AND FULLNESS HAVE IN COMMON. Or between saying the UNIVERSAL ONE and THE ONENESS OF THE MANY OR THE MULTIPLICITY OF ONENESS. The difference pertains to the absolute specificity of entities in the causal state-domain and the simultaneous affirming & cancellation of polarities which, all together, constitute entities of the nondual state-domain. Whereas your “casual essence” might be language as the indefinitely withdrawn, and unmanifestly pure, is-ness of your being,
your “nondual essence” would be more akin to that transrational and perfect synchronicity of your manifest forms and your unmanifest potential. The quintessential and unconditional difference that makes you a self that can enter into relations of knowing with other being – even the relations we call “space” and “time” – is the description of your causal self-nature. Conversely, the description of your nondual nature is whatever Self and Not-Self have in common.

You dig?

Obviously all terms will be confused in actual usage by various communicating agents with various understanding and purposes. And looking back through our personal and anthropological history we are likely to find clunkier, more naive, more simplistic ways of phrasing these things. Increased social and cognitive complexity leads to more precise, abstract and peculiar generalizations that are typically found in conventional usage but which, nonetheless, must be structured such that they can explain why those conventional usages make sense in context.

So what we are dealing with here is a very complex nuancing of the semantics pertaining to more common experiential dimensions of everyday and extraordinary Reality.

For the entities of the causal state-domain we are using variations of a most basic distinction prior to qualities, quantities and cosmic history. And for entities of the nondual state-domain we are deploying trans-oppositional terms – concepts that simultaneously provide separation & nonseparation. Functional paradox.

Many of the most profound concepts in both spirituality and intellect make themselves available to us in both forms. That is to say there are many semantic terms which can be suggestive of either causal or nondual experience depending upon the angle from which we encounter them.

Consider the mark of the “/” in writing. This sign is a break but it may also act as a simultaneous break-and-joiner. A woman known both as Betty and Ariadne might be referred to casually as Betty/Ariadne. This means on the one hand that a basic difference exists – an alternative, a choice. A fundamental disjunction. The person we mean is specifically the one who is either referred to as Betty or Ariadne. Yet in the same mark we find these two terms brought into the most intimate possible conjunction. There is an implication that a shared identity moves between them. This common feature does not undo the dichotomy but rather eludes it while accepting it. “Someone” is both Betty AND Ariadne while also being presented as either.

A choice or a shared identity of non-cancelled opposites?

A difference or a same-difference?

The mark “/” is a nice example, though others could be chosen, because of its visual similarity to any straight line used to diagram a boundary condition. Recollect how such lines are used in metatheory diagrams to elucidate the relationship between fundamental categories of Reality. Internal/external, for example. These two territories are identified as by their pure difference from each other. Zoom in on the that dividing line and watch it retreat toward infinity like an endless fractal horizon. Yet these territories are fundamentally conjoined by that same boundary. Every
boundary connects the two things which it separates. They touch each other in the form of the boundary. A basic differential is also a shared contact point which mutually distinguishes AND mutually connects the identities that are involved.

The most basic possible form of reality is a minimal existential comparison (or constitutive differential). This is a causal structure but with a small shift of focus is can reveal a nondual structure as well. There is both a causal and a nondual gestalt for this fundamental unit of Reality.

The Separator is the Connector

Assuming we are totally deluded, how can we make use of this remarkable quasi-concept that seems to be able to harness the irreducible, unmanifest structure of a pre-detected Being AND its transcendental potential to operate simultaneously as itself and also as what is not itself? We see that a basic disjunction is needed to point at the causal essence and with a small shift of context any such separation can be cognized, felt, contemplated, utilized in its nondualistic character. What will do with that?

A very simple use is to unify pluralism, integralism and transcendentalism. This is what I have called the Metaphysics of Adjacency because it explicates the implied metaphysics of so-called “postmetaphysical” stances by rooting them in the logic of this “separator-connector”.

If we invoke a simplified version of the higher developmental stages in systems such as Spiral Dynamics, Gebserian philosophy, Integral Theory, etc. then we can speak generally of several postformal phases of cognition. Green, Teal & Turquoise. Higher 1st Tier, Second Tier & Third Tier. Deconstructionism, Reconstructionism & Supermind. There are numerous ways to parse these terms. I mean only to suggest a general tripartite concept in which (1) multivalent, contextual, pluralistic reason is joined by (2) integrative, meta-structural, trans-contextual, evolutionary universalism which peaks toward a more stabilized (3) transrational, nondual, ultra-consciousness.

Our humble slashmark (“/”) can symbolically provide the centerpiece for all three of these profound phases of developmental complexity. It can, for example, suggest the parallax or a-perspectival contrast which emerges into the authentic postmodern, pluralistic, postform mind which becomes increasingly conversant with multidimensional rationality and alternative reality-contexts. This form of perception has many gifts but also many challenges including fragmentation, exacerbated nihilism, narcissistic loss of objectivity and other phenomena which could be predicted from an over-emphasis on the contextual nature of reality and the awareness that distinct contexts are in tension or juxtaposition with each other across the cultural landscape. Thus the emergence of an integrative transperspectival universalism because necessary and desirable. Metatheory (and its non-cognitive correlates in other forms of intelligence) works to include & balance the various types of contexts and perspectives in a complementary and coherent fashion. A great integrative mandala of perspectives begins to emerge in a manner analogous to Einstein’s famous deployment of the speed-of-light to integrate relative measurements of space and time into a single universal system. The variations among the contexts are not lost but instead affirmed within a Great Reason that allows every perspective to co-contribute to the Whole. This “integralism” affirms the ambidexterity of the cosmos. Thus the two sides of the “/” are again presented but this time as mutually comprehensible partners rather than mutually exclusive worlds.
vying for normalcy. That represent a currently emergent and fantastic possibility for higher cultural and cognitive life among human beings but our aspirations, combined with the extraordinary glimpses provided by the lives of saints, mystics and drug-takers, suggests that some even more luminous and profound state may lie beyond upper reaches of ambidextrous integrative vision-logic. Such a stage would not merely be identical to the further reaches of nondual state-mysticism found in the spiritual traditions but would bring the complex interblending of all the state-domains to such a rare degree of depth and development that the advanced mind & the incomparable illumination of non/being flow together and flower in remarkable novelty and virtually incomprehensible salience. Here the simultaneous both/and symbolized by “/” is a gift-giving jewel of endless separation-and-nonseparateness in the gross, subtle and causal dimensions of Reality at all scales. After all, proximity (when thought through carefully) is already a functional condition that unites separation and nonseparation. Love is the desire to be more transformatively “close” in operations with each other. When we are neither merged or radically separate we occupy a nondual condition whose peaks are unutterably ecstatic but whose general situation is unutterably ordinary and in fact provides the functionality of all functions! Nothing “works” until it is “close enough” – whatever that means in a given circumstance.

If we were so inclined (as I once was), we could utilize these three stages of the Metaphysics of Adjacency (MOA-1, MOA-2, MOA-3) to help us understand the growth beyond formal operational cognition into (1) pluralism (2) integralism (3) transrational, transcendental, all-state functional nondualism. To do so would be to operationalize the “/” or “proximity itself” or “adjacency” or the “separator-connector” as the fundamental reality-structure which emerges into greater and greater clarity and multidimensional utility at each progressively complex stage of development.

My own attention, as I indicated earlier, was drawn to this notion of “adjacency” when I pondered the metaphysical structures and presumptions that are necessarily implied in worldviews that call themselves postmetaphysical or even post-postmetaphysical. It became apparent to me that similar ultra-semantic proto-thought (sic) was being actively invoked by the deepest thinkers of postmodernism, integralism & evolutionary nondualism even where these individuals supposed that they were in fundamental disagreement with each other.

I began to use the term MOA (metaphysics of adjacency) to describe any worldview which assimilated the basic creative disjunction at the heart of identity and to use the term MOSP (metaphysics of simple presence) to describe “lower first tier worldviews” which supposed that reality consists of pre-given objects and entities.

The various types of MOA deal, implicitly or explicitly, with a creative separation-connection between epistemology and ontology. No entity is perfectly identical with itself. 99 is the new 100%. “=” is maximally but not totally true. Absolutes and almosts are no longer in simple opposition.

That is to say that everything is either defined and perceived in relation to others OR prior to such detections anything exists as a self-approximating difference-from-itself which constitutes its identity. For a pluralist, your identity is no longer a simple given fact but rather an phenomenon which appears in the context of your point-of-view. The I becomes the “I”. As obvious at it seems
to you, it has reality only in a greater field which includes other relative viewpoints and alternative contexts. For an integralist, the fundamental co-presence of multiple fields of perspectival engagement (epitomized in the notion of internal and external or personal and collective reality) is the inherent “holonic” nature of any real entity. And for the higher evolutionary nondualist, the self and not-self are both the same and different.

All observable facts, all detections of reality, are co-created by objects and observers while, at the same time the pre-detected essence of anything – from which potential acts of knowing arise – is itself constituted as a self-difference, a minimal comparison, an ontological disjunction.

Such a conception of reality, implied in the emergence of the various “postmetaphysical” stages of cognitive and cultural development, provides a consistent way to articulate the complementary truth of both the tetra-enactive and object-emphasizing schools of metatheory. To predicate reality upon “adjacency” is a means of languaging pluralism, integralism, nondualism, pre-detected objects & subjective/objective co-arising all in the same common functional principle. We may or may not wish to pay attention to such an overflowing notion but it is possible to deploy such a MOA framing.

Appendix: The Wilber-Bhaskar Triangle

The following diagram examines Reality as a set of subsisting actualites (detectables) which are only partially revealed and known (detected) by any given set of observers or socio-technological methods of inspecting the cosmos. This actual world, with its smaller subset of known possibilities, is a four quadrant affair. Personal, mutual, objective and systemic aspects co-exist as the actual world whether it is known or unknown by any particular community of beings. Gross, subtle & causal ontologies also co-exist and provide distinct and necessary preconditions for any kind of internal or external knowledge. The causal domain, by its very nature, specifies that the intrinsic status of objects (and subjects, etc.) is indefinitely withdrawn and must be thought of as an excess, as more than what can be known by any interaction. It is “prior” to detections even though the external quadrants are not prior to the internal quadrants. Nonduality names the ontology that provides the capacity for interaction, blending and non-destructive transcendence of those other state-domains. Levels of emergent worldspace exist and each other offers more complex ways of integrating the state-domains, balancing the quadrants and shifting the ways that hidden actualities are presenced into our personal and social knowledge. Lower levels of coherent functional complexity (simplicity) appear, retroactively, as relatively deluded, ignorant or simplistic. Any early level of developmental worldview operates with the force of what Bhaskar called “demi-reality”. And the sway of more primitive, less accurate, less comprehensive understandings provides a regressive possibility for individuals and societies that must be guarded against by political, spiritual and scientific methods of progress.
Pascal: Can Anybody Hear?

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Preface

Depending on one's tolerance, or even love, for uncertainty and the unknown, "post-metaphysical thinking" can be either a fascination or a real downer. And by "interest in uncertainty and the unknown" I don’t mean that effervescent attraction to the mystical, magical, esoteric, and unbelievable – I mean the blunt confrontation with how, when it comes down to it, the certainty that one holds for much of one's beliefs and knowledge is bewilderingly undeserved. To get the most out of this text it is best to consider how it applies to one's own knowledge, in addition to reading it as an exploration of the indeterminacies of knowledge in general. But for those truly interested in where the post-metaphysical arrow points, you know that it is about attitudes of deep curiosity, listening, and humility – skills of letting go, letting be, and letting come – that we long to see more of in our world. Here already the reader can sense how being "post-metaphysical" relates to spirituality.

I have had a lifelong interest in the nature of knowledge, belief, and uncertainty. This philosophical curiosity paralleled my avocational experiences in various forms of conflict resolution and dialogue processes, alongside studies in cognitive psychology and philosophy. Amidst the confluence of perspectives found in real dialogue and deliberation one must come to terms with, as I call it in this text, "the sources of belief fallibility." How intelligent, well-informed, well-meaning people can come to very different conclusions is a koan-like puzzle I was drawn into. I've been trying to let this puzzle solve me for over 40 years.

I find myself immersed in both scientific communities and New Age (or "Cultural Creative") communities, and judge that conversations between them are rife with straw men and confirmation biases. This text is, in one sense, an outcome of my own internal process, over decades, of allowing the voices of these diverse perspectives to listen to each other with appreciation, empathy, and respectful criticism. I believe that the future of humanity requires spirituality; but that what passes for spirituality now is insufficient. My hope is that I have worked out a few knots of tension between these worldviews to support their integration for others. To do this I have attempted to make accessible some historically recent advances in philosophical and scientific thought that inform the humility with which we must hold our beliefs.

This text began as an appendix within a larger book-length text that is in-process. The book is about "wisdom skills" from a developmental perspective, and explores the relationship between wisdom, "complexity capacity," and "spiritual clarity" – weaving in findings from cognitive and brain sciences. Among other things, it takes a post-metaphysical look at wisdom and spiritual development, and relates that to ego development. That book (draft) includes an appendix explaining my perspective on post-metaphysics. As this Integral Review special issue began to take shape, I decided to turn that appendix into a paper, and in the end, that became a large project in itself, in which I have combined most of what I have said on the topic of post-metaphysics, scattered among a dozen papers in the last decade. I must admit that post-metaphysics is a soapbox that I kept finding myself standing on in the middle of writing about other things, and this text is my attempt to get it all out of my system, package it up, and put it to rest (!).

Though I have written many scholarly papers, the Wisdom Skills book is my first attempt to reach a broader audience. The text you are reading on post-metaphysics is similarly written – with
the intention to be understandable by anyone who likes to follow contemporary ideas about spirituality, philosophy, and human potential. Thus it does not have the density of references expected in an academically styled paper, and it explains some ideas at a level of detail that some readers of this journal may find lumbering or obvious. My aim is to bridge the gap between scholarly and popular texts to make the key ideas behind post-metaphysics meaningful and practical outside of academic and "integratedly informed" communities of theory and practice. I hope the extra space I have taken to move carefully through many interconnected ideas is worth the journey for you.

That being said, I have not held back any thoughts on the topic because they were too advanced, and the title "A Beginner's and Expert's Guide..." signifies that I am confident that advanced readers will find novel ideas and useful insights within. What began as an appendix and then an article has grown to the scope of a booklet or monograph. The chapters in this text are relatively stand-alone so that the reader may explore any part directly. For those who prefer having an overview in the Preface, I refer you immediately to the Conclusion, which is primarily a summary of the text’s themes.

I should state up front that your author has not achieved a stable state of non-dual awareness or spiritual awakening according to any of the various definitions – yet in this text I dare to provide some commentary on the claims of some well-known spiritual teachers who are clearly advanced souls (or "realized" individuals). The reader may wonder how I assume the authority to write about many subjects, including non-duality, and offer opinions that differ from esteemed mystics and scholars. First, I try not to venture into any proposition for which I do not have at least an intuitive experiential taste of its validity (partial truth), though in some sections I am also treading into waters that may be over my head (it's hard to know how deep the water is when one is swimming).

Second, I try hard to acknowledge the profound experiences of these teachers, and the deep source(s) from which their wisdom comes. What I am trying to tease out is a less metaphysical interpretation, or a more reflective and explicit metaphysics, of their claims – one that is appropriate for an open-ended, open-hearted, open-minded march into the 21st century. Thanks to modern internet technology, I am blessed to live in a time in which I can listen to online lectures, dialogues, and interviews with many dozens of "awake" individuals. I notice not only where they seem to agree, but also where they seem to disagree or offer different perspectives. I am grateful for living in an age when these resources are available, allowing me to have some understanding of a territory I could never have had access to alone, nor even with a small set of sage mentors.

Those of us who listen attentively to many such teachers may even see novel pools of breadth, depth, and color that are unseen by teachers who stick to their own philosophical frameworks. It must be noted, as these teachers often do, that intellectual listening is no substitute for deep experience (or practice), yet I have found that hearing multiple perspectives that relate to my own experiences and intuitions deepens my understanding and gives me confidence in knowing where I have something to offer within the larger conversation. I have particularly enjoyed listening to Shinzen Young, Adyashanti, A.H. Almaas, Hari Alto, and Vinay Gupta, all of whom have expressed a non-dogmatic and open-ended curiosity about the nature of their own spiritual journeys. I am inspired by how much wisdom and depth they hold – even as they describe and delight in their own profound unknowing. As the reader will see in this paper, I am also indebted
to Jürgen Habermas, George Lakoff, Ken Wilber, Roy Bhaskar, and Dan Brown, whose writings and teachings have greatly informed me. While extending acknowledgements, I will mention my gratitude for colleagues/friends Terri O'Fallon, Kim Barta, Bonnitta Roy, and Zachary Stein, whose insightful creations brilliantly capture wisdom at the leading edges of humanity's pondering, and whom I draw from in everything I write.

I believe that post-metaphysical thinking, taken fully, is at odds with the ways we are taught to think, and that approaching it from many perspectives is necessary to loosen the entrenchment of old patterns. Therefore, this text is segmented into six chapters that are relatively stand-alone and approach the issue from different perspectives: a developmental approach to "magical, mystical, and metaphysical thinking;" a three-story "interlude" setting post-metaphysics into a historical context; a chapter approaching post-metaphysics from a philosophical perspective (through the interplay between ontology and epistemology); another philosophically oriented chapter comparing the properties of concrete reality with those of ideas; and a chapter approaching post-metaphysics from an embodied and experiential (phenomenological) perspective. In addition to these six chapters are the Introduction, which sets the stage, and a Conclusion that summarizes the book and folds in some connections to ethics. Enjoy and wonder.

**Introduction and Some Foundations**

**The Metaphysics to Come**

"Post-metaphysics" is a term coined by philosopher Jürgen Habermas to refer to a historically emerging trend toward a more humble and reflective attitude on truth and belief that acknowledges how human knowledge is deeply fallible. It signals a move away from – not only the religious and dogmatic orientations to truth predominant in pre-modern cultures – but from more subtle modes of unreflective metaphysical thinking predominant in modern cultures. This trend is observed in every domain of human discourse, from the scholarly treatises of philosophers to newspaper editorials and dinner table conversations. Post-metaphysics signals a distancing from definitive or authoritative proclamations of universal truth. In this text I use a developmental approach that describes levels of sophistication and depth in both the individual's reasoning and in cultural trends. Thus, the historically emerging trend in thought that Habermas termed "post-metaphysics" is also an evolutionary or developmental trend in the complexity and depth of reason achieved, or achievable, by society.

"Metaphysics" traditionally refers to claims about the essence or ultimate nature of reality, being, or existence – thus the term post-metaphysics points beyond such claims. Just as the term "post-rational" refers to an understanding of the limitations of rationality, and not to non-rationality or irrationality, post-metaphysics does not imply the rejection of metaphysics, but rather a reflective attitude that understands the limitations and best uses of metaphysical ways of thinking. Perhaps the terms meta-metaphysics or trans-metaphysics would be more apt, especially since what we could call "post-metaphysical thinking" has much overlap with "meta-rational" thinking (Stanovich, 2015; David Chapman’s hyper-book at meaningness.com) and "meta-modern" sensibilities (Vermeulen & Akker, 2010; Freinacht, 2017). Later we will also use the term "4th person perspective" (and beyond) for this territory. In this text "thinking" refers broadly to all types...
of cognition, including intention, motivation, feeling, etc. "Post-metaphysical being" would also be an appropriate term – as thought, feeling, and action are deeply entwined.

Nowhere is the tension between metaphysical thinking and post-metaphysical thinking more apparent than in discourses on spirituality and religion. It is not difficult to notice a general cultural developmental trend away from concrete and literal interpretations of spirituality and religion toward more abstract, nuanced, and scientific interpretations. If you are reading this text you are not likely to literally believe that that Moses parted the Red Sea, the God created the Cosmos in six days, that God looks like an old man with a white beard, that a Heaven full of willing virgins awaits the faithful, that the world sits on a series of elephants and turtles, or that a feathered serpent in the sky took part in fashioning mankind out of clay.

The modern scientifically-informed intellect is more than suspicious; it is completely unbelieving of literal interpretations of religious stories about the origins or destiny of the earth, of people (and souls), or of reality as a whole. We understand ancient and aboriginal myth and lore as quaint or metaphorical – perhaps deeply meaningful but not literally true. But such concrete and literal metaphysical claims notwithstanding, we still struggle to relate to the more abstract or esoteric claims associated with metaphysics today. In this text I draw from contemporary notions of spirituality as a context for exploring the wider domain of metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking.

This exploration of the cultural and philosophical emergence of post-metaphysics is situated within the theme of "spirituality" because ethics exists at the intersection of reason and spirituality (or science and religion). That is, how we approach caring for each other, our planet, and future generations rests in large part upon the depth of our wisdom regarding the interplay of rationality and the deeper pre-rational (including magical, archetypes, and "shadow") realms of the self. We frame the contemporary puzzle of how to resolve these domains in terms of the tension between historically metaphysical thinking and emerging post-metaphysical thinking.

The conversation is timely in part because of the emergence of the “new atheist” movement, which carries a harsh condemnation of religion as a social force (see Harris, 2004; Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006). These well know intellectuals seem to have little empathy or tolerance for the segment of the population faithful to an organized religion; and have equal distain for New Age spiritual beliefs. Their position, harsh and analytical, has moved a few minds, but is not likely to move many hearts. All in a time when religious fundamentalism is bringing chaos and cultural regression to many corners of the world. This text follows Wilber (2006, 2017) and others in using a developmental lens to clarify certain aspects of these issues. Developmental theory can illustrate (1) how aspects of cognition that give rise to religious and spiritual needs function at all times and for all people within a deep layer of the psyche; and (2) why it is unreasonable and potentially harmful to propose an increase in rationality alone as a “cure” for religious and spiritual thinking. Though we rely on Wilber and others who have tended the developmental view, we think that even Wilber’s work carries too many metaphysical implications, and more can be done to bridge the cultural distance between rationality and spirituality.

Consider the statements shown in Exhibit A from five contemporary spiritual teachers. These teachers' books will all be found on the same shelf in bookstores, yet their teachings, styles, and
lineages are quite diverse. Still, from the quotes given, it appears that they are all reading from the same metaphysical playbook. They regularly use the descriptors *absolute, ultimate, infinite, groundless, supreme, essential (essence), pure, fundamental, irreducible, limitless, endless, eternal, immeasurable, unmanifest, empty (emptiness), timeless, ever-present, spaceless, unbounded, formless, perfect (perfection), omnipresent, universal, primeval, primordial* – and the like – words that, as often as not, are capitalized. The familiar spiritual objects of such radical, absolutist, or hyperbolic language include: Consciousness, Awareness, Presence, God, Soul, Spirit, the Universe or Cosmos, Nature, Reality, Truth, Goodness, the Non-Dual, and the Source or Ground of Being. (Note that I am not claiming that all spiritual teachers rely on this type of metaphysical language, only that it strongly informs the contemporary spiritual landscape.)

**Exhibit A: Metaphysical statements by contemporary spiritual teachers**

- *Ken Wilber [1]*: discusses "the path of Waking Up – which deals with ultimate Reality, with the Ground of all Being, with the divine Self and infinite Spirit...found in the great Traditions around the world " (in contrast to the also-important "path of Growing Up – which deals with the finite self, the ordinary, conventional, typical small self and its changes"). Waking up is concerned with connecting with "an ultimate unity, oneness, infinite harmony and interconnectedness with the entire universe – the discovery of our real Self, Big Mind, the groundless Ground of all Being, the Supreme Identity, the Great Liberation in infinite Spirit.

- *Reginald Ray [2a,b]*: In describing his interpretation of awakening in the Tibetan tantric essence traditions, says "Pure Awareness...is our most fundamental nature, a part of ourselves that is neither born nor dies," and continues his explanation of awakening using the terms "limitless openness" and "touching infinity." On another page he discusses "the space of the heart...so vast and so endless and so open...[it] has this fundamental, eternal, infinite openness...known as ultimate bodhicitta."

- *Andrew Cohen [3]*: "This is when we discover the limitless interior dimension of our own Being, when consciousness begins to open to itself to an immeasurable degree and when we discover the unmanifest dimension of reality...This absolute nothingness or voidness or emptiness is traditionally called the Ground of Being. When we discover the literally infinite, timeless, formless nature of this dimension, we recognize that 'This is what it was like before the universe was created'."

- *A. H. Almaas [4]*: Strictly speaking, the absolute is the ultimate nature of Reality, and it is beyond dimensions; for dimensions are the experience of manifestation. Yet, we do experience the absolute as a dimension, boundless and infinite, an infinity that contains and holds all manifestation, including the other boundless dimensions. We can say that the absolute is the unmanifest, the ultimate truth and mystery of Being, beyond all dimensions and qualities. But when it begins to manifest appearance, this manifestation appears as if in an expanse, an infinite and boundless expanse, that looks like black space.

- *Adyashanti [5a,b]*: "All things – all beings and all activities, no matter how ordinary – are equal expressions of the Infinite...Therefore, all attempts to either find or hold onto the Infinite are based in illusion. And illusion itself is none other than the Infinite." "Simply put, ultimate truth comes at a cost, and the cost is everything in you and about you that is unreal. The end result is freedom, happiness, peace, and no longer viewing life through the veils of illusion."

(See References for Exhibit A sources).

The statements described above are neither poetry nor metaphor, nor are they sage advice about moral or spiritual living – they are *truth claims* about reality. These teachers follow the lead of
spiritualists and mystics throughout history who have set a precedent for definitive-sounding metaphysical assertions. These are not only metaphysical claims, but often they are mystical claims. Whereas many metaphysical claims are justified through logical argumentation, mystical claims are also grounded in the experience, or the experience-based intuition, of the speaker.

Along the further reaches of the spiritual or psychological path to awakening, or comparably radical stages of consciousness, one encounters certain types of well-documented experiences. These include profound states of emptiness, bliss, expansiveness, one-pointedness, unity, and/or compassion. What all seem to agree upon is that mystical experiences are ineffable – that words can only inspire or obliquely point to the states and realizations attained. And yet words are used, and strong claims such as those illustrated above are made. In fact, all experiences are ineffable in a sense. For example, the color blue for a blind person, and the taste of chocolate for one who has tasted nothing similar, are ineffable. Words point to shared experiences and comparable experiences among interlocutors, but do not directly convey those experiences. Mystical states are no more or less ineffable than other experiences, but they are much more rare (and esoteric), and thus we have yet to form adequate language for describing them.

We should not doubt that many spiritual teachers and mystics are speaking from direct authentic experiences that are sublime beyond the understanding of the vast majority of individuals. I do not doubt that the adepts quoted above have participated in states of communion with reality, have attained a radical type of freedom from conditioning, and have received realizations about the nature of the self, that lead to profound wisdom and a deeply inspiring presence. I am grateful that these and other spiritual teachers have profoundly influenced me and illuminated my own understandings. These teachers are mystics fully and successfully embedded in the modern (and post-modern) techno-scientific world – and every age needs its mystics, along with its artists and philosophers, to tap the dreamy resources of the collective unconscious for fresh insights to address dire needs of the time.

But the definitive metaphysical claims quoted above grate on contemporary sensibilities. They harken back, in developmental terms, to the child-like mind or to pre-modern cultures, when truths were bequeathed by authorities – parents, teachers, priests, shamans, kings, or sacred texts. They have some of the flavor of esoteric mysteries offered by spiritual authorities from 17th century occultism, yet are offered in the context of sophisticated contemporary philosophical and scientific worldviews. The very fact that spiritual teachers and mystics disagree on many details is enough to support a suspicion that even the "enlightened" do not have direct unmediated access to universal truths about reality. And yet, they offer us great wisdom, and it seems that metaphysical ideas such as soul, spirit, god, and non-dual source point toward a territory of deep "truths" about the human condition. So these narratives should not, and cannot, be ignored.

Spirituality and religion are concerned with "questions of ultimate concern," such as: the origins, ends, and purposes of human beings and the cosmos; the fundamental or essential nature of reality; moral questions about right and wrong, good and evil; and metaphysical (non-physical and non-perceivable) beings, realms, and influences (Fowler, 1991; Wilber, 2006; Rowson, 2014). When speaking confidently or persuasively on questions of ultimate concern it is difficult to avoid claims about universals, totalities, essences, and foundations, i.e. metaphysics – but it is done at a price. The problem is not so much for the mystic making these proclamations, but for the rest of
us. Though many of them entreat us not to merely believe, but to experience and/or practice, we inevitably take on beliefs, language, and forms of argumentation from these sages. Mystical claims invite forms of ideology and "magical thinking" even if those offering the claims do not succumb to them. And, as we describe later, magical thinking can, at worst, promote fixation on developmentally primitive modes of reason that are dangerously pre-ethical.

We give ourselves permission to participate in such metaphysical thinking (when or if we do) because our esteemed teachers do so, and because our peers do so – it can be the unquestioned memetic water that the "spiritual but not religious" club swims in – the cultural air we breathe. But contemporary spiritual teachers acquired this way of speaking from their teachers, who were immersed in pre-modern belief systems. Though these teachers are trying to describe authentic insights sparked from deep encounters within mystical territory, the language and modes of rhetoric that they use are often hold-overs from a pre-scientific, pre-rational era.

In contemporary contexts there is an understanding that deep wisdom must have a "post-rational" component, and some use that fact to champion mystical claims. But, for the most part, we live in a time when there is confusion about what is post-rational and what is pre-rational. To be post-rational (also called meta-rationality or vision-logic) is to understand the limits of reason (including logic, abstraction, and generalization) and the important roles that emotion, intuition, embodiment, and cultural biases play in reasoning. But claiming to be post-rational is not an excuse for old-style absolutist metaphysical thinking.

The claims shown in Exhibit A relate to discourses about ultimate truths, and those espousing them differentiate "Ultimate" Truth (or Reality) from "relative" truths. Later we will discuss whether such a classification is useful, but here we can also note that much of what is discussed within spiritual and religious discourse is metaphysical without being about "ultimate" reality. Contemporary narratives about soul, spirit(s), disembodied consciousness, reincarnation, prayer, angelic beings, Akashic records, heavenly realms, distance healing, psychic powers, Gaia, pranic energy, divination, etc. refer to phenomena that are said to originate from a non-physical, spiritual, or subtle-energetic reality. Though some of these phenomena are being studied scientifically, such beliefs are often promulgated without concern for scientific proof. This does not mean that they are invalid ideas, but that they are argued for using "action logics" (or implicit thought and discourse rules) that may be inadequate to the modern task of probing for truths, as we will discuss. Our exploration of (post-) metaphysical thinking includes both the absolute and the simply non-ordinary types of "realities."

How do we hold what seems valuable and true about metaphysical statements, coming from admired teachers, sages, and colleagues, in a way that yet honors the level of reflectivity and critical thinking that is required for ideas to seem legitimate, intelligent, careful, and respectful in contemporary dialogue? How can our discourse include such ideas in a way that honors their importance, usefulness, and deep meaning, while yet acknowledging fallibility and remaining open to revision and critique? In trying to share such ideas, how do we avoid the extremes of speaking with unjustified confidence and arrogance; or feeling tongue-tied and inarticulate regarding why we believe; or sounding like naive devotes of the One Revealed Truth?
What seems called for is a critique of intellectual and spiritual confidence itself. Though persuasive rhetoric and firm "ontological commitments" play important roles in social life, the "post-metaphysical turn" emphasizes the unsettling uncertainties and limitations – the fallibilities and indeterminacies – within human reasoning and knowledge-building. It embodies an informed and active type of humility built, not from self-deprecation or nihilism, but from a strengthened tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability, and paradox. Simply acknowledging fallibility or uncertainty is only a starting point – we will explore the many sources of indeterminacy in human reason.

Our exploration draws from developmental theories and cognitive sciences, and focuses on the lower/earlier cognitive mechanisms, including magical thinking, concept formation, and "epistemic drives" that entangle the emotional mind with the rational mind. Understanding these most basic aspects of the mind helps to reveal some sources of fallibility in normal reasoning, but just as importantly, it illuminates important modes of thinking that we often suppress or discount to our detriment.

We explore post-metaphysical thinking in the context of religion and spirituality, but what we find is applicable to all domains of reason and life. In spiritual and mystical beliefs, we find some of the clearest examples of metaphysical thinking, but in an arguably "post-truth" world we desperately need more sophisticated wisdom about how communities locate sturdy truths and valid beliefs of all sorts. The metaphysical assumptions we make about reality matter, and at this historical juncture we are called to craft our metaphysics more deliberately, including envisioning a spirituality that meets and anticipates concrete human needs rather than concealing unmet needs and hiding the ways we are ruining the world for future generations.

A Developmental Perspective

Jürgen Habermas coined the terms post-metaphysics and "post-metaphysical thinking" to designate an emerging trend in philosophical thought, and eventually in ordinary cultural thought (1992). The term refers to an approach to knowing that accepts the fallibilities of reason exposed by "post-modern" thinkers of the mid-20th century (including Derrida and Foucault), while not succumbing to the nihilism and relativism that some post-modern theories promulgate. As we discuss later, Habermas was in part trying to clarify and resolve a tension between theories of reality focused on objective exteriors, as in science, and theories of reality focused on subjective interiors that study thinking, feeling, and knowing. In this text we frame post-metaphysics in terms of adult developmental theory. Developmental theory is a cognitive science that, through a constellation of models and empirical findings, has mapped out levels of complexity and depth in how humans make meaning in and of their lives – in both exterior world-understanding and interior self-understanding. The development of meaning making maturity has also been called "ego development" and "worldview sophistication" – terms pointing in different senses to complexity, nuance, and depth in human wisdom.

The developmental approach is vital in our inquiry of human meaning-making because the important questions, motivations, and dilemmas of life are understood differently as one develops. For example, one's approach to each of these questions tends to evolve developmentally:
− What does it mean to be happy?
− What is the good life (or the moral life)?
− What is free will and how do we hold each other responsible?
− Who am I?
− How do I know what is true (or real)?

**Developmental levels.** The development of meaning making can be described in terms of a sequence of levels or stages of cognitive/psychological maturity. (There is disagreement regarding whether the progression involves distinct levels vs. a continuous movement – but the levels framework suffices here). Each stage represents increased complexity and abstraction in cognitive skills applied to both objective *exterior* realities and subjective *interior* realities. Increased complexity in understanding exterior things and systems "out there" is a type of development, but to fit within "meaning making development" (or "ego development ") the increased complexity of understanding must include an awareness of aspects of the self (and the self's relationships with others and the world). The development of self-understanding is sometimes described in terms of "subject to object" transitions in which operating-but-invisible aspects of the self become known to the self (Kegan, 1994).

We can name developmental levels, also called "action logics," using a pair of words, the first suggesting how exteriors are understood and the second suggesting how interiors are understood:

− 1stPP: magical/impulsive,
− 2ndPP: mythical/conventional,
− 3rdPP: rational/autonomous, and
− 4thPP: meta-rational/pluralistic.

The first term refers to the level of cognitive complexity that can be brought to bear in making meaning of the world. The second term refers to how that cognitive capacity manifests when it is applied to the subjective and intersubjective domains of I, me, you, us, and them in the psychosocial world.

Developmental theories have a variety of schemes for naming and describing such levels (e.g. see Fischer, 1980; Commons & Pekker, 2008; Wilber, 2000), but these will do for our purposes. The "1stPP, 2ndPP..." terminology refers to first, second...etc. person-perspectives or action logics, the naming convention used by O'Fallon's STAGES model (O'Fallon, 2011, 2013; Murray, 2017), and suggested in Cook-Greuter's Ego Development Model (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2011; Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009), and which is compatible with Kegan's "construct developmental" model (Kegan, 1994). Our terse level names hide the fact that each category has a complex description – for example 4thPP "pluralistic" is also holistic and highly strategic in its full manifestation.² (Note

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² Various developmental theories slice the sequence or spectrum of development differently, for example, though Kegan's model has about the same number of levels as we show above, Cook-Greuter's and O'Fallon's models have about twice as many levels (also called "stages"). In Cook-Greuter's model the Expert and Achiever levels correspond to the early and late halves of the "3rdPP", and her Pluralist and Strategist levels correspond to the early and late halves of 4thPP. O'Fallon uses the names "3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5" to refer to the same segment of the developmental sequence.
that in this text we use the term "action logic" to point to the person-perspective levels; but it is more common to use action logic to refer to Cook-Greuter's levels, which divide each person perspective level in half).

The 1stPP action logic is impulsive and narcissistic (which is completely natural for the infant and toddler). Self and world are in an as-yet unfinished process of differentiation. From an interior perspective, the self's needs and drives are acted upon instinctively, and the social consideration of the other has not developed yet. In terms of understanding the exterior world of things, there is little or poor differentiation regarding which impressions and perceptions originate inside the mind vs. outside in the world; and there is also poor differentiation between what is animate and what is inanimate. The 1stPP level of consciousness is a "magical" world of emotionally potent objects and experiences.

2ndPP marks the movement into the self-awareness and self-control required to succeed in social settings – to fit into the conventional roles and expectations of one's family and culture. Thinking is still rather concrete. The world is managed largely by adopted rules, norms, and principles, often in rule-systems that can be rather complex (as in sports games, furniture installation instructions, rules of decorum, or bureaucracies). 2ndPP consciousness defines the status quo for "traditional" cultures.

3rdPP marks a move into more abstract, logical, and "formal" reasoning skills. These are used to interpret exterior phenomena "objectively," while the growth in interior complexity includes an autonomous sense of self, more free from conventions and able to think and create in ways beyond what others expect or have demonstrated. Its gifts include pragmatic rationality and creativity. However, some experience its objectivity, autonomy, and abstraction as dry, impersonal, or removed from the tender urgencies and peculiarities of specific individuals and situations.

4thPP marks a move into more sophisticated ways of understanding exteriors, including capacities to see complex systems and reciprocal causation, and an ability to perceive complex "objects" such as eco-systems and social systems. 4thPP interior understanding includes the ability to experience the self as a collection of sometimes conflicted parts, and understanding how beliefs are formed as much by cultural and contextual factors as by one's rational reasoning skills and conscious intentions. At 4thPP consciousness one can observe the spectrum of action logics at work within the self and society.

Various theories define levels beyond 4thPP, but in this text we will mostly mention "4thPP and beyond" to indicate that territory. Less is known about levels beyond 4thPP, but, for example, O'Fallon's STAGES model describes 5th and 6th person perspectives based on the analysis of ego development assessments of late-stage individuals (O'Fallon, 2013; and see Churchill, 2018).

Developmental discourse modes. Each developmental level is associated with a "mode of discourse" for explaining and justifying its beliefs. This is important for our discussion of post-metaphysical thinking. At 1stPP the need to explain or justify does not exist – the narcissistic perspective either assumes that others see and believe what it sees and believes, or judges all conflicting beliefs as simply wrong (if it notices other perspectives at all).
At 2ndPP beliefs tend to be justified with reference to authoritative or sacred people, laws, or texts; or to the conventions of what everyone else does or believes. Things are expected to "make sense" but the sense-making complexity is at the level of narratives, linear logics, and concrete past-bound facts.

At 3rdPP beliefs can be justified on the bases of universals and abstractions. For example: the scientific method "objectively" validates truths that are replicable by anyone with the right tools; democratic decision making tries to capture the predominating will of everyone; and business and technology try for the best possible (realistic) solutions.

4thPP modes of discourse include a deeper openness and curiosity about multiple perspectives, a deeper appreciation of the fallibilities of one's own beliefs, and an unsettling problematization or critique of certainty for any belief for method. In justifying one's belief's one can reflect on the justification method itself, and its limitations. One appreciates the roles of intuition, insight, and unknowing, especially in domains where analytical thought runs out of steam.

**Development in sum.** In many domains of inquiry important questions lead to a bewildering plethora of possible answers. Developmental models are extremely useful because they can organize these answers prismatically into an elegant and insightful sequence in which the answer depends on developmental aspects of the context. As many readers will be familiar with the basics of developmental theories, I describe these basics in an Appendix. Its themes include:

- though there are multiple intelligences, the focus in this text is on meaning-making or "ego development;"
- development in individuals vs. groups or cultures;
- caveat and dangers in using and misusing developmental theories;
- 'include and transcend' growth dynamics;
- people embody a range of levels, not just one;
- learning can become automated with practice, moving into the unconscious;
- vertical growth vs. horizontal (and healthy) growth;
- shadow: suppression and repression; re-integration through meditation and psychotherapy;
- one can categorize psychological pathologies/tensions (shadow elements) using developmental levels.

Additional descriptions of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th person perspectives are provided at in the Appendix. We also explore the action logics in more depth in the next chapter under the themes of magical, mythical, rational, and post-metaphysical thinking. In a later section titled "From 4th into 5th person perspective" we describe 5thPP.

In terms of post-metaphysical thinking, the developmental model is crucial because it explains pre-rational magical and mythical thinking as capacities that, though limited in many ways (1) provide necessary foundations for reasoning at higher levels of thought, and (2) are always functioning unconsciously and influence all action and thought regardless of whether one might be ignorant or disowning of them.
In sum, each developmental mode of cognition builds directly upon prior modes. Each level can provide a robust and healthy foundation for the next, but it can also harbor weaknesses, gaps, confusions, and pathologies. We are usually not aware of the functioning and influence of lower levels of cognition, which can be hidden from us gently through automation, or more forcefully through suppression or repression.

The Meaning-making Drive and Unknowing

The pleasure, meaning-making, and reality principles. Post-metaphysics includes a nuanced approach to truth itself – inquiring into the limits of knowledge and how one finds truth. Freud coined the term "reality principle" for the deep drive or need to know what is true as a matter of survival. He contrasted this with the "pleasure principle" which is developmentally more primitive. Adults (ideally) can postpone what seems to yield maximum immediate pleasure by objectively reasoning about the "reality" of what is likely to bring acceptable pleasures over the long run. But one could argue for a stage in-between these two, a "meaning making" principle or drive, which refers to our need for things to make sense, or feel like they make sense, or appear to make sense, even sometimes at the expense of congruence with reality.

Plato once defined man as “a being in search of meaning.” Developmental psychologist Robert Kegan writes: "It is not that a person makes meaning, as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making … the most fundamental thing we do with what happens to us is organize it. We literally make sense" (1982, p. 11). The human brain is a master pattern-matcher, and in its insatiable goal to make meaning it seems to care less about accuracy than sense making. As noted in Michael Shermer's "The Believing Brain" (2011), mind/brain theorists believe that the mind has evolved to detect faint patterns in noisy data, as often as not fooling itself, because overestimating possible dangers has an evolutionary advantage over underestimating those dangers. Nothing is lost if one freezes in fear upon mistaking a vine for a snake; but missing a snake waiting in the shadows could be deadly. At the extreme, this propensity to see patterns where there is only noise creates difficulties such as conspiracy theories, pseudo-science, and psychosis. Shermer calls the cognitive tendency to find patterns regardless of whether they are real "patternicity."

It turns out to be not so necessary that most of our beliefs are accurate, and even less important that we can derive accurate beliefs from scratch. The most important true beliefs are handed to us or taken care of by society – along with an abundance of non-truths. We live in a world where it is reasonable to trust that our food is safe, that the man-eating animals are locked within zoos, and that we will be warned or protected from the vast majority of dangers. It is impossible to question every belief and research every statement that is important to us – most of what we believe (or act as if we believe) must be taken for granted, so that the potentially infinite onslaught of doubt, scrutiny, and ambivalence can be evaded.

Thus, modern survival, reproductive success, and happiness depend much more on how well one assimilates into social structures and belief systems than on one's ability to detect patterns accurately in the world of ideas. (Of course, in the concrete domains of physical survival and object manipulation, our brains need to process information very accurately to be able to, for example, drive a car, grow and harvest food, or recognize what an infant needs.)
If fact, one could argue that appearing to be right or feeling and demonstrating confidence hold more value in the world of social interactions than does accuracy (truth). Because we are social animals the meaning-making drive to be "right" includes both the truth-relative sense of the word and the moral sense – we don't want to be wrong or bad. The world of social interactions operates largely through a 2ndPP action logic, within which we exchange stories or narratives – idea streams that need not stand up to the rigors of "proof" (3rdPP action logic). At 3rdPP we become more interested in critical thinking and verifiable truths, and question traditional narratives and popular beliefs. Although we may not need 3rdPP and higher action logics for the vast majority of daily life, 3rdPP and higher levels of complexity are increasingly necessary for individuals and cultures as social and global predicaments accelerate in complexity, scale, and gravity.

The mind's meaning-making function discovers patterns primarily by matching incoming information to what is known and anticipated. Recent models of cognition portray the brain as a "predictive" organ that helps organisms adapt by minimizing the error between what it predicts will be experienced and what is actually experienced (Seth, 2015; Bar, 2009). So, while the pattern-matching capacities of the brain may seem ingenious, usually one is trying to confirm existing patterns rather than discover new patterns – the mind's brilliance is typically spent bending reality to fit one's models rather than constructing them anew. We seek confirmation as much as truth, with the truth drive (3rdPP) acting as an occasional reality-check against the meaning-making drive (2ndPP) and the pleasure drive (1stPP).

Ideas are more meaning-full, or feel more important, when they are more closely related to one's personal needs, survival, values, identity, and sense of purpose (i.e. with one's ego). It also appears that more abstract ideas attain more meaning – which is somewhat problematic because more abstract ideas operate further from empirical reality and are more difficult to validate. In other words, at least in conversational contexts, ideas that are the most difficult to validate can feel like the most important ones to have a strong opinion about. This clearly has implications for spiritual and religious thought.

Critical thinking has an uneasy relationship to the "questions of ultimate concern" that drive spiritual and religious discourse. These are questions about "the meaning of life," including themes on the origins and ultimate ends of people and the cosmos as a whole; and ethical questions about right and wrong behavior. For such questions humanity has used science to produce partial answers, but full-bodied "answers" remain in the realm of metaphysical thinking (e.g. in religions).

The cloud, the clearing, and the clown of unknowing. The mirror image of meaning is the unknown. The humility of knowing that one does not know is an important aspect of post-metaphysical thinking – in this text we go further to explore some sources of belief fallibility. We are reminded of the "known knowns, known unknowns, unknown unknowns, and unknown knowns" popularized through statements by United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and various theories of solving "wicked problems." "Known unknowns" relates to uncovering sources of fallibility (or indeterminacy) to perceive some of the contours defining the penumbra of one's ignorance. "Unknown knowns" refers to ignored or denied "truths" held in the shadowy depths of the unconscious. Fischer and Stein use the metaphor of dark knowledge for known unknowns, i.e. "knowledge of ignorance" (borrowed from the concepts of dark matter and dark
energy invented by physicists as place-holders for the invisible 90% of the stuff-of-the-universe that we have practically no understanding of yet).

Poet John Keats coined the term *negative capability* for the skill or predisposition of tolerating, or even delighting in, uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability, and paradox. I.E. "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts – without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1817). As Keats knew, negative capability is useful well beyond the realm of poetry. Negative capability (and thus post-metaphysical thinking) includes the "informed and active humility" mentioned above, in which the sources of indeterminacy are better understood so that knowledge can be more adaptive and resilient. It is not enough to acknowledge that "the map is not the territory" (an injunction not to confuse theories and ideals for reality), but we must understand as precisely as we can how/where/when/why our maps differ from the territory – impossible to do completely but essential nonetheless.

The contemporary understanding of the mind is that it not only constructs knowledge but, just as importantly, it acts like a lens or filter that limits the boundless expanse of conscious thoughts and sensory data possible at any moment. Cognitive resources such as memory, speed, and processing power are finite, so the mind must select only the fragments that seem most relevant to one's needs – and discard the rest. One can balance the negative capability of being open, curious, and accepting of the unknown with the positive capability of, metaphorically speaking, *characterizing and calibrating* the coloring or distortion introduced by the lenses, filters, and fabricators within the mind. One can then more intentionally participate in a perpetual trialectic between learning, knowing that one doesn't know, and correcting faults in one's understanding.

Unknowing is a favorite topic of sages, pundits, and spiritualists. Historian Daniel Boorstin said: "The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge." *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a book of spiritual guidance thought to have been written in the late 14th century that counsels: "I urge you, go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may often deceive you, but this gentle, loving affection will not deceive you. Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds. Knowledge is full of labor, but love, full of rest." (Butcher & Acevedo, 2009).

The early 21st century specter of a "post-truth" society is not only about the prevalence of deliberate falsehoods and "bullshit" (i.e. not caring about whether a statement is true or false, as discussed in Harry Frankfurt's 2005 popular philosophical treatise "On Bullshit"). It arises in part because society is becoming increasingly aware of the fallibility of knowledge, including scientific findings and "facts" offered in the media. Texts on the subject of "everything you know is wrong" have been increasing in recent decades. The post-metaphysical skill of negative capability has become a crucial tool for navigating the dissonance-creating complexity of modern culture (this is discussed from a developmental perspective in Robert Kegan's *In Over Our Heads*, 1994).

In this text we emphasize a type of unknowing that is not so much about discarding obsolete beliefs as discarding obsolete certainty or fixation upon beliefs; or developing the general skills of negative capability and unknowing. It is a common complaint that humility is in short supply, but psychological studies have shown how pervasive and unremitting overconfidence can be. Cognitive scientists have studied the related phenomena of the Overconfidence Effect and the
Dunning–Kruger effect. In the former it has been found, for instance, that for many common tasks, when someone is 90% confident that they are correct, there is a 50% chance that they are wrong (Moore & Healy, 2008); and that 93% of American drivers rate themselves as better than average drivers (Svenson, 1981). In the Dunning–Kruger effect, it has been shown that those with the least ability or knowledge are often the most likely to overestimate their ability (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Above we describe unknowing as a noun, but it can also be a verb: un-knowing, also called un-learning. These refer to using meta-cognitive skills to determine that a practice or belief is wrong or no longer useful. Some of what one learns turns out to be non-useful or harmful, and, once noticed, calls to be "unlearned." Depending on the situation, unlearning might take the form of re-training, re-education, group-reflection, psychotherapy, meditation, etc. "Spiritual clarity" is my term for the incremental results of this unlearning, healing, clearing, deconstruction, or "shadow work" – as discussed more in the Appendix. The process is also called "releasing complexity" (see Roy, 2018).

Importantly, negative capability and unlearning are closely tied to social and relational realities. Elsewhere in this text we emphasize the relationships between negative capability and listening, curiosity, vulnerability, and collective "self-emancipation." As pointed out by Hans Köglér (a Habermasian scholar), taking a reflective stance on a relational encounter (which he calls "self-distanciation") implicates a radical openness to the unknown (which some call beginner's mind). Köglér says "the self … abandons itself … to a [dialectical] process of understanding those results and challenges it cannot foresee or determine" (1999, p. 272).

Echoing Köglér's ideas, educational theorist Peter Elbow (2005) critiques how "critical thinking" is taught in the schools. It is presented as a type of skeptical thought that is predominantly directed at others, and too infrequently used to question one's own ideas and world-view. "[The] disciplined practice of doubting all views" (p. 3) that is held out as a standard for rational thought, rather being a tool for greater understanding and expansion of knowledge, too often becomes a shield for protecting one's own world-view. He asks: Why not also have disciplined practices of trying on all views? He suggests a practice he calls "The Believing Game" to strengthen this skill. This supports avoiding the two extremes of dogmatism, which is to be unskilled at doubting, and skepticism, which is to be unskilled at believing. In the Believing Game one gains the right to critique another only after first "dwelling with" and "dwelling in," another's words and world. He notes that "when readers fail to read critically it is not usually that they believe everything, it is that they are unengaged in any way; not dwelling in or critiquing anything" (p. 3).

In our exploration of spiritual beliefs and spiritual modes of thinking, we will explore the role of the magical strata of consciousness, a realm saturated with mystery, awe, and paradox (and sometimes trembling and vertigo). The wise individual can open to such experiences with openness and even humor. The Clown archetype is an important friend in navigating the realms of unknowing, uncertainty, and paradox.

Next we show how magical thinking and mythical thinking are components of metaphysical thinking, and argue that they are actually important parts of the reason-able mature life. Post-metaphysical thinking sees (some of) the limitations of magical and mythical thinking, and it also
recovers (some of) their useful elements that have been hidden, repressed, or suppressed in modern 3rdPP cultures.

Lest the reader jump to conclusions, I will not claim that all mystical experiences or metaphysical thinking can be attributed to "magical" or "mythical" thinking. But some of it is, and our developmentally oriented overview of magical and mythical thinking will establish groundwork for later elaborations on post-metaphysical thought.

Magical, Mystical, and Metaphysical Thinking

Meaning-making in Magical, Mythical, and Rational Thinking

"Magical Thinking" is a many-faced topic in spiritual inquiry. The term can be used to denounce an idea as unsophisticated, but it is also used to refer to an important capacity that is lost to most of us moderns, while yet preserved in artists, spiritual adepts, and aboriginal peoples. In this chapter we explore magical, mythical, mystical, and metaphysical "thinking" from a developmental perspective, and chart the gifts and weaknesses of these action logics as we consider what post-metaphysical thinking might look like. Note that in this text the term "thinking" is not restricted to logical/rational cogitation, but is meant to holistically include emotion, intention, and intuition.

Magical thinking (1stPP). Magical thinking points to modes of cognition that corresponds to the 1stPP action logic, is predominant in 1-4 year olds, and continues in some form in all of us. It is hypothesized to have been the dominant mode of cognition for pre-agricultural mankind, and remains as a layer of mental operations within all cultures. In "The Seven Laws of Magical Thinking" Matthew Hutson (2012) describes magical thinking as an inability to clearly differentiate the subjective from the objective worlds. The world of interior imagination and the world of exterior sensation are merged (undifferentiated) and confused. The monster under the bed seems very real; the stuffed animal is a friend who seems quite alive. The sense of self is merged with intimate others (at first with the mother). Association is confused with causation, creating a world of incomprehensible beings and forces. Time and space are cognized only primitively, and one lives in a world of present-moment, where memories of past and imaginations of future merge with (are projected onto) perceptual reality.

The magical world is emotionally potent, and from a neuroscientific perspective is more intimately linked to the primitive (mammalian/reptilian) functions of the brain. Within magical thinking feelings, including fear, hunger, longing, bliss, and confusion, inundate one's consciousness – and actions are impulsive and reflexive. One also experiences much of the world with awe and wide-eyed fascination; so much of the world is larger and more powerful than one's self. Lacking power and understanding, the things that care about us, e.g. our parents, seem like gods and angels; and the things that don't, e.g. the thunder cloud or the neighbor's barking dog, appear as daemons and monsters. One has little access to self-control or self-reflection. Thought is primarily associative – the child's brain is building millions of associative connections but has not yet built layers that substantially monitor or inhibit those associations. If a clown scares her, then anything reminding her of a clown will trigger fear – this action logic does not wonder why, it just reaches for, runs from, or freezes.
Adults can tap into magical modes of reasoning with both positive and negative effects. On the negative side: one may feel helpless or terrified in the face of something that is actually not life-threatening; one may let one's "amygdala hijack" the rational self and react from raw emotion; one might engage in fetishes that transform dark corners of the imagination into objects desperately sought after. On a more positive side, one may sense the tree or the moon as a living being or spiritual presence that one is intimately connected to. One might access a feeling of oneness with others and with the universe as a whole, or re-experience the timeless spaceless infinity of the "now." One can appreciate how nature is awe-inspiring, miraculous, and sacred.

Language and symbols were first invented in cultures operating predominantly at the level of magical consciousness. The lines between interior and exterior were blurred, and "real" powers were attributed to words and symbols. These include powers that transcend time and space. Incantations, invocations, mantras, prayers, voodoo dolls, divinations, and sacred objects draw upon this level of consciousness – worldviews in which the laws of science as we know them do not apply. Objects and symbols are felt to have some un-measurable essence giving them power and significance. To speak or name a thing gives one power over it; and to incant a powerful thing gives one power over other things. Religions today still rely on such modes of thought.

Other manifestations of magical thinking are more controversial because modern adults might argue about what is real vs. imaginary. Modern New Age culture includes beliefs in angels and spirits; and in the healing powers of crystals, prayers, sounds, and infinitely diluted homeopathic solutions. For many of these things we don't know for sure what is real or true. But what we can do is clarify the modes of reasoning (explanation and discourse) that are being used. If the primary justification is from gut feeling, instinct, or intuition, then we are in the realm of 1stPP magical thought.

To say that something comes from magical thinking does not necessarily mean that it is false, or imaginary, or wrong-headed. Some aspects of the world are so complex or unknown that a 1stPP approach is the best one can do to have it make any sense at all. Some things may actually exist in a meta-physical realm that is in between subjective and objective, or neither subjective nor objective, and thus not be amenable to the developmentally later 3rdPP modes of reason and validation. "Magic(k)" could be real, but if so we understand practically nothing about how it works. Some draw specious connections from magical worldviews to scientific worldviews, e.g. through quantum mechanics or n-dimensional space-time, but at bottom these are still merely metaphorical appropriations of empirical science, not actual science (except for conclusions drawn through rigorous scientific methods).

The more sophisticated 3rdPP modes of reason tend to be more accurate, produce more reliable results, and allow for more stability of agreement, but they can also be experienced as dry and lifeless if the magical level of consciousness is disregarded. Raw intellect can also produce self-centered, materialistic, and ethically flawed reasoning. One may choose to "re-enchant" one's experience and understanding by incorporating some magical thinking, which gives access to emotional vitality, sensory vibrancy, and a visceral sense of communion. But, ideally, one can at least try to be aware of when one is accessing magical thinking, and make "rational" choices about when to do so.
**Mythical thinking (2ndPP).** What some call *mythical* thinking, an aspect of 2ndPP, follows magical thinking developmentally. Each level rests on increasing complexity vs. the prior level. Magical thinking is about the apperception of "what is," i.e. recognizing objects and their properties; and establishing simple associative connections between them, often with strong emotional overtones (e.g. clown $\rightarrow$ scary). Mythical thinking includes *directional* associations and *chains* of associations, which allow for constructing narratives and procedures, and understanding causation. Here the child, or the primitive culture, inhabits a social world organized around norms, rules, laws, goals, stories, and myths that are handed down from authorities or handed across from peers. Mythical thinking signals a move from "what is" in the moment into the why/how/when of narrative structures that explicitly consider past and/or future. At 2ndPP the answers to why/how/when are usually given rather than discovered or invented (as doing so usually demonstrates a 3rdPP).

As alluded to earlier, mythical thinking, perhaps better called the story-telling action logic, is the primary level for day-to-day social and personal meaning making. Though the meaning of a situation or idea is in part related to the "What are the objects and their properties?" of the magical level, meaning is usually understood in terms of the "Why/how/when/who?" of (2ndPP) narratives. 2ndPP includes the "dramatic" elements of assigning blame/praise, dominance/submission, success/failure, hero/villain, etc. to characters and roles in real and imagined scenarios. Narratives fashion a coherent whole from their elements, usually through a structured arc such as beginning-middle-conclusion.

1stPP operates through impulse and gut feeling, while at 2ndPP adequate understanding includes causes and reasons – even if these do not hold up to 3rdPP standards of validity because they are taken from authority figures, sacred texts, or social norms.

Though magical thinking is associated with children and primitive cultures, mythical thinking underlies much of today's (conventional) culture and society. Religions, bureaucracies, and socio-political identities are based primarily on hierarchical authority structures, stable systems of rules and norms, and shared stories.

**Rational thinking (3rdPP).** Rational thinking is the next developmental phase. Here thinking becomes not only more abstract and creative, but also more "formal." In part, this means that the validity of a claim or idea can depend more on its *form* than its content. Ideas are justified based on the *method* used to derive them. Mathematical proofs and engineering design methods rely on following valid methods – if a valid method is followed then we tend to trust the outcome, even if the outcome is surprising and non-conventional. We focus on *how* someone arrives at a conclusion, not *what* the conclusion is. The quintessential example is the "scientific method" for arriving at truths through reliable, replicable, observations, within which logically or mathematically rigorous methods are applied.

Here we can note another sense of "formal" reasoning: the sense of being somewhat impersonal and standardized or universal, as in "formal" speech or attire. Rational thinking includes the ability to consider what *any/all* reasonable persons would conclude, given the same information. Formal reasoning appeals not to a specific authority figure but to the impersonal generalized rational human (an abstraction).
In rational thinking one escapes from the confines of convention and norms based on the past. With a heightened sense of autonomy one imagines new possibilities and strives toward the highest, deepest, largest, most productive, or most original achievement that is practically reachable. The products of rational thinking create a world full of ever more unique and diverse objects, people, and phenomena. At the same time, 3rdPP can have difficulty making sense of, or building theories of, aspects of reality that cannot be empirically measured or that do not fit well into discrete categories. At "post-rational" (or "post-formal", 4thPP) thinking, one begins to see the drawbacks of the rational mind, but that is skipping ahead in our story.

The interplay of action logics. In our exploration of post-metaphysical thinking we want to develop sensitivity to the action logic being used in any moment: magical, mythical, or rational (or locate action logics along a more refined developmental spectrum). This is because answering the questions "Is it real?" or "Is it true?" depends on the mode of reasoning one chooses to apply. We move among these modes fluidly without being aware of it. In addition each mode does not so much replace the prior, but builds upon it organically. Though we may have well-developed rational thinking, we apply it in surprisingly little of our day. As indicated above, most of the time we rely on existing habits, conventions, and our trust in others – from 2ndPP. One may have an understanding and appreciation of rational thinking, but still blithely follow the conclusions of trusted scientists, engineers, journalists, etc. Who has the time or capacity to cross-check all the knowledge one consumes? So we can make a distinction between one's thinking capacity to use 3rdPP as needed, vs. one's operating mode of thought in the moment, which, much of the time, need not exert the extra effort to engage the expensive rational cognitive functions.

For example, consider the scientist. A successful scientist will use 3rdPP rational thinking to formally validate her and others’ experiments and conclusions; and to creatively explore novel territory. Her rational scientific thinking depends upon a community of the adequate being able to repeat and verify claims following established methods. But the very ability to form a stable community, or hold to established methods relies on a foundation of individual and cultural capacities at the mythical/conventional/story-telling 2ndPP. Her trust in a scientific community, as opposed to, say, a religious one, comes from some appreciation of the scientific method, so in one sense that trust comes as much from an early 3rdPP as from the 2ndPP (remember that the action logics are general categories describing average correlations within complex human behaviors – they have no exact definition or delineations). Through her mythical thinking she feels herself to be a devoted and valuable member of a research community carrying forward in a historical lineage of inquiry that benefits mankind. The scientist can also access a feeling of awe and reverence for the natural world through her magical thinking.

Each action logic operates under its own rules. The scientist does not use formal logic or run experiments (3rdPP methods) to "prove" that she should: use established methods; trust her colleagues; or allow her sense of awe and reverence for nature to motivate her pursuit of science. These choices are primarily based on 1stPP or 2ndPP action logics. The scientific endeavor can become warped or pernicious if it is undertaken purely by the rational mind in the absence of (i.e. in denial or suppression of) earlier levels of consciousness. A scientist, or a technology company, that is not grounded in identifying with and contributing to a community or and has no reverence for the miracles that constitute our world, is a potential threat to all.
A psychologically healthy and ethically congruent 3rdPP orientation naturally includes (i.e. does not exclude) positive elements of 1stPP and 2ndPP action logics. And it is at 4thPP that one can understand the importance that such a balance brings, and consciously reflect on the developmental mode(s) of reasoning that one uses. 4thPP advances and rectifies the scientific process (or any 3rdPP mode) by understanding its limitations within different contexts. Kegan describes developmental progress in terms of subject-to-object shifts: 4thPP is a move from living and working within the scientific paradigm (or any 3rdPP worldview) to seeing science as a paradigm, or as a limited tool that one chooses when to use.

4thPP and the counter-cultural moment. Habermas' definition of post-metaphysical thinking includes not only a more reflective awareness of knowledge and belief (which we could call meta-knowledge), but also a more reflective awareness of feeling – a deeper empathy and self-empathy that senses the motivational and affective qualities of the life-world (we could call this meta-feeling). Post-metaphysical thinking constitutes an increase in the depth as well as the complexity of thought, where here "depth" points to wisdom about the human condition that is grounded in self-understanding. It is a move beyond the purely logical and efficient search for truths and achievements that characterize 3rdPP worldviews, into a more holistic appreciation of the complexities, interdependencies, fallibilities, and vulnerabilities of human endeavors. One sees how knowledge – even scientific knowledge – is shaped by human interests, cognitive biases, identity affiliations, and power dynamics.

The capacities inferred within Habermas' description of post-metaphysical thinking correspond very well with the capacities that developmental psychology describes as 4th Person Perspective. Though we may often use 4thPP and post-metaphysical thinking synonymously in this text, more technically, 4thPP points to the many changes in consciousness observed as one moves beyond 3rdPP, whereas post-metaphysical thinking refers to the subset of those emerging capacities related to how one understands knowledge, belief, and truth (i.e. the reflective meaning-making functions of the 4thPP mind).

Whereas 3rdPP can see the flaws in mythical and magical belief systems, such as literal interpretations of sacred texts, 4thPP can sense the fallibilities in all belief systems. At 4thPP one is aware of the limits of logic and abstraction (3rdPP), and sees the need to integrate the earlier developmental capacities of 1stPP and 2ndPP, which, for most in modern cultures, have been partially repressed or disowned. Psychologically, at 4thPP one desires to make transparent, and integrate, all aspects of the self. Culturally, this corresponds to the desire to become more intimate with all humans, regardless of status or identity.

What we might glibly call "spiritual thinking" can occur at any developmental level, since "questions of ultimate concern" seem eternally relevant. Clearly, the cultural reproduction of traditional religious beliefs is a manifestation of mythical/conventional (2ndPP) thinking. At 3rdPP one might reject religion altogether, but alternatively one might discover ways to maintain the benefits of social solidarity and an ethically-driven life that is found in religious communities, while abandoning distasteful mythic and magical literalism and allowing for more self-determination.
The emergence of 4thPP more widely within culture corresponds to the "consciousness expanding" trends of the New Age, progressive counter-culture, post-modern, and Cultural Creative movements of the mid-20th century. The "spiritual but not religious" sensibility can thus be characterized in terms of a development from 3rdPP into 4thPP in individuals and cultures. Within its critique of modernity is a calling for more emotional and "spiritual" vibrancy in life. This call for a deeper sense of meaning in life includes a desire for more intimacy with, and response-ability for, oneself, others, and the natural world. 4thPP can motivate a recovery and integration of magical (and to some extent mythical) thinking — to re-enchant the life-world, activate the "imaginal" mind and the sense of the sacred, as well as deepen consciousness into a holism that frees repressed and suppressed layers of the self.

The upshift from any developmental worldview to the next can be accompanied by a strong critique, backlash, or push-away from the prior level. Ideally the positive aspects of what is pushed away are eventually re-integrated, but some frustrations within contemporary spirituality can be traced to the lack of such re-integration. The transition to 4thPP often comes with a critique or outright rejection of some of the products of modernism, including scientific materialism, logical "positivist" thinking, capitalism, and hegemonic and extractive accumulations of power and resources. But the scaffolding that grounds life pragmatically, such as values for logical thinking, material needs, and valid authorities, can become as babies cast out with the dirty bathwater of modernity.

In the STAGES developmental theory the action logic levels roughly alternate between individual-focused and collective-focused. 1stPP is a self-oriented concrete stage, while 2ndPP includes the concrete skills of socialization (i.e. collectives). 3rdPP adds formal reasoning and abstraction skills, which is relatively oriented to individualized skills.

At 4thPP one develops skills in understanding systems, flows, trends, and constellations of ideas (i.e. collectives of abstractions, as opposed to 2ndPP concrete collectives). Topics such as systemic bias and racism, global/cultural "worldview" development, knowledge building communities; and methodologies for dialog, decision-making, and conflict resolution, move into to the foreground. Working with emergent collectives of abstractions (ideas) is necessarily more complex than thinking about individual ideas (or simple idea hierarchies or well-structured models).

When one enters into this territory one is, more forcefully than ever, confronted with the reality of alternative and conflicting perspectives, and sees that (3rdPP) rationality alone is not a sufficient vehicle for delivering truths sturdy enough to address many real problems. That is to say, that the post-rational critique or contextualizing of rationality itself does not "magically" or spontaneously arise at 4thPP — but rather it is a direct result of building the increased cognitive capacity to consider more complex constellations of ideas and perspectives.

It is within the 4thPP domain that modern forms of spirituality have formed (though of course entering a 4thPP does not require any particular "spiritual" focus). This re-emergence or re-invention of spirituality incorporated much from Eastern religions, and also tapped into contemplative, esoteric, and shamanistic aspects of all religious traditions. This brings us back to the metaphysical ideas illustrated in Exhibit A.
Because the integration of East and West, and the new levels of depth of consciousness being explored, is relatively new from a historical or anthropological perspective, we are still working out many of the "bugs" within post-modern forms of spirituality (i.e. approaches to "questions of ultimate concern"). We can identify two problems: (1) maintaining problematic forms of metaphysical thinking, including totalizing or foundational claims about ultimate or absolute realities and truths; and (2) the desire to re-incorporate magical thinking opens up possibilities for regression to earlier modes of thinking, rather than integrating them into higher forms of reason.

We will discuss the latter of these next, and return to the former in the succeeding section on "Mysticism and Logic."

**Dangers of re-visiting magical and mythical thinking.** Throughout this text we emphasize that more "primitive," i.e. developmentally earlier, action logics are critically important to a healthy psyche and a healthy culture; and that these earlier modes of thought are always active in one's consciousness, even if they are repressed or denied at the conscious level. But within 4thPP cultures there is often what Wilber calls a "pre-trans fallacy" in which a regression to earlier modes is confused with re-integrating of the earlier modes with higher modes.

This is complex territory but these issues are front and center in our culture's transition from 3rdPP to 4thPP, and for understanding contemporary spirituality; so we will take the time to explain three important principles.

(1) *Receptive vs. active phases.* We have so far mentioned but glossed over the fact that some developmental theories include early and late halves or stages of each person-perspective. O'Fallon's STAGES model in particular, separates 4thPP into levels 4.0 and 4.5. In the STAGES model the early (X.0) levels are passive or receptive in relationship to the new world of complexity and depth being opened up at that action logic; while the later (X.5) levels signify a more active engagement with, and more robust understanding of the new capacities. In this text the receptive/active refinement within each action logic is of minor importance for all levels except 4thPP. There is so much movement and turbulence in society at the 4thPP juncture that our discussion benefits from zooming in by an additional "click" and considering the difference between early and late 4thPP (Wilber and Beck call this interface the transition into "second tier," which is at 4.5 in our model).

We can frame the chaos and instability often seen in progressive cultural settings as early 4thPP (4.0) opening to a flood of new ideas, feelings, and values that have not yet been completely sorted out. Brand new powerful ideas can produce wide-eyed wonder, passionate but naive devotion, ideological aggression against the "old ways," and disorientation from an overwhelm of new objects that have not been ordered and prioritized. (For example, feeling distressed in deciding how to spread one's charity donation among the hundreds of progressive causes; or a leader becoming frozen when he needs to choose between the value of including everyone's voice and the value of protecting the vulnerable.) Its difficult to feel solidly "on one's feet," or gain a perspective on where one is at, when one first enters a new territory. As an idea moves from receptive to active modes we see it being better situated "in perspective," "in context," or "in proper proportion" to a wider world of practical considerations. It might take an individual many years, or a culture many generations, to transition from the early half of an action logic to the late half.
Fully achieving 4.5, for an individual or group, includes gaining experience using, tweaking, and coordinating 4.0's influx of new ideas, values, and awarenesses and becoming facile with them. It also includes re-integrating healthy elements of lower action logics that were pushed aside in the stretch from 3rdPP into 4thPP.

(2) Developmental spread in groups. We have said that a person who achieves any developmental level does not operate consistently at that level. Stressors and other factors can "downshift" cognition into earlier modes. In addition, many contexts do not require one's full capacity. Also, under special conditions, one can have "state experiences" that peak into stages later than the "center of gravity" of one's developmental maturity. Things get even more complicated when we use developmental levels to describe cultures (or groups).

Culturally, it requires a certain critical mass of human development to establish a stable self-replicating "groove" at any developmental level. It appears that for 4thPP this process began in the mid-20th century and, because 4thPP capacities are still maturing and spreading, the establishment of 4thPP culture is still in-process (though some scholars would say that there are stable manifestations of early 4thPP groups). Each succeeding developmental action logic supports a new set of value-orientations – for example 3rdPP ushered in values for scientific rigor, democratic decision making, and self-determination; while 4thPP is ushering in values of social justice, ecological sustainability, holism, and deep intimacy. The exact values that emerge at any level for any culture are not predetermined, but whatever emerges (if development progresses) is marked by increased complexity and depth.

The key point to be made here is that once a developmental groove, along with its values and idea "memes," is established within a culture, individuals from any developmental level might be attracted to the surface features of the new sub-culture. And this is what we find. It explains why, at a board meeting for Green Peace, a gathering at Occupy Wall Street, or at a Buddhist meditation retreat, one can find individuals who embody the mature 4thPP action logic, including a highly rational capacity for wise thought and well-integrated social-emotional skills; but we can also find individuals who were drawn in from other action logics. For example one may be drawn in through narcissistic authority-rebellion, pleasure-seeking, or magical thinking (1stPP); or to meet social solidarity or identity formation needs (2ndPP); or to cleverly exploit the credulous members of a group for personal gain (3rdPP). In sum, being in the, seemingly 4thPP, "spiritual but not religious" club of value-orientations does not guarantee that one is operating at any particular action logic.

(3) Mystical experiences and early developmental levels. As noted, the developmental or spiritual journey of life can include glimpses or stable experiences of profound states of oneness, emptiness, selflessness, expansiveness, and one-pointedness. These states are, understandably, associated with advanced levels of development, though Wilber and others have pointed out that one can have access to these sublime states from any developmental level. In the primary text on wisdom skills, I elaborate an argument that these states are better described in terms of one gaining access to developmentally lower (earlier) modes of being. In brief:

The new infant lives in a "booming buzzing" world of disorganized stimulus. Time, space, the stability of concrete objects, the sense of having a body, and the psychological ego are not yet constructed. This is a developmental phase prior to 1stPP magical thinking – we will call it 0thPP.
I propose that the sublime states associated with spirituality involve accessing modes of experience at 0thPP. At 0thPP "meaning-making" is about organizing perception, while 1stPP is about conception. Through technique, neurochemical manipulation, or bizarre strokes of luck, one who experiences sublime "spiritual" states has found a way to deconstruct, release, or slip underneath constructed mental structures in order to experience what awareness was like before the phenomena (space, time, ego, etc.) was ever constructed.

Clearly one does not (normally) completely regress to an earlier age, but the adult mind gains access to 0thPP though methods outlined above, and then interprets the experience according to one's established meaning-making habits. An experience of peeling away a primordial layer of conditioning (i.e. a construction) usually releases revelatory insights that can then be integrated in one's evolving wisdom. When foundational structure is loosened up or released, higher level structures (beliefs, etc.) that were built up assuming these structures can reorganize—sometimes very rapidly, in a flood of revelation.

One could make the argument that (a) having the motivation to search for these 0thPP experiences, (b) skillfully interpreting insights born of the experience, and/or (c) achieving reliable access to these states – all require relatively high levels of development. All of these things help explain why sublime spiritual or "peak" experiences are associated with advanced spiritual achievements. But it is important to also acknowledge that they first source from the lower OthPP level.

The three phenomena noted above: (1) the receptive and unsteady nature of early 4thPP, (2) the fact that pre-4thPP action logics can be attracted to 4thPP, and (3) the idea that mystical experiences tap into lower, not higher, developmental capacities – each leads to some problematic possibilities in spiritual thinking, spiritual seeking, and spiritual practice for the "spiritual but not religious" culture. I will briefly describe some of these problems, because we cannot avoid them if we cannot sense them.

Entering into mythical and magical mind usually involves putting oneself (or part of oneself) into a receptive quasi-childlike state. In such a state, especially when people do this in groups, one sets aside or attenuates rational and critical thought processes and the strongly individuated self. One thus opens oneself, not only to psychological healing and spiritual nourishment, but also to being controlled or manipulated by others. One is not only more open to love and wonder, but is more vulnerable to becoming overwhelmed and confused. One may have greater access to "collective intelligence" and creative thinking, but is also more vulnerable to herd mentality and collective stupidity. With the rational mind suspended, one might more easily enjoy bliss, but when conflicts arise one may be less skilled in perspective taking dialogue, and imagining alternatives.

Lower level action logics are more naive socially, less skilled ethically, more self-centered, and more impulsive. The magical mind is magical in all of it positive connotations, but it is also weak in differentiating interior from exterior, and more likely to involuntarily project biases and shadows upon others. From within the magical layer of consciousness we are more likely to project perfection and majesty onto our teachers and guides. Cognition is more black-and-white and we are more impulsively attracted to the sparkling, the alluring, the charismatic, the awe-some.
In sum, entering into these realms can be disorienting and even dangerous if one does not simultaneously tend the pilot lights of reason in the background (3rdPP or 4thPP mind). My goal here is not to strike fear into the hearts of spiritual seekers. The risks I am pointing to are not horrible traps lurking around the dark corners of spiritual practice; they are usually the minor problems that the reader has no doubt already witnessed within oneself and in acquaintances. As our focus is on post-metaphysical thinking, the primary take-away is this: as and when spiritual thinking accesses magical and mythical action logics, it opens up to both the gifts and the dangers of these more primitive levels of consciousness, and, in particular for our inquiry, one opens oneself to pre-rational modes of believing and sense-making.

It is not simply a matter of ensuring that one maintains robust rationality while exploring magical consciousness, because it seems that to engage in the exploration one must create safe spaces where one can actually put aside doubt, the critical mind, defenses, and vigilant surveillance. One must actually travel into that territory to bring back its gifts. Aside from the practical matters of making sure the journey is safe, which is outside of our scope, what we are concerned about here is how those gifts are interpreted once brought home. For example, ideally one can reflectively differentiate and move skillfully between magical mind and rational mind as one assimilates and disseminates these gifts – whether they are retrieved through one's own magical journey, or received from a teacher sourcing their journey.

**Mysticism and Logic**

We bring our attention again to the metaphysical quotes in Exhibit A at the beginning of this text. In doing so we shift from day-to-day meaning-making conversations and the ideas that we adopt and adapt from mystics, sages, and philosophers, to the experiences of those mystics, sages, and philosophers – and how they communicate their insights. Or, a bit more mundanely, we turn to how anyone tries to make meaning and convey ideas plumbed from a radically deep encounter with What-Is – the territory of mystical experiences and revelations. As we will see, the mystical thinking implies a more sophisticated and abstract experience than magical thinking by itself.

In *Mysticism and Logic* Bertrand Russell describes metaphysics as "the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought" (Russell, 1917, p. 6). He says that metaphysical claims are based on a mixture of two distinct impulses: the mystical and the scientific. He notes how scholars often lean strongly in one or the other of these directions, while those in the middle struggle to reconcile these two impulses. Russell says that the "great philosophers" achieve an "intimate blending" of the two, a union that is "the highest eminence...that it is possible to achieve in the world of thought" (he offers Heraclitus and Plato as examples).

Russell describes several common characteristics of mystical knowledge in comparison with other types of knowledge and philosophical ideas, which I summarize as follows:

- **Intensity**: Mysticism has "a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe." It has a sense of "certainty and revelation." Though it sometimes uses logic to justify beliefs, the claims seem to come from "a way of wisdom, sudden, penetrating, coercive, which is contrasted with the slow and fallible [process of scientific reasoning]."

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− **Insight and ineffability:** Mystics are attempting "an articulation upon the inarticulate experience gained in the moment of [insight or intuition]."

− **Introspective revelation:** There is a "sense of a mystery unveiled [and] revelation" of "a reality behind the world of appearances and utterly different from it." Truth and essence is found through profound introspective thought, not through sense experience.

− **Poetic:** Mysticism can be expressed in deeply poignant, poetic, or metaphorical prose.

− **Paradoxes:** It often plays with opposites and paradox, pointing beyond them to knowledge that resolves or harmonizes them (as in Heraclitus' "Good and ill are one.").

− **Universals:** It often deals with universals, infinites, essences, or foundational truths.

− **Unity and ultimate reality:** There is a common "belief in unity, and its refusal to admit opposition or division anywhere" – that "reality is one and indivisible." There is also commonly a belief that reality, or ultimate reality, is beyond time and space. This relates to the above-mentioned resolution of polarities, as past, present, and future become one.

These qualities are quite evident in the quotes in Exhibit A. Russell argues that, though the merging of the mystical and the scientific is a great achievement, it is difficult to do well, and poses a number of dangers. One danger is a tendency for the passion of the mystic to conflate "the good with the truly real" (i.e. conflate fact with value, which he claims Classical philosophers do all too often). Aristotle, for example said "earth and sun seek their proper path in the sky" – conflating science with a metaphysical implication that a higher purpose governs physical reality.

A second danger is that those who "are capable of absorption in an inward passion" can experience "the loss of contact with daily things [and] common objects." Some have held that a radical commitment to formal practices or renunciate lifestyle opens up a privileged access to sublime truths. An ability to think free of enculturated beliefs is a key component of inspiration and creativity, but distancing oneself from ordinary culture can also leave one trapped in a private world of ideas, drunk on an elixir of certainty, and unable or uninterested in coordinating with others' perspectives.

We can see from the previous sections that Russell is pointing to the ways that scholarly thinkers combine magical thinking, mythical thinking, and scientific thinking (1stPP, 2ndPP, and 3rdPP) – action logics or "language games" that each has its own rules of engagement and validation. (Russell wrote too early to have access to the theories of developmental actions logics that we understand today.) For example, Plato combined magical and scientific thinking in his attribution of an intelligence or intention upon the motion of the planets.

Russell describes a second, but related, mode of metaphysical thinking that relies on logic alone, without the necessity of authentic mystical experience, to flesh out abstract metaphysical ideas. Using our developmental frame we can describe this as the use of highly abstract concepts and formal logic, which come online at 3rdPP, but without a grounding in the scientific method that requires repeatable empirical methods and social validation through democratic peer critique (we could say that this logical but pre-scientific mode is a late 2ndPP or early 3rdPP mode of reasoning).

For example, theologians, whose cultural surround did not allow them to escape from magical and mythical thinking, offered numerous arguments "proving" the existence of God and deriving
the properties of divinity (Davidson, 1987; e.g. St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*). Russell describes a strain of thought, woven from Parmenides to Hegel and his disciples, that grounds mysticism in logic and abstraction. This strain describes reality as having an essentially "uncreated, indestructible, unchanging, indivisible" nature that is beyond time and space. Russell says that "logic used in the defense of mysticism seems to be faulty as logic [and renders such] philosophers incapable of giving any account of the world of science and daily life" (p. 15).

Even today there are many intellectuals who tread on similarly tenuous ground – confounding scientific reasoning and metaphysical reasoning. For example: theories about "consciousness" using quantum mechanics; and more extreme versions of the "anthropic principle" that reference the enigmatically improbable fundamental properties of the cosmos that allow matter and life to exist. Though this type of reasoning continues today, the "post-metaphysical turn" and the "embodiment turn" in philosophical thinking make it increasingly dubious to use logic and abstraction alone to make objective claims about the nature, origin, and purpose of the universe as a totality.

Yet, using formal logic but staying within the language game of 2ndPP, one can make valid arguments, i.e. *meaning-generative narratives*, about metaphysical phenomena. This is acceptable if the object of inquiry is explicitly outside the bounds of objective physical observation and measurement (that is to say, not merely subjective, but meta-physical). In fact, many of the "questions of ultimate concern" addressed by religion and spirituality may never be answerable objectively. But they can still be approached with post-metaphysical sensibility by, as we suggest in various ways in this text, including a humble acknowledgment of the limitations of the language game of whatever action logic is used.³

Along similar lines, in *Mysticism and Logic* Russell concludes that "while fully developed mysticism seems to me [a mistaken outcome of the emotions], I yet believe that by sufficient restraint, there is an element of wisdom to be learned by the mystical way of *feeling*, which does not seem to be attainable in any other manner [and which is] to be commended as an *attitude* toward life, not as a creed about the world" (p. 12; emphasis added).

**Metaphysical Thinking and Action Logics**

The 3rdPP action logic has several components, which are understood to usually arise in concert, i.e. in a coordinated way, but can also each develop along its own trajectory. In particular we can note abstract thinking and critical thinking – two main capacities of 3rdPP – can develop quasi-separately. For our purposes we will relate critical thinking to logical thinking and scientific thinking. These three capacities allow for a critique of 2ndPP dogmatic and authoritarian modes of reason; and they support autonomous belief-formation beyond conventional beliefs. *Abstract* thinking relates more to capacities of the imagination – allowing one to consider generalities and hypothetical objects, possibilities, and worlds that are not tied to concrete realities. The two are tied together; for example, "formal operational thinking" requires both abstractions and logical mental operations. But it is also true that critical and scientific thinking can become very

³ We should note that, contrary to the efforts of philosophers such as Popper, there is no clearly definable boundary for what claims or questions fall within the scientific method – but that does not diminish the need for epistemic humility.
sophisticated without *necessarily* being very abstract, and conversely, central to our conversation about metaphysical thought, abstract thinking can become very abstract without being tied to the empirical validation associated with critical and scientific thinking.

Let's look at abstraction more closely. Magical thinking (1stPP) is concrete in that it deals with objects-at-hand, whether real or imagined. Mythical thinking (2ndPP) is a bit more abstract, in that a story or narrative structure abstracts from particulars to create generalities. A narrative broadens the particular to a hypothetical or *generalized* time and place. Narratives also assemble a collection of concrete instances into a unified, though more abstract, whole.

*Metaphysical* thinking signals a movement into a fuller abstraction at 3rdPP. This may seem contradictory since it would appear that 3rdPP scientific and critical thinking expose and reject the magical/mythical aspects metaphysical thinking. But this is not necessarily the case, in part because, as mentioned above, abstract thinking can develop separately from empirical/logical scientific thinking. In metaphysical thinking the objects of thought are abstracted, not only beyond *particular* times and places, but also beyond *any/all* time and space. This is what characterizes the meta-physical realm – that it is beyond time and space, the dimensions that structure concrete reality. This allows for an even higher level of unification, or a deeper claim to foundations and essences, vs. narrative structures. As Russell says, this is an "attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought" with a "belief in unity [in which] reality is one and indivisible."

Habermas, in describing metaphysical thinking, says that “The One and the Many’, unity and plurality, designates the theme that has governed metaphysics from its inception [as far back as Plato]” (Habermas, 1992, p. 115). Metaphysical thinking privileges unity, the One – the Identity through which the diversity of the world can be reduced. Javier Aguirre notes that "Metaphysics responds...by tracing the plurality of beings back to one single and unique element...[it]...unites all innerworldly things and events as determinate and concrete parts of a totality" (2012, p. 23). In spiritual discourse this totality has taken many forms, including: God, Ground of Being, Emptiness, omnipresent Consciousness, The Good, Nature, First Mover, the Unconditioned, and Absolute Spirit.

In metaphysical thinking (3rdPP) the general-but-concrete elements of the narrative (2ndPP) structure "are removed from the dimensions of space and time, and abstracted into something first which, as the infinite, stands over and against the world of the finite and forms its basis” (Habermas, 1992, p. 45). Such unifying abstractions are placed in a domain sometimes thought of as the universal Mind, or into a non-substantial realm of perfect ideas or Ideals (as in Plato's supra-sensible hyper-real realm of Forms just outside the "cave" or ordinary reality). Aguirre, summarizing Habermas, concludes that metaphysics is "the doctrine of ideas that equates being with thought" (emphasis added).

Post-metaphysics includes and transcends the concerns of post-modern philosophers of the mid-20th century, who deconstructed essentialist, foundational, absolutizing, totalizing, and universalizing language and ideas – which were understood to usher in ideological belief systems, grandiosity, and "repressive metaphysical projections." It signals a move into 4thPP, which can take a reflective perspective on 3rdPP modalities.
Our discussion is not meant to imply that those quoted in Exhibit A are "at" and particular developmental level—indeed, these spiritual teachers, as observed in various contexts, seem to be operating well above 4thPP, and to deeply understand both the 3rdPP scientific method and 4thPP critique of science and reason.

People have access to a range of developmental levels, though they tend to operate from a particular stable "center of gravity." When one achieves any higher action logic, one can make use of lower action logics—usually unreflectively, but sometimes intentionally. Wilber maps out a related developmental sequence of mystical "states." His "nature mysticism" corresponds roughly to 1stPP, "deity mysticism" to 2ndPP, "formless mysticism" to 3rdPP/4thPP, and "Nondual Isness" to yet higher stages (Wilber, 1996). His Wilber-Combs Lattice model (Wilber, 2006) illustrates that, theoretically, a person centered at any developmental stage can visit a range of mystical states, which is compatible with our notion that, for example, modern individuals can revisit the magical strata of their consciousness, and can also have a peak experience rising above their developmental center of gravity.

To summarize, Mystical thinking (or perception) can occur within either 2ndPP or 3rdPP (or later levels). As it is based in experience, it is grounded in the 1stPP cognitive layers that can metabolize raw experience to produce emotion-infused objects of awareness and feelings of awe, wonder, unity, and luminosity (as well as terror, hate, etc.). If thought stops at the level of experience, without trying to "make meaning" of them, we would call it a 1stPP action logic. If mystical experience produces mythologies, concrete narratives, and rules, then it is bound to 2ndPP action logics. If mystical experience produces absolutes and radical abstractions, as in the case of the quotes in Exhibit A and the mysticism discussed by Russell, then it is making use of 3rdPP action logics—a type of 3rdPP thinking that is not beholden to the empirical demands of scientific thinking. At 4thPP and above one understands the limits of abstraction and purely logical thinking, and appreciates more embodied orientations to consciousness.

All of this helps to contextualize the metaphysical statements in Exhibit A, and avoid some of the pitfalls of overcommitting to such language. But we don't yet have the linguistic resources to describe the wisdom they point to or come from in satisfying post-metaphysical language. As Western cultures assimilate the ancient Eastern spiritual "wisdom traditions," we have not yet developed a common vocabulary or conceptual framework that allows the sages quoted in Exhibit A to escape from the uncritically metaphysical foundations that they inherited from pre-modern traditions. That is, we have only begun to imagine truly post-metaphysical (4thPP and higher) forms of spirituality.

**Interlude: Three Historical Arcs**

To deepen our exploration of post-metaphysical thinking we will step back and situate it within historical arcs. Post-metaphysics includes a deeper appreciation of the limitations of human thought and reason—a deeper understanding of how the mind misleads one in the search for the true and the good. I will propose three narratives as partial truths that show how historical trends have brought us to a moment in history when post-metaphysical thinking is crucial, possible, and perhaps inevitable. These brief narratives are gross simplifications of ideas that are developed as well as critiqued in the scholarly literature, and I include them here only to suggest a context for
our investigation of, and advocacy for, post-metaphysical thinking. At the end of this chapter in the side-bar "Deepen Dive: Stories of Recapitulation" we include an additional set of mini-stories that puts our developmental model of human wisdom in another panoptic perspective.

(1) The Rise and Decline of Rationality

Narrative Arc #1 illustrates the unfolding story of human rationality as simultaneously a historical liberator and a looming menace. First, and most obviously, the faculty of Reason, associated with the scientific method and technological innovation, has birthed technical and scientific knowledge that has led to breathtaking advances that have alleviated many sources of suffering for much of humanity. What began as an effort to defend ourselves against the perilous forces of nature, for example with the inventions of fire, shelter, spears, and farming, increasingly became a project for controlling nature, bending it to our will. The resulting advances are undeniable today, as evidenced by, for example, the miracles of smart phones and social media, and overall increases in human lifespan and material wealth (Pinker, 2011). Also, the so-called Age of Reason (or Age of Enlightenment) in the 17th and 18th centuries included the development of democratic ideals and a belief in the autonomy and sovereignty of the individual as emancipatory forces against oppressive institutions and religions. The fruits of Reason have been substantial.

But second, and obvious to many but not all of us, humanity also faces new and unprecedented challenges, including weapons of mass destruction, climate change, species extinction, both famine and obesity, terrorism, and increasing rates of suicide and depression – most or all of which can be directly or indirectly blamed on the “progresses” that human Reason has wrought. Developmental theories of cultural change note that it is a perennial fact that each generation of "solutions" to human problems ushers in new challenges to be contended with (for example, the invention of money alleviated problems in the fluid exchange of value, but created quandaries related to debt). This has always been the case, but our historical moment presents a unique predicament.

The predicament is that, whereas once it might have been true that the challenges humans faced were mostly imposed upon them by nature, in modern times we have tamed, "mastered," or dominated nature to a great extent, and most of our current problems can be traced to human decisions, and thus linked to the nature of human reason and the workings of the mind. Thus, any project intending to steer humanity into a desirable future must focus on understanding the workings of the mind, i.e. understanding the nature and limitations of thinking, decision-making, affect, perception, etc. – in short understanding human nature.

Our geological epoch has been called the Anthropocene, a period in which human activity is the dominant force determining the future of the entire planet (Latour, 2014). It seems clear that continuing to only understand and control the exterior world will not save us from self-ruination – we must, as a species and as individuals – better understand ourselves.

Some might say that the global necessity to increase in self-understanding entails an amplification of the faculties of Reason, because it is ignorance, dogma, emotional impulsiveness, group-think, and irrationality that are at fault. Yet we can see that increases in raw intelligence,
technical knowledge, and mental complexity are just as likely to produce tragedy as wisdom. Others might say that it is care and compassion that are missing from the big picture – that a simple strengthening of the heart will counteract the defects of rationality ("all you need is love"). Yet the problems we face are too complex to be addressed by love alone, which can, by itself, be both blind and stupid (as in Trungpa's "idiot compassion" (2002)).

The developmental approach offers more nuance. While 3rdPP rationality can understand and tame irrational "passions," it also seems to have cast out many gifts of 1stPP and 2ndPP consciousness. It is at the 4thPP (a post-rational or trans-rational phase) that the limits of reason are seen through and the importance of integrating lower levels, including the genius of the unconscious, is deeply appreciated. 4thPP includes the "post-rational" (or meta-rational or trans-rational) ability to evaluate rationality (i.e. logic, abstraction, the scientific method, etc.) itself and choose when and how to use it.

4thPP (and beyond) marks the realm of post-metaphysical thinking. In sum, we have reached a time when it is critically important that we understand more about the human mind, and that includes a post-rational understanding of the limits (and appropriate uses) of rationality. Here are two quotes that underline this theme – that humanity needs, not only new ideas and knowledge, but a new relationship to our ideas and knowledge:

*Albert Einstein:* "the significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

*David Bohm:* "underneath [humanity's dilemmas] there's something we don't understand about how thought works [and what is needed is a] very deep [and] very subtle awareness of thought itself."

Jean Gebser (1985), a pioneer in devising developmental theories that apply to both individuals and cultures, used the term "mental structure" for our 3rdPP. He claimed that modern society exhibited a "deficient" form of the mental structures of consciousness because it rejects too much of the prior mythical and magical structures, resulting in the modern problems of isolation, alienation, and existential fear.

To return to our theme of spirituality: clearly the move into 3rdPP relates to humanity's partial outgrowing of simplistic religious dogmas and authority structures. The downsides of 3rdPP "progress" have inspired "Romantic" philosophical counter-movements that involve humanistic and "spiritual" intuitions about the essential roles of love, humility, service, simplicity, and creative expression for human thriving. Even when a tentative balance between the scientific and the romantic are found, for example in contemporary or New Age spiritual narratives, there is too often a problematic sense of certainty about ultimate realities (as in the mystical thinking described by Russell). This cannot escape from the critical weight of the post-metaphysical "turn" that questions metaphysical thinking. Thus, any sustainable believable spirituality (or religion) of the future must incorporate what we are learning about the limitations of human thought and belief at 4thPP.
(2) A Brief History of Belief Fallibility

Our second historical narrative arc illustrates how many of the limitations of reason have already been mapped out in detail. A post-metaphysical attitude includes an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (Lyotard, 1979, xxiv) – i.e. a deep suspicion of grand ideas that seem to take a completely objective "view from nowhere" as if the individual making the proclamation could see the world clearly, free from personal or cultural bias (see Nagel, 1986).

Though this "incredulity" has been taken too far by some, into a cynical wholesale suspicion of rationality and a rejection of quests for the truth, post-metaphysics takes a more tempered approach. It acknowledges the fallibilities of logical thought and abstract ideas, while noting that robust relationships and societies require reason, dialogue, shared "stories," and leaps of the imagination into abstract ideas. Through the capacity of negative capability one can move from a stark "incredulity" toward metanarratives to a healthy "suspicion" of them – that allows them to be used cautiously.

What follows is our second narrative or arc, a "Brief History of Belief Fallibility," in which we discern a historical progression in uncovering multiple layers of indeterminacy in reason. This trend situates us at a moment ripe for a new humility – a generalized critique of over-confidence (think again about the metaphysical claims in Exhibit A). It roughly orders the sources of fallibility from the easier to apprehend to the more difficult. Following suit with the rest of the text, this argument takes the form of a quasi-developmental sequence.

Since Antiquity sages have pondered the nature of knowledge – asking how we can know what is true. A consistent thread in Western philosophy, from the ancients up to the Modern period, placed a high value on Reason, and assumed that the mind, through logic and refined imagination, could discover pure, universal, transcendent truths.

The above-mentioned Age of Enlightenment (or Age of Reason) included the development of the scientific method and democratic ideals – rationality and formal reasoning methods were valorized and refined. The era was motivated by a deeper understanding of the problematic influences of emotion, bias, and ideology on belief and knowledge. Reason, including appeals to logic and empirical data, were found to be superior foundations for belief and social progress, as opposed to appeals to authority, passion, intuition, dogma, or common knowledge, which dominated earlier world-views. (This trend can be traced back to the Classical period of ancient Greece, which temporarily lost momentum during the intervening Dark Ages, according to orthodox historical interpretations).

During this period there was an ongoing philosophical battle (which persists today in some corners of philosophy) between those who thought reason should be based on sense experience (roughly speaking, the Realists and Empiricists) vs. those who believed that logic and "pure reason" was paramount (roughly speaking, the Idealists and Rationalists). The former emphasized the fallibilities of reason, pointing to how reason can involve bias, contradictions, and beliefs not borne out in reality. The latter emphasized the fallibilities of sense data, pointing to how the senses can mislead and err, including sensory illusions and the imperfections of measurement.
Immanuel Kant is known as the first to reconcile (though incompletely) these disparities, by noting how both perception and logic were indeed fallible; and that universal underlying structures of thought systematically distort and set limits upon both experience and reason (these structures include how the mind conceives of time, space, sequence, and causality). The emerging scientific method itself, seemed to include a perfect balance of perceptual and rational faculties (though it was not applicable to all domains).

It seemed for a brief moment that Reason, as a dialectic between logic and sense-data, could thus be saved. But philosophers from the Romantic tradition (and later the Existentialists), valuing emotion and intuition, continued to point out how reason alone was an insufficient and impoverished tool for addressing the deeper issues of life. They noted how scientific materialism had created various social and existential ills. Though one can note a dialectic of alternating corrective swings between rational/positivist and romantic/intuitivist trends, scientific rationalism always won the day (in the West), spurned in each generation by new technological advancements.

The narrative so far marks the height of Modernist thinking (though "modernism" continued to advance in terms of its products). It maps the conquering of the 3rdPP worldview over earlier worldviews (1stPP and 2ndPP). Reason was understood to overcome the problematic influences of emotion, intuition, and dogma – i.e. magical and mythical thinking. But then, as Reason was increasingly turned back upon itself, its majestic stronghold began to relentlessly deteriorate.

Early on came Charles Darwin (1809-1882), whose theories of evolution exposed reason as – not a transcendent or pure capacity – but a practical and somewhat arbitrary set of cognitive tools cobbled together over eons as animals evolved to meet the changing demands of survival and reproduction. In the god-less world of evolution, how could such a process produce a "pure" intellect able to find ultimate truths? The – from the eyes of scientific materialism – horrific slide from modernism toward post-modernism had begun. (Not to mention the irreparable shocks to religious fundamentalism.)

Then came Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who exposed the unconscious and its unsavory and unavoidable influences on reason and belief. He showed us that behavior, cogitation, and belief exist at the tip of a cognitive iceberg, grossly influenced by a deep dark mass of complex and conflicting processes that one cannot be aware of, never mind control. This notion is such a radical insight that, to this day, even most who intellectually believe that it explains human nature do not experience themselves as harboring a vast invisible sub-mind.

Meanwhile, even in analytic philosophy, mathematics, and computational theory, the three bastions of Pure Reason, hard limits on reason were definitively proven. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, Tarski's Indefinability Theorem, and Turing's Halting Thesis, in various ways, proved that any complex system of logical statements (or beliefs) contains contradictions, i.e. is illogical (Hofstadter, 1980). In addition physical scientists including Lorenz studying the "Butterfly effect" in chaos theory, Einstein studying the cosmological warping of space-time, and Heisenberg with his quantum "uncertainty principle," showed us how physical reality itself surpasses the mind's ability to grasp it in its entirety. It seemed that certainty was headed for certain demise.
Then, in the mid-20th century, a parade of postmodernists (and post-structuralists) including Derrida and Foucault, continued the dethroning and deconstructing of Reason by exquisitely showing (1) how it is deeply biased by invisible cultural norms and historical contingencies, and (2) how language and symbolic thought, the basis of knowledge production and reproduction, harbor grave indeterminacies and logical inconsistencies.

The final blows in the rumble to decenter Reason came from cognitive scientists in the late 20th century. Thousands of empirical studies have illustrated deep fallibilities in memory, perception, awareness/attention, rationality, and self-understanding, including a litany of "cognitive biases" describing the "bounded rationality" that even the most advanced scholars, intellects, and spiritual adepts are not immune to (e.g. see Kahneman et al., 1982; Ariely, 2008; Shermer, 2011; Sunstein, 2002; Simon, 1957). It is now incontrovertible that we construct beliefs about reality with great fallibility, i.e. we cannot perceive or deduce beliefs about reality with anything approaching complete "accuracy."

In the 21st century post-modern world we find ourselves struggling to cope with the implications of these revelations. The de-centering exposure of reason's fallibilities (in two senses – removal from central importance, and forcing one off-balance) has led many to relativism, nihilism, or cynicism – or to a head-in-the-sand regression to an imagined safety of pre-rational ideologies and world-views. We struggle with a "post-truth" culture, and for those who don't want to throw the baby of rational and democratic thinking out with the bathwater of Reason's flaws, it can be difficult to find rays of hope. But a path forward has been charted in several communities of theory and practice, as we discuss later.

(3) An Evolution in Understanding Ideas vs. the Real

Our third historical narrative suggests that the story of philosophy can be told as a journey of increasing sophistication in how humanity differentiates and integrates the subjective realm of interiors vs. the objective realm of the exteriors – i.e. ideas vs. the real. Because developmental frameworks allow us to map the progression of complexity in action logics within individuals to the cultural/anthropological course of history, we will start by illustrating this idea in terms of the individual, and then extend it to the historical.

As noted, at the magical (1stPP) level of development the self has yet to clearly differentiate exterior from interior realities. The monster under the bed feels real, and if the child sees that a playmate is sad she may suddenly find herself inexplicably sad as well. Though the capacity to differentiate interior thoughts and images from exterior reality establishes itself in childhood, the developmental project of differentiating interior from exterior realities (as well as coordinate and integrate them) continues at ever more subtle levels.

At the magical thinking level (2ndPP, even in the adult) one believes that the stories of one's culture and religion are more or less literal and accurate (introjection). One also tends to project one's interior feelings and beliefs upon the world, assuming that they are or should be shared by others. One engages in wishful thinking, surprised and disappointed when the world fails to deliver what one imagined would happen. At 3rdPP, established within most but not all contemporary adults, one gains the abstract and critical faculties to more deeply understand the interior self, and
learns to monitor and regulate thought and belief (interiors) to coordinate with concrete reality (exteriors). Recall that our model of development stipulates that one shifts between the earliest developmental levels and one's highest capacity depending on the context, and clearly even highly developed adults will engage in projection, wishful thinking, etc. from time to time.

But a dilemma arises at 3rdPP where, as narrated above, there can be an entanglement of the strengths and weaknesses of 3rdPP reason. At 3rdPP one has gained the intellectual capacity to understand various types of bias and distortion produced by the mind (which is why the scientific method is valued), but has not yet mastered the skill of noticing these biases within one's own thinking – especially in the moment. Meanwhile, 3rdPP achieves a degree of mastery within the realm of abstractions, formal reasoning, and imagination. Thus it can build magnificent, sublime, and elaborate thought-structures (theories, models, etc.). As the reader has no doubt noticed, one becomes quite attached to these creations of the intellect, which can be powerful forces of both good and harm.

Thus, at 3rdPP there can be a confusion between ideas and reality that is more subtle than that found at earlier levels. One falls prey to a "misplaced concreteness" in thinking that one's abstract ideas and ideals, such as beauty, symmetry, equality, democracy, or responsibility, exist as actual things in the world, rather than as ideas we have constructed to understand and manipulate the world. This is a subtler, though also more pernicious, form of projection. It is at the 4thPP action logic that one begins to become aware of these subtler projections, and also begins to understand the interpenetrative nature of how interiors and exteriors co-influence each other.

Roy Bhaskar coined the term "demi-reality" for ideas that don't map to reality – i.e. for the gap between ideas and the real. To bring the discussion back to the historical/cultural, if conditions are supportive, humanity as a whole (or specific societies) can progress along the developmental trajectory we have outlined – developing skills to reduce demi-reality. It is neither a monotonic nor a guaranteed movement, but cultures, like individuals, can become wiser as they develop new concepts, tools, and modes of reasoning and communicating. Ideally, our understanding of exterior "reality" increases alongside increasing depth in self-knowledge, which includes a more sophisticated understanding of how "ideas" work. A crucial aspect of this journey is an increasingly nuanced and clear appreciation of the relationships between reality and ideas. Or more broadly it is a journey of learning of the ways that the mind/body adds demi-reality to all that it perceives and conceives. This includes an actionable understanding of the unconscious.

The point is both simple to understand and profoundly difficult to fix: we take our ideas, our theories, our identities, and our ideologies too seriously, assigning too much certainty and reality to them. Here are examples of what this means. When one treats a person as a member of an abstract category (e.g. a Frenchman, a Democrat, a Virgo, or an INTJ) rather than an individual, then one may be confusing a (simple) idea for a (complex) reality. When technologists or policymakers initiate large changes in society based on abstract theories without sufficiently considering on-the-ground realities, they are misunderstanding the relationship between ideas and the real. When people pay attention to pundits, prognosticators, and charlatans who, with a little more thought, would be seen as quite unlikely to correctly predict the future, they are caught in a fantasy of confusing ideas for realities. Each of the themes in the above discussion of "belief fallibilities"
points to a sense in which humanity has learned that ideas and ideals don't match reality as was once thought – i.e. each uncovers another facet of demi-reality.

Here we propose that skills developed at 4thPP allow one to better understand and coordinate the gap between ideas and the real. The entire developmental journey, of either an individual or a culture, can be framed in terms of this journey of more deep and nuanced apperception of how the What-Is of the cosmos relates to the appearance of the What-Is in the embodied mind of the human.

In the next chapter we delve deeper into the philosophical question of "what is real?" and in the succeeding chapter we explore the nature of thought and ideas more deeply from a psychological perspective. We will also get more specific about the ways that reality exhibits properties that differ from the structure of ideas (as concepts).

**Deeper Dive: Stories of Recapitulation**

The developmental and evolutionary journey of increasing levels of complexity and depth "recapitulates" itself at different levels of analysis, suggesting a kind of fractal or holographic principle at work. At the turn of the 19th century biologists proposed "embryological parallelism," the theory that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" – i.e. that the development of the embryo and fetus during gestation goes through stages resembling evolutionary phases back to the animal's remote ancestors.

Psychological scientists, including Jean Piaget, proposed that the development of cognitive capacities has parallels to growth in complexity found in the evolution of animals. Social theorists have observed that the evolution of meaning-making complexity through cultures at anthropological timescales has parallels to the development of cognitive complexity in individuals from childhood into adulthood.

Neuroscientists note how the human brain has a layered structure with mammalian-like regions at mid levels and reptilian-like regions beneath those. Finally, some of the most recent theories in cognitive science are suggesting that thought and brain activity itself operate through overlapping waves of signals that start at the lowest levels of complexity in the unconscious and progress through the developmental layers, recapitulating the developmental path of the individual – i.e. each thought that one has emerges from the depths of the unconscious through layers from magical through mythical and finally rational (or meta-rational) modes of cognition (Brown, 2002).

All of the above patterns of recapitulation cannot be taken too literally (the early embryo does not look exactly like a fish; archaic man did not think exactly like a 6 year old child), but there are remarkable unavoidable parallels in structures at these varying scales of time and space (evolutionary, anthropological, personal, and moment-to-moment cognition). The similarities in structure can be partially explained by stripping off surface features and focusing on the development of structural complexity. The action logics (1stPP, 2ndPP, 3rdPP, etc.) can be used to describe structural changes in culture and cognition (and more refined complexity models have been developed; e.g. see Common's model of Hierarchical Complexity, 2008; and Fisher's Skill Theory, 1980).
A Philosopher's Knot – Knowing and Being Entangled

Is there a God? – Philosophers as Under-laborers


Definitive answers to these "questions of ultimate concern" are beyond the purview of scientific knowledge and the scientific method – at least for the time being (despite some fervent attempts to apply scientific ideas to metaphysical questions). They are metaphysical questions. Metaphysics is largely about the "ontological" inquiry into what can be considered Real, as opposed to merely epiphenomenal/derivative, imaginary/fictitious, subjective/illusory, or fallacious/groundless. Though various specific claims can be made about the objects of consideration (God, Consciousness, Eros etc.), the fundamental issue is whether they exist at all, i.e. whether they are serious topics of inquiry. Differences about what is considered real or to exist are often at the core of disagreements about the truth of claims.

Though Philip K. Dick makes the tidy suggestion that “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away” (1985, p. 4), the question remains controversial – so in this chapter we take a deeper dive into the metaphysical question: "What is real?" A post-metaphysical approach should not lead us to say that "nothing is really real," nor to any definitive answer, nor to discard the question as meaningless; but rather to answer the question sincerely in a way that also witnesses how and why we are asking it in the first place.

In the chapter above on magical, mythical, and mystical thinking, we framed metaphysics and post-metaphysics in developmental terms, exploring how spiritual ideas can contain multiple layers of interpretation, each embodying an action logic defining its structural complexity and wisdom-depth. In the second chapter we situated post-metaphysical thinking within a broader perspective by narrating three historical/cultural arcs. This had implications for where spiritual thinking might be heading. In this chapter we will explore a more explicitly philosophical approach to post-metaphysics, tapping into what contemporary scholars are teaching us about the question "What is real?" – which is the central question in metaphysics, and thus in post-metaphysics.

As noted, philosophical thought has undergone a gradual developmental transformation over millennia. Philosophers and sages were once unabashed about making broad claims about man, nature, and the cosmos, but now, with the fallibilities of human reason having been increasingly exposed, they must be more humble and self-reflexive in their theorizing. To satisfy contemporary norms philosophers must imply a knowing that they, inescapably, come from a particular perspective. Their ideas must aim for usefulness rather than ultimate truth. In fact the role of philosophy has been recast by some (including Roy Bhaskar and Jürgen Habermas) into that of an "under-laborer" that helps other disciplines do their job, rather than as a master architect, curator, or arbitrator that sets other disciplines in their proper place.

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4 Metaphysics originally meant the body of Aristotle's work after his Physics, but later took on its current meaning of the science of things transcending the physical or natural.
The role of under-laborer is humble, but far from inconsequential – it is as important as the foundation is to a home. Philosophers are experts at teasing apart assumptions, noticing hidden contradictions, inspecting the strength of foundations, finding connections among disparate fields, and inspecting, not just the products, but the processes used to arrive at them. Philosophy holds the banner at the vanguard of post-metaphysical thinking, by, for example, illustrating how concepts and symbolic language, the building blocks of ideas and theories, are frustratingly mutable.

All domains of human knowledge can be strengthened and tuned up by a critical philosophical look "under the hood," and most scholarly disputes can be improved by a philosophical meta-analysis of the properties of the dialogue itself. (Philosophy is increasingly trans-disciplinary, incorporating ideas from psychology, sociology, linguistics, computational science, systems theory, etc. – even as it informs these other disciplines.)

So, in the end contemporary philosophy is less likely to answer the questions above ("Is there a God?" etc.) than it is to provide Rules of the Road for engaging in the inquiry. But this is crucial since, in our time the way that we inquire and dialogue about "questions of ultimate concern" may be more critical than the conclusions we come to, as those answers may need to evolve rapidly with the rest of human reality. In addition, philosophical analysis can show us that metaphysical assumptions and metaphysical thinking are inevitable aspects of meaning making, and that we can both choose and act out our metaphysics more consciously.

Bhaskar and Habermas also see the role of contemporary philosophy as primarily emancipatory. That is, rather than discovering exalted or fundamental metaphysical truths, contemporary philosophy has a primarily ethical or healing role that operates on whole systems of thought in the way that psychotherapy operates on the individual. Emancipation is very much about reducing what Bhaskar calls the demi-real (beliefs and conceptions that do not correspond well with reality). Others might call it ignorance, inconsistency, misinformation, denial, or bullshit – which are ultimately seen as suffering-creating chains that we might free ourselves from. The demi-real involves not just erroneous ideas, but erroneous certainty in ideas.

Philosophy takes a – usually critical but also possibly appreciative – stance to shine a light on inconsistencies, paradoxes, blind spots, hypocrisies, etc. (Psychological "shadow work" can reveal dark material but also "golden shadows" – positive things about ourselves that are somehow painful to acknowledge.) A number of 20th century philosophical schools adopted a "critical" perspective (e.g. "Critical Theory") that questioned and deconstructed social norms, institutions, ideologies, and dominant narratives. At best these theories sketched a collective path toward liberation from social oppressions, and at worst they cynically dwelled on what was wrong with society, without offering practical solutions or hope. But these frameworks can also be used self-reflectively to critique a theorist’s, group's, or discipline's own stance. Critical self-reflection upon my/our demi-reality is thus self-emancipatory (and part of what Bhaskar calls the "pulse of freedom" within humanity). The principles we are exploring in this text are meant to be applied in this self-reflective way, as a form of self-learning and self-emancipation. Thus, the under-laboring of post-metaphysical philosophical thought can be deeply spiritual in its intention and application, aiming to further human happiness, flourishing, freedom, and/or evolution.
Two Truths: One Problem

**Metaphysical realms.** Speaking of using philosophical thought to free ourselves from outmoded ideas – let’s take the risk of beginning by taking on one of the broadest and most strongly held ideologies in contemporary spiritual thought – that being that there is a metaphysical realm or world that holds truths outside of mind, matter, time, and space. We find this type of argument in many forms, including philosophy (e.g. Platonic Ideals), occult belief systems (e.g. etheric or spirit worlds), and contemporary spirituality (e.g. separating Absolute from Relative realities). Our intention is not to rebuke and debunk such beliefs, but to propose a post-metaphysical framework – a more reflective (meta-) metaphysics – that can appreciate what drives such belief systems yet avoids problematic modes of reason.

One of the problems with (classical) metaphysical thinking is that it posits a realm that is neither objective – as existing in time and space, nor subjective – as part of human experience. Metaphysical claims, whether made by an esteemed philosopher or by your cousin the plumber smoking weed, are particularly problematic because of this. Modern thought has developed a rather clear and useful differentiation between the objective and subjective worlds, and concluded that claims about each must be made under different rules. Subjectivity is explored through methods including phenomenology (trained introspection) and self-reporting that allow for the validity of personal and aesthetic judgment. Objective truths are determined using variations on the scientific paradigm that combines empiricism, logical methods, replicability, and collective inquiry. (Other disciplinary methods have been tuned to study the *intersubjective* world of beliefs and relationships held between and among individuals and groups.)

Though contemporary philosophy has articulated the inter-relationships and interpenetrations of objectivity and subjectivity (e.g. between facts and values), there is still no room for classically metaphysical objects that exist in an ideal world that is neither objective nor subjective (nor intersubjective). Russell describes metaphysical as being an "uncreated, indestructible, unchanging, indivisible" realm beyond time and space, beyond matter and energy. Given that, on what basis can one make a metaphysical claim? How could one ever test such a claim when it refers to something beyond both matter and mind, beyond measurement and thought? Objects in the actual physical world are assumed to obey certain laws; and subjective reality is understood to develop within its own logic and rules – but there is nothing to constrain the metaphysical world. Literally anything is possible there because nothing is impossible – anything that can be imagined can be comfortably placed there and said to "exist."

In scholarly circles, and to a lesser degree in cultural narratives, metaphysical claims are expected to hold to the principles of logical thought, yet they are not further constrained to be consistent with objective or subjective realities. Hypothetical thinking is similarly unconstrained, but does not posit a new domain of existence (hypotheticals are subjective imaginations). This is what Aruuirre meant by metaphysics being "the doctrine of ideas that equates being with thought" – ideas and the real are equated, and thus undifferentiated. The metaphysical object or realm is neither here nor there – like the view from nowhere by no one, it crumbles under the post-metaphysical gaze.
One of the problems with classical metaphysical thought, including how it is used in spirituality, is that it is a convenient tool for precluding critical discussion. If one witnesses an unexplained phenomena, or proposes an indefensible idea, proposing that it exists or emanates from some other dimension or alternate reality may produce the impression that something has been explained, when in fact it was only a dodge – producing a grimy gem of demi-reality from the magician's hat.

In a prior chapter we showed how sophisticated metaphysical thinking incorporated the abstract (and to some extent the logical) capacities of 3rdPP cognition, while eschewing the scientific (and some of the critical) thinking elements of 3rdPP cognition. A "fully" 3rdPP approach, one that can hang together through contemporary post-modern analysis, must answer to the critical and empirical questions of the scientific method, which metaphysical realms cannot live up to.

Therefore, though one can't avoid having metaphysical assumptions about what is assumed to exist when one considers any question, one can and should avoid positing a metaphysical place or realm within which to locate objects of thought or reality. But doing so may prove to be difficult in practice for some, because many traditional spiritual and philosophical frameworks rely on just such a realm. These frameworks, and the teachers who promote them, use sophisticated reasoning to create self-consistent belief systems that satisfy "questions of ultimate concern" for many individuals. So they are difficult to relinquish.

Two truths. Returning to the metaphysical spiritual claims listed in Exhibit A, which we have said are made by highly intelligent and insightful individuals who understand both modern rationality and the post-modern critique of rationality – on what basis can these claims about Ultimate Reality be made? As we have said, claims from this common "play book" follow motifs established millennia ago when the Wisdom Traditions were formed. They have been transferred to modern Western cultures hungry for spiritual meaning-making in the wake of modernity's dry materialistic and rational worldview. The motif common to them all is the "Two Truths" doctrine.

Before going further let's reiterate some developmental considerations about belief in metaphysical realities. 1stPP does not clearly differentiate interiors from exteriors, so there is only one "realm" of experience. Metaphysical beliefs at 2ndPP are of the supernatural or occult variety, in which the realm or "dimension" of non-ordinary phenomena is quasi-concrete, operating over or alongside conventional reality (both objective and subjective), with some interactions between them. Like dreams and novels, these "alternate reality" realms have objects, causality, and space-like and time-like properties (e.g. Heaven, Akashic Records, subtle or spirit-realms, etc.). These realms are, in a sense, abstractions of empirical realities.

The "higher" forms of metaphysical thinking referred to in Exhibit A are extremely abstract, positing universals above/encompassing, or fundamental essences below/within, the entirety of experiential reality – and yet existing beyond any experience. When we discuss metaphysical thinking below we usually refer to this later type, which we could call "classical" metaphysical thinking, which refers to an Absolute realm beyond any semblance of space, time, mind, and causality. It is this metaphysics that is critiqued in gestures toward post-metaphysical thinking (e.g. Russell and Habermas above).
It is not necessarily fallacious, meaningless, or groundless to posit metaphysical entities, realms, or truths. But such claims should be understood to operate within certain action logics and discourse norms. They are valid as meaning-generative claims if understood to operate below 3rdPP scientific rationality. They can be productively or enjoyably entertained at 4thPP and beyond, but with the understanding that one is accessing one's 1stPP and/or 2ndPP consciousness.

**Absolute and Relative Truth.** The Two Truths doctrine held by the sages from Exhibit A states that there is a "relative" reality, governed by relative truths, that stands in contrast to an "Absolute" (or Ultimate) Reality, governed by Absolute (or Ultimate) Truths. (As the reader will anticipate that I will argue that this distinction has reached its limit of usefulness, I will henceforth drop the capital letters.)

The two truths doctrine was invented at a time when sages had weak and nebulous conceptual tools for differentiating the objective and subjective realms (not to mention the intersubjective realm). They may have formed personal intuitions with significantly more clarity, but the cultures they were immersed in did not provide the language resources for the clear conceptual self-understanding nor communication of such intuitions. (Note: take care not to confuse the undifferentiated or poorly differentiated with the integrated or interpenetrative understanding of ideas that can only come after they are first differentiated – this confusion is an example of what Wilber calls the "pre-trans fallacy"). Many of the thinkers of antiquity had not fully grappled with the fallibilities of reason that we have discussed – some of which were not clearly articulated until the mid-twentieth century. (This is a hypothesis whose validity does not impact us much – it is quite possible that some ancient civilizations surpassed Western culture developmentally.)

The metaphysical realm is said to offer a home for unfathomable paradoxes. That "I am nothing" and that "I am everything" can both be true in the realm of the Absolute. Spiritual revelations such as these (and "the world is an illusion" and "everything is perfect as it is") should be taken as sometimes-useful perspectives on reality – tools as the pragmatists would say. To interpret them literally or at face value is clearly a dangerous thing for an individual or a culture to do. The two truths doctrine was in part a kind of epistemological truce formed from the incommensurability of paradoxical ideas about the fundamental nature of reality. Absolute reality is claimed to be non-dual, or beyond categories, yet the two-truths idea itself contains a dualism.

Of course, since metaphysical thinking is not subject to the conventions of reason, such paradoxes are not a problem for it – rather, paradoxes may be used to prove the necessity, and thus the existence, of metaphysical realms. But this type of circular logic, perhaps necessary for the 3rdPP mind to address questions of ultimate concern, can be seen as bankrupt when more contemporary 4thPP modes of reason are available. Such paradoxes, as will be explained later, can be explained as products of the way that the mind relies on language and categories, rather than as existing ontologically in an alternate or Absolute reality.

Spiritual adepts will sometimes claim that their approach reveals "reality as it is," in its true form. It is reasonable to assume that mystical or contemplative insights reveal that everyday reality is a constructed experience, and that even time, space, independent objects, and the self are insubstantial. Such insights can leave one with a depth of understanding that makes the prior world-view seem like a dream or an illusion. But to be ever clearer in the negative knowledge of what is
not true does not ultimately lead to a positive understanding of the world "as it really is" (but only "as it really is not").

As discussed previously, mystical experience is often associated with a feeling of boundless clarity, wisdom, confidence, and yes, "truthiness." The biblical message from God: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End," echoed also in many corners of Eastern spiritualism, lights up the mind like a luminous full moon or a blazing sun. One can have a spiritual experience of reality as a totality, or what feels like totality, that seems expressible only with language such as we see in Exhibit A. But from our contemporary 4thPP vantage point, we see that this is not a direct view into objective reality. Mystical experiences are "ineffable" and portend truths or insights "beyond language" – but this does not mean that those truths or insights are valid. In fact, all experience and intuition is fundamentally ineffable, as has been noted. Rather, such experiences, in addition to supporting deep meaning and emancipation from suffering, can indicate important facts about how the human mind works, and the relationship between the realm of the real and the realm of ideas. Mystical experiences can be the result of stripping the mind bare of its normal processing modalities, and can thus reveal much about how those modalities function.

The realm of the Absolute, toward which descriptors such as infinite, ultimate, boundless, omnipresent, etc. point, is empty as a realm of metaphysical "reality." However, such terms can usefully be used to point toward some horizon or limit. Infinity is a useful concept – for example it is indispensable to mathematicians. The process of opening one's awareness, or one's compassion, to ever greater extents can be described in terms of an ultimate end point, even if that extreme is unreachable, receding as one approaches it. The same can be said of the elimination or emptiness of anything.

**Emptiness.** The concept of "emptiness" is also prominent in spiritual discourse, particularly in Buddhist-inspired metaphysics. We can distinguish three ways to approach the idea of spiritual emptiness: experientially, logically, and metaphysically – with the last option being problematic. Experientially (i.e. phenomenologically) it is true that individuals have contemplative or spiritual states that, though ineffable, seem best described by the concept of emptiness. Logically (i.e. epistemologically or through rational deconstruction) one can also argue that all of the objects of experience are constructed and that their "true nature" is empty of the properties that we attribute to them. One can also argue logically that objects seen as independent entities actually exist only in relationship to other entities, and thus their appearance as objects is an empty illusion.

These logical conclusions (found, for example, in the Buddhist teachings of Nāgārjuna) can be developed into understandings so deep that one perceives reality with the immediate realization that they are true – i.e. that the objects of experience, and experience itself, is empty of all perceptual appearances and conceptual attributes – thus uniting the experiential and logical modes of thought described above (what Russell would call the highest achievement of the mind). Also, as noted above, emptiness can stand for the logical/theoretical endpoint of any process of diminishment.

But none of these modes of thought – experiential, logical, or their union – authorize one to claim that emptiness is an ultimate property of objects or of reality. Emptiness as a spiritual concept is extremely abstract – in fact it sits at the end of the abstraction continuum, as something with all
properties abstracted away into formlessness. In this sense it is analogous to the concepts of universal spirit and the ground of being, which are abstracted to a level of complete fullness, containing all things and properties. Ultimate reality is said to paradoxically be both completely empty and completely full. But it is a mistake of projection to interpret the contemplative experiences associated with emptiness and fullness as proving that there is an ultimate reality that is radically empty and full. That a single experience invokes the ideals of radical emptiness and radical fullness speaks more to the paucity of our conceptual apparatus than to the nature of reality. Using these concepts as tools or lenses, one can adopt the perspective that reality (or any object, thought, or phenomena, including the self) is radically empty, or is radically full, or is both (or is neither! – to borrow a trope from the "tetralemma" of the Indian sage Nāgārjuna). (We return to the concept of emptiness and Absolutes in the next chapter, where we consider their status as an objects or properties; and again in the section on Phenomenology, where we explore the associated experiences in more depth.)

The Two Truths Doctrine is an outmoded classical metaphysics. It remains meaning-generative for a 2ndPP action logic that accepts majestic esoteric truths handed down from authorities; and for a 3thPP action logic that can't resolve the paradoxes of belief fallibility without creating a world outside of both thought and concrete reality. The downsides of using a pre-rational or hyper-abstract metaphysics were described above. The issue is not that Mystics describing an Absolute Reality (or emptiness) are themselves pointing toward a demi-reality, but that the gestures are so easily misinterpreted or reified. Framing the absolutes as horizons or goal-states, rather than metaphysical realms or ends, might avoid such problems. As the meaning-making resources of 4thPP become increasingly available to us, we can adopt a metaphysics that focuses on "real" human suffering, human potential, and the delicate interdependencies among humans, and between humans and nature – while still acknowledging the enchanting, the paradoxical, and the radically empty realms of experience (not "reality"). In the end, wise teachers and sages, including those quoted in Exhibit A, ground and measure the spiritual journey in terms of the ethics of concrete daily life.

Arguing against the venerable Two Truths Doctrine is pretty heavy lifting, especially for one such as myself who would not claim any sort of spiritual "enlightenment." But its demise is a straightforward implication of post-metaphysical thinking in its fullness. Unwrapping the full potential of post-metaphysical thinking, including its unsettling conclusions for contemporary spiritual belief systems, is a formidable task. That is why I approach it through numerous trajectories in this text. In fact, post-metaphysical thinking challenges many of the conclusions of classical philosophy as well. Luckily, scholars including Habermas, Russell, Lakoff, Bhaskar, and Wilber have done the bulk of the groundwork that I will build upon. Next we will walk through the classical philosophical territories of ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, and phenomenology, to chart yet another path into the post-metaphysical perspective.

**Truth, Belief, Vulnerability, and Seriousness**

**Tensions between ontology and epistemology.** Central to the topics of spirituality and religion is an inquiry into the nature of belief. Little could be more important in life than knowing what is true – including feeling confident in one's beliefs and convincing others that one's beliefs are valid. Determining what to believe, who is right and wrong, how uncertain one should be, and when one
needs more information, are essential preoccupations for people. Believing, advocating, doubting, and inquiring are central to spiritual life as well.

Disconcertingly, we find ourselves immersed in a world of increasing change, uncertainty, conflicting perspectives, and misinformation. On a daily basis one must decide not only what to believe, but how much effort to invest in seeking or confirming new facts and ideas. As mentioned above, most of what we believe relies on 1stPP and 2ndPP action logics including gut feelings, authoritative sources, or social norms; yet increasingly we need to use 3rdPP and higher action logics to navigate reality. Our modern understanding of civic duty compels us to be informed about science and technology, but it is less recognized that the average person is increasingly motivated to be a lay philosopher, thinking more deeply and more abstractly to make sense of the world.

In fact, in our "post-truth" society the average person is faced with deep philosophical conundrums about the very nature of knowledge, truth, and reality in simply trying to interpret the daily news. We confuse pre-rational with post/trans-rational approaches to the complexity of reality. In addition, as modern citizens and consumers we are constantly being manipulated by experts in the science of how the mind works, through advisements and propaganda. More than ever, it is our civic duty to know enough about our own minds to be able to act autonomously within this torrent of skillful manipulation of our psyches. So we are increasingly called to be proto-cognitive-scientists as well as proto-philosophers. Luckily we live at a time when these two disciplines are increasingly overlapping and accessible. In this chapter we discuss philosophy, with its epistemological nods toward psychology, and in the next chapter we focus in on findings in cognitive psychology that have deep implications for philosophy. So, gentle reader, bear with me as I introduce some philosophical terminology.

Philosophy differentiates epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge, from ontology, the study of the nature of reality (or Being). Epistemology is about "what can be known," and ontology is about "what is real." These two are intimately linked, because what we believe to be true about reality is constrained by the (epistemological) limitations of knowing and thinking; and the nature and limitations of knowledge are determined in large part by the (ontological or real) constraints exerted by things like neurobiology, genetics, and culture that restrict the scope of human cognition.

Ontology is closely related to metaphysics and according to most definitions is a sub-field of metaphysics. Ontology inquires into the objects or entities that are fundamental to reality (or to some domain of inquiry), while metaphysics inquires more broadly into the nature of reality, i.e. it identifies the objects and also includes narratives or frameworks describing the roles, relationships, and ultimate purposes of those objects. As we said above, what one believes is real is a subset, or underpinning, of what one believes is true, as truth-claims describe things.

However, there is some gray area here, because to claim that an object is real entails defining or suggesting its key properties (e.g. ancient scholars defined man as "the animal that has rationality" [or politics or language]). The key properties of a fundamental entity often include its relationship with other fundamental entities, especially via core ontological relationships, for example: What creates, causes, or governs what? What lives within, contains, is an essential element of, needs, or feeds upon what? What opposes, diminishes, or destroys what? What is
identical to what? For example, is the mind (or consciousness) a part of nature, having been produced by natural evolution? – or is Mind (or Consciousness) the foundation and essential ground underpinning all of nature and the cosmos? Thus, the "what is real" of ontology bleeds into the narrative story-telling aspect of metaphysics.

Spirituality and religion are primarily concerned with ontological/metaphysical questions, but as we have indicated, in the contemporary context ontological inquiries must be tempered with epistemological considerations – i.e. a deep engagement with the disquieting limits of knowing. How does one come to understand divine spirit, absolute reality, or universal love? The epistemological answer given by Socrates is: "know thyself." From a 4thPP one could add that knowing thyself is not a singular enterprise, but a participatory and dialogical one.

After Kant philosophy became increasingly self-conscious about strong ontological (and metaphysical) claims, faced with the revelations outlined above in the "Brief History of Belief Fallibility." Epistemology was "in," and ontology was suspect. Making claims about reality was relegated to scientists, who seemed better equipped. However, a counter-movement developed (as is often the case in thought-trends) to reclaim ontology, and the post-metaphysical turn is in part the result of a new integration of ontology and epistemology. (In a later section we discuss phenomenology, another significant category of philosophical thought.)

This reintegration of ontology was bolstered by the insight that all theories are underpinned by, usually tacit, ontological assumptions. For instance Bhaskar argued that the scientific method itself would be impossible if reality was not actual (real), differentiated (containing parts), structured (the parts have relationships), changing (dynamic), and intelligible (can be at least partly known by humans). One tacitly makes these ontological assumptions when one does science. These may seem like thin or obvious assumptions, but Bhaskar was making the point that ontological assumptions are deep, omnipresent, and unavoidable. Even "objective" science cannot escape metaphysical thinking and ontological assumptions.

Post-metaphysics seeks a balance between ontology and epistemology, yet some philosophers travelled far enough down the nihilistic branch of the epistemological path to claim that it is impossible to prove that reality exists at all (or to prove that experience is not merely a dream, or a subjective interpretation, or a simulation). These scholars have been criticized for lacking "seriousness" (Bhaskar et al, 2009). To say that reality does not exist is to commit a "performative contradiction" – that is, one's actions belie a more deeply held belief that is at odds with one's words. Similarly it was pointed out that to claim that "there is no ultimate truth" was itself a statement of ultimate truth – catching radical postmodern thinkers in a performative contradiction. In focusing on epistemology alone we risk losing sight of the pragmatic and ethical "realities" of life – becoming lost in a disembodied intellectual world, and avoiding life's existential urgencies. And yet epistemological concerns (e.g. "how can we know it is true?") are an essential ingredient in balancing overconfidence, dogmatism, and bias in ontological claims about what is real.

A century before Bhaskar, Habermas, and Wilber, the stage for post-metaphysical philosophy was set by the American Pragmatist scholars (including William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Dewey). Louis Menand, says that Pragmatism is an idea about ideas: "The idea is that ideas – theories, beliefs, convictions, principles, concepts, hypotheses – are essentially means of
adaptation...Ideas are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but are tools that people devise" (Menand, 2001, p. 1, 8). This notion is central to post-metaphysical thinking.

**Integrating ontology and epistemology.** Post-metaphysics can be seen as an integration, or perhaps an uneasy truce, between ontology and epistemology. This integration can be summarized in four steps. First, from an ontological perspective, we always already assume that reality exists, and that we exist. As above, to assume otherwise involves performative contradictions. (There are other ontological assumptions that, whether we intellectually/theoretically agree with them, are shown to be held tacitly through our actions.)

Second, from an epistemological perspective, any claim that we put forth (including the first one above), is fallible in all of the ways we have mentioned in this text. These two together seem to leave us bound in a contradiction, but it is better to see them each as partial truths that interact with each other dialectically, creating a tension that begets a higher level integration.

The third step integrates the first two to produce the pragmatic principle that we should be, and often find ourselves, searching for ever more truthful knowledge, i.e. for knowledge that best approximates reality. This is akin to Freud's "reality principle," and is simply a necessary condition for survival and negotiating reality "seriously."

Fourth and last, we can see the validity of truth claims as graded, i.e., although no truth claim is absolute or permanent, this does not imply the relativistic conclusion that all claims are equally valid or equally meaningless – we can compare alternative claims and can (often) judge one to be a closer fit to reality, or generally more valid and perspicuous, than another. This represents a move from the 2ndPP attitude that beliefs are either true or false, to the 3rdPP stance that finding truth is an ongoing process, always open to revision and critique.

At 4thPP and above, the iterative search for truth becomes increasingly nuanced as additional sources of fallibility are realized; including a realization of how values and ethical concerns are deeply involved in the search for truth. Development is about complexity and depth – epistemological humility follows from cognitive complexity, while ontological grounding becomes more profound with developmental depth. Paradoxically, an increasing weight of "seriousness" can be accompanied by greater lightness of being.

**Definitions of post-metaphysics.** We have said that post-metaphysics is in part about a stance of informed humility that admits to the indeterminacy of knowledge, and have also described it in general terms as a resolution and integration of the philosophical schools of epistemology vs. ontology. We have also given examples of what this new humility implies, through a developmental framework describing magical, mythical, and metaphysical thinking. But we have not yet tried to define post-metaphysics itself. So let's dive a bit further into exactly what philosophers mean by post-metaphysics. Of course, since all concepts carry some indeterminacy, there is no single definition of the term, but rather a rich field of overlapping interpretations that one can develop a "gist" for.

In *Integral Spirituality* Ken Wilber (2006, p. 231) explains post-metaphysics by saying that “[arguably] metaphysics...ended with Kant [who realized that] we do not perceive empirical
objects in a completely realistic, pre-given fashion; but rather, structures of the knowing subject import various characteristics to the known object...Metaphysics is then a broad name for the type of thinking that can't figure [out that] reality is not a perception, but a conception. [...] thinking that falls prey to the myth of the given.”

Wilber's colleague Sean Esbjörn-Hargens adds that post-metaphysics implies a participatory and thus multi-perspectival approach to truth which “avoids positing realities independent of the viewer,” and instead locates realities as “perspectives from somewhere by someone” (Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 484).

Post-metaphysics points not so much to a set of beliefs as a set of principles and cautions for how we can think, communicate, argue, and build knowledge. Cooke (1994) summarizes Habermas' notion of the historical trend into post-metaphysical thinking as including the following:

− Understanding rational discourse as being less about what people think as about how people think (i.e. the focus shifts from valid conclusions to valid process);
− Replacing "foundationalism with fallibilism" in the approach of truth-finding – all truth claims are tentative and open to critique and revision;
− Casting doubt on whether reason can be purely objective, as in the abstract "view from nowhere" that is free of historical, psychological, and cultural conditioning; i.e. truths and knowledge are context-bound;
− Understanding that because no perspective is privileged above all others, knowledge progresses through actual dialogic encounters – the confrontation of ideas combined with efforts toward mutual understanding (and not through an intellectual imagination of what others would think);
− Framing philosophy in a fundamentally ethical, emancipatory, applied, and under-laboring role – renouncing its traditional fixation on discovering abstract theoretical truths;
− Recognizing the deep interplay of the traditional truth-seeking mode of philosophical discourse with the aesthetic/expressive and moral/practical functions of discourse (or Reason); i.e., highlighting the importance of attitudes like sincerity, authenticity, and care in philosophical thought.

Cooke's summary focuses on epistemological principles, so we should add that, as described above, post-metaphysics allows for a deeply pragmatist and ontological orientation that takes reality seriously.

But not too seriously. The post-metaphysical attitude allows for and calls for humility, playfulness, openness, curiosity, awe, surprise, and an acknowledgement of existential vulnerability.

**Seriousness, playfulness, and vulnerability.** This humility comes not from a selfless modesty, though that can accompany it, but it is forced upon one when one acknowledges and opens to the accumulated sources of fallibility of human reasoning and sense-making. It comes from the vulnerable and even ironic position of having to coordinate two contradictory insights: the
epistemological insight into the indeterminacy of every claim and belief; and the ontological insight that one must often act decisively, *as if* one knows.

It is within this caldron of dissonance that the 3rdPP ego, the assured autonomous sense of a self-in-control, can be transformed into a more fluid state that can flow amidst chaotic upheavals – a movement that can occur on personal as well as cultural levels (as 4thPP and above consciousness). Overcoming the attendant dissonance and vulnerability calls for reaching into deeper layers of trust and regard of self and others. It includes developing a meta-cognitive instinct about when to let go, open up, listen, or let be, vs. when to let rip, commit, coerce, or command. This is why post-metaphysics (and a 4thPP worldview) requires a deeper sense of both ethics and spirituality in comparison to the scientific, logical and/or materialistic 3rdPP worldview.

This vulnerability is an interpersonal as well as personal phenomenon. Beginning at 4thPP (and even more at 5thPP) we more deeply experience how the sense of self is defined by and negotiated within social relationships. The ego/self is defined as much by how others judge us (or might judge us), and by what we try not to be (i.e. those whom we condemn), as by a personal process of self-authorship. As we have discussed, meaning-making and belief-formation are deeply intersubjective processes, such that the fallibilities of reason and of knowing are largely fallibilities in collective sense-making. And, as we depend on communicative processes and relationships of trust and solidarity to create meaning for ourselves, it is both the self-as-autonomous-system and the self-as-interdependent-with-others that is revealed as vulnerable. We have mentioned the ideas of Hans Kögler (1992) and Peter Elbow (2009), who emphasize the important of the, sometimes unsettling, authentic hermeneutic encounter with the other as a means to expose beliefs or values previously hidden in one's shadow, and thus add to one's own self-understanding. Kögler says: not rational analysis but the other "becomes the point of departure for critical insight into self" (p. 272).

Since the vulnerability is mutual and reciprocal, its resolution must include mutual inquiry and reciprocal regard. It also requires shared ontological commitments or beliefs – all of which implicate new forms of "spirituality" and ethics. But the conundrum is in knowing at what level and to what degree this shared meaning is required. Sovereignty and autonomy are in a dialectical dance with mutuality and solidarity – overreaching the former leads to isolation and defensiveness, while overreaching the latter leads to dogmatic group-think and oppressive social structures. Developmental theories tell us that the capacities necessary for locating an appropriate balance cannot emerge from brute intellectual effort coming from 3rdPP, but must come from a higher consciousness that can metabolize the apparent contradictions that come with the territory.

**The inevitability of metaphysics.** As we have said, post-metaphysical thinking is not non-metaphysical thinking, but is a reflective appreciation of the limits of metaphysical thinking. The fact is that in mundane life, in scientific pursuits, and in philosophical theorizing, one cannot avoid metaphysical assumptions – though they often remain implicit. As the precocious child will ultimately force its parent into a philosopher’s role by repeatedly asking "but *why* is that?" following each deeper level of explanation, a scholar can, for any claim, drill down the causal or explanatory stack to reach an underlying assumption that must simply be assumed or believed, with no deeper explanation or evidence possible. This bottom is metaphysical.
In a recent paper in Integral Review journal, Zachary Stein says:

These three topics – sex, reality, and politics – are implicated in any metaphysical characterization of the human ... [Historically] humans have long depended upon the normative force of metaphysical ideas to regulate these realms in particular. Untold and innumerable injustices were perpetrated in these realms in the name of pre-modern metaphysics. Modernity sought to rectify these by turning to science alone [and rejecting metaphysics], yet as the centuries unfolded the vacuum created by the absence of metaphysics continued to expand, and today the absence of metaphysics is now creating new and more dangerous problems ... [Authoritarian] political thought is resurgent today because of the absence of reasonable discourse about metaphysical realities during a time when exactly these realities are being put in question ... The way we answer questions like, “What is the human?” [and "What is Love?"] will determine the next century ... Metaphysics is necessary because we are in a time between worlds. (Stein, 2018, pp. 191-93)

Though we problematize metaphysical claims about absolute reality, consciousness, and spirit, our critique is of "classical" metaphysics that traffics in absolutes. Stein reminds us that we can and must reflect upon and take responsibility for the metaphysical foundations of ordinary life and "questions of ultimate concern" related to this world. For example, though there are more and less sophisticated ways to understand them, the metaphysical or metaphorical "forces of good and evil" may forever be an element of moral deliberation.

Metaphysical thinking is thus unavoidable, but it can be approached skillfully and ethically, vs. bluntly and authoritatively. As indicated above, we can understand it as related to an always-operating level of consciousness, an action-logic at the magical level of consciousness, which higher levels of abstraction and complexity build upon. And we can, in a quasi-therapeutic sense, intentionally uncover, recover, or reconstruct elements of that lower level toward emancipatory and ethical ends.

It is useful to differentiate explicit from implicit metaphysics. Explicit metaphysical thinking, especially as in the grand narratives and totalities espoused by some philosophers and spiritual sages, is susceptible to the cautionary caveats, such as grandiosity, we have described. Implicit metaphysics hides beneath all thought and cannot be avoided. Self-emancipation involves a kind of individual or collective "shadow work" that reveals these implicit foundations. Though such revelation makes them explicit in a sense, they remain active at the implicit level of consciousness, unless intentionally altered. For example, one may discover, through a therapeutic process, that one fears mother figures; or that one has a deep love of oceans. Discovering these things does not imply that they have thus been uprooted or transformed. In the case of the former, one may want to pursue a deeper therapeutic program that uproots or re-programs the fear; or with the later case to cultivate that experience of love. As we will see in our exploration of George Lakoff's work on metaphors, there are culture-wide and species-wide phenomena involving implicit metaphysics.

Science fiction author Arthur C. Clark said that within each historical era "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Similarly, some would say that metaphysics is just a name for what has not yet been explained by science. Applied to spirituality, this is the "God of the gaps" principle noted by skeptics: i.e. claiming that a phenomena
unexplained by current science must be an act of God, or explained through some supernatural process. This type of metaphysical thinking is clearly fallacious, since repeatedly science has been used to explain phenomena that were previously "explained" through esoteric metaphysics.

However, even though our 3rdPP capacities for scientific investigation have disclosed much about the atom, the galaxy, and even human nature, there are natural phenomena too subtle or complex, and questions of "ultimate concern" too deep, to be understood or even approached via 3rdPP reason. Humans will forever have intuitions and questions that are, though beyond empirical analysis, critically important to constructing a meaningful life. We cannot help but construct magical and mythical interpretations of and answers to these questions. Though ideally, we can understand our "answers" to such questions as provisional and constructed; and we can sustain the sense of re-enchantment and awe that should accompany inquiry into the unknowable.

In sum, not only is metaphysical thinking unavoidable because it sits at the foundations of any rationally organized thought, it is also unavoidable because some questions worth asking cannot be answered through rational or empirical analysis. Post-metaphysical thinking (1) includes an understanding of the unavoidability of implicit metaphysics, and (2) adopts an explicit metaphysics that acknowledges the fallibility of making such claims, while allowing for strong "ontological commitments" about reality that can be argued as pragmatically necessary. In the next chapter we explore some of these defensible ontological and metaphysical assumptions.

**Contours of the Real**

**What is Really Real?**

*The flavors of reality.* One can formulate many "questions of ultimate concern" as questions about what is *real*: Is God real? Is love real? Is consciousness real? Is free will real? But what, then, does "real" mean? Clearly, the fallibility of knowledge presents a problem for the concept of reality. This may be no surprise, as "the epistemic turn" in philosophy and cognitive science tells us that all percepts and concepts are constructions of the mind (or mind/body/culture). Yet the later "ontological turn" re-vindicated the notion that human beings must, and unavoidably do, construct sturdy reliable knowledge about reality. In addition, following the pragmatist's intuition, knowledge and "truths" about reality are simply cognitive tools that can be assessed according to their correspondence to reality, or their usefulness in negotiating reality. As physical and social beings acting in the world we must continuously be making mostly correct assumptions about reality in order to survive physically and socially. So one actually can *seriously* make claims about the nature of reality (even "ultimate reality"), as long as one understands these claims as provisional and emerging from human meaning-making labor.

We have already said a few things about what can be considered to be "real." We have noted that what seems real differs for different developmental levels (and we explore this further later under the topic "adequatio"). We have also argued that one does not need to posit extra realms or absolute realities to account for the various types of objects and phenomena of experience and thought. In what follows we will explore the many ways in which things can be, or be understood as, real – by the ordinary mature (3rdPP) adult considering everyday ideas – i.e. simple objects not requiring metaphysical esotericism or philosophical scholarship to understand.
The cacophony of perspectives on "precisely what constitutes reality?" can be partially clarified by an *enumeration of the types of things* said to be real, or included in reality. The most obviously real objects are *concrete* instances – *that* bottle and *this* flower. The next slight step in abstraction is the *class* of objects: bottles and flowers are real (though the class itself is an abstraction, because one will never see all of the instances). Sensory *properties* seem particularly real, though they are abstract: red, round, heavy, etc. (we will never observe redness by itself, only as a property). Slightly more abstract are *processes* and verb-like objects (e.g. flying, reproduction, growth), *events* (e.g. a season, a cultural revolution), and *systems* (e.g. the weather, a transportation infrastructure). *Change* presents a thorny problem for those desiring philosophical precision – the river changes in every moment, and one's body has a subtly different makeup from one moment to the next, yet both are considered real objects.

At higher levels of abstraction and generality we find *natural laws and causal mechanisms* such as gravitation and evolution, which could be said to exist either as foundational realities or merely as explanatory fictions (see Bhaskar, 1978; Elster, 1999). Also problematically "real" are so-called *social constructions* such as money and gender (Searle, 1995). For example: is money a real thing, or simply the coordination of trust agreements and recordkeeping ledgers? Are gender and race real or social constructs with no basis in "reality?" In our approach, *all* of the above types of things can be considered real – one can spread one's arms around the scope of interpretations of reality, rather than be forced to pick one.

Bhaskar's "Critical Realism" argues that the *unobservable mechanisms, structures, and tendencies* that generate the observable world are just as real as observable concrete reality. He points out that science makes ontological commitments that things such as the laws of physics are real. Robust scientific discoveries would not be possible were there not some real, though invisible, mechanisms or forces behind or beneath the natural patterns and objects that we study. The more *abstract* a concept the more one must stretch the concept of "real" away from concrete reality to include it. Concepts that frequent spiritual discussion such as mind, the self, and morality – can be claimed as real but it is difficult to separate their objective reality from the cognitive processes that find patterns in sense data and construct or infer abstract entities. Particularly problematic are the *most* abstract concepts, such as truth, goodness, beauty, form, system, object, change, causation, pattern, and yes, "reality" itself; and also the foundational spiritual concepts that we have discussed, such as God, Spirit, Ground of Being, Emptiness, etc.

Philosophers have coined the term "hyper-object" to refer to objects or systems that are so large and complex that humans cannot possibly comprehend them; especially including systems that we are embedded within (Morton, 2013). For example, the phenomena of climate change, the global economic system, and cultural evolution are hyper-objects – tangled conglomerations of interacting components spread across huge swaths of time and space that we can only glimpse facets of, yet must humbly try to understand.

Habermas, Wilber, and Bhaskar are among the philosophers who champion an ontological commitment that *subjective* realities are just as real as objective realities. If one approached this from a 3rdPP action logic one might take sides in arguing whether subjective "objects" are in fact real or not. But through a more flexible 4thPP reasoning one can say that subjective things like
ideas, plans, feelings, perceptions, assumptions, stories, and theories are as important and impactful as concrete realities. As Bhaskar says, these things are "causally efficacious," having definitive impact upon reality, and are thus real. Thus, rather than quibbling over the definition of a word ("real"), one can claim that it is important to extend the definition of real to include subjective objects – elevating subjectivity and objectivity to equal ontological status. (So-called "idealists" would claim that subjectivity is more real – but that is a regression to 3rdPP thinking.)

One can make the case that hypotheticals, myths, creative imaginals, and counter-factuals – i.e. claims or narratives that involve what is not actually the case (or is not actually "real") – are also real. Surely the things that we imagine in order to avoid, and fictitious stories spun from the imagination, have enormous impact on life. Critical Realism goes as far as to claim that negation, i.e. absence is real. For example, any change can be described as the negation of something making way for the emergence of something new, making non-being just as important as being.

Absence is certainly causally efficacious, for example: the absence of a liver in an animal; the absence of a key ingredient in a recipe, the absence of justice in a government. Reality is composed of complex systems at all levels, including galaxies, animals, ecosystems, and cultures. Such systems are "complex adaptive," "self-organizing," or "autopoietic" systems that persist through self-preservation processes as they interact with environments that "feed" them while simultaneously threatening to destroy them. Such systems persist through delicate and precise synergistic relationships, such that if one key component is removed the entire system might break down. Absence is real.

Bestowing absence with an ontological status equal to presence is important to Bhaskar's overall philosophy of human ethics and emancipation. Ignorance, denial, lies, and shadow-material are types of absence – demi-realities that have grave impacts. To ameliorate demi-reality is to absent such absences. The term "negative capability" mentioned earlier reminds us of the importance of acknowledging the realm of the unknown and non-existent. If human flourishing is one of the most important goals that we can have, then, Bhaskar argues, we have to take negation seriously and give it a prominent ontological status that supports our focused awareness of it.

Bhaskar’s associating absence with emancipation provides a useful hook for grounding spiritual concepts such as emptiness and non-duality in compassion. This lessens the possibility that such concepts will be used to take flight into abstract "absolute" realities that are open to the phenomena of "spiritual materialism" and "spiritual bypass."

**In what sense real?** In sum, all of these things, in addition to concrete observable objects, can be considered real: classes, abstractions, and generalities; processes and properties; hyper-objects; theories and models; ideas, stories, hypotheticals, and social constructions (subjectives); physical laws and causal tendencies; and even absences. In addition, what is considered real depends on the capacities of, and context of, the observer.

The more abstract an object, the more difficult it is to tease apart its being as an ontological "reality" from its being as a subjective construction. Importantly, if we agree on this then we do not have to argue or decide whether something is objective or subjective – we can acknowledge how it is in some ways objective and in some ways subjective, and move on. This is actually (and
The social negotiation of beliefs is replete with disagreements and impasses concerning what is real. In such cases the problem is often that interlocutors have different meanings for the "real," rather than that they agree on the definition but differ in its application. As we discuss more later, it is unavoidable that abstract words such as "real" have indeterminate meanings, i.e. they are interpreted differently by different individuals and in different contexts. One aspect of the 4thPP action logic (and even more in 5thPP) is that one learns to accept and accommodate to this disconcerting fact of language – whereas at earlier action logics one fights against it, trying to nail down the definition of terms, or arguing from one's own definitions, seeing others' arguments through one's own definitions. Of course, it is wise to refine and agree on term definitions as much as we can – the point is that it is impossible in the limit, and unlikely in contentious dialogues stemming from different world-views.

Our description of the many ways that things can be considered real illustrates this definitional indeterminacy. The same issues have been noted for "true" as for "real." For example Richard Kirkham, in *Theories of Truth, A Critical Introduction* (1992), shows that there are a multitude of definitions of truth implied in academic Philosophy and Logic. He shows that disagreements about the nature of truth are often the result of scholars talking past each other, unaware that they are using quite different senses of the word. By teasing out the various senses of "truth," Kirkham hopes to help philosophers clarify their inquiry.

All of this is to say, that the question "is it real?" is insufficient, as there are so many senses of the term; and the better question is "how is it real?" or conversely "in what sense is something not real (or less real)?" Within 2ndPP dogmatic belief systems and 3rdPP logical arguments, scholars may forever be writing lengthy treatises defining reality, and laymen may forever be spilling sloppy arguments about it – all in hopeless attempts at conclusiveness. The only way out is to abandon the question "Is it real?" and move to the more pragmatic question "In what sense is it real?" (and, conversely, In what sense not real?). As Bhaskar's says: "the relevant question is not whether ideas are real, but what kind of reality they have, and whether ideas of different type...have different kinds of reality" (Bhaskar, 1997, p. 142). Another way to employ "in what sense" is to ask "under what definition of the terms (consciousness, God, country...) can I see some truth in the statement?" We call this general approach "interpretive pluralism."

This is also the case for moving from "Is it true?" to "In what sense is it true?" (balanced with: "and from what perspectives does it seem false?"). But we are focusing our conversation in this text to ontological questions about what is real, not the larger topic of how to evaluated the truth of an idea, because real-ness is at the core of metaphysical inquiry. Though scholars may need to define clear sub-categories of the real, as we began to enumerate above, what is important to readers of this text is to know that there are many valid perspectives on the question; and it might add sufficient nuance to a conversation to say that, for example, an object is real "in the way that a law of physics is real," or "in the way that human intentions are real" – without needing a carefully mapped out taxonomy of types of real-ness.
Some philosophers make the case that invisible underlying laws and mechanisms, such as mathematical principles, quantum laws, information flows, or psychological archetypes, are more real, perhaps meta-real or hyper-real, compared to concrete reality. Again, though the point about the importance of unseen realities is taken, this regresses to a 3rdPP need for definitional certainty, and we suggest moving away from trying to claim which aspects of reality are most real. "In what sense is it real?" shifts the discourse from a definitional argument into a dialogic inquiry allowing for multiple nuances and perspectives. For example, there are important insights available in both the claims: the flowing river is a bona fide object, vs. the flowing river is an unreal illusion of a solid object. Perhaps there are a dozen perspectives on how the river is real or not real. Considering them is more difficult – it requires more effort. It can be a "pain in the ass" like trying to listen attentively to every single person at the family holiday gathering. But doing that creates new possibilities for mutual regard and intimacy as well as deeper understanding.

Is God real? Is love real? Is consciousness real? Is free will real? Interpretive pluralism represents a post-metaphysical (4thPP) move towards a flexible, appreciative, participatory, evolutionary, and ultimately more ethical approach to spiritual inquiry, belief, and being.

Constructing the Real

**Enaction.** "In what sense...?" (interpretive pluralism) creates an opening to deepening perspectives, information, and relationships. But it also adds complexity that may be overwhelming to interlocutors, or inappropriate to a situation, resulting in "analysis paralysis" or unhelpful dissonance. So, pragmatically, a balance is to be found between sticking to what one believes and opening to the unknown in each situation. This is particularly true when decisions need to be made and when time is a factor – i.e. when action is needed. Which brings us to another aspect of our inquiry into "what is real?" – that reality is "enacted."

This perspective is closely aligned with the philosophical tradition of Pragmatism that sees ideas as tools. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens says "the ontological status of [a soda] bottle is enacted in part by the method of interacting with it...The reality of the bottle as instrument, vase, or cash refund is not [merely] dependent on your viewpoint but rather on the social practice of interacting with the bottle" (2010, p. 13). The "reality," or meaning of a thing evolves as we interact with it. At a cognitively more basic level, an organism's sensory-motor relationship with an object is what confers the object's reality upon it (see Kiverstein & Clark, 2009). The reality of a fly is different to animals who "see" it with echolocation vs. vision vs. smell; and is different for animals for whom the fly as prey vs. predator vs. nuisance.

And, for the human animal, speech is also an action that confers reality. We have already mentioned how, at the magical substrate of cognition, speaking or naming something confers it with reality (or life or power). "Ontological legislation" is a term used when those in power dictate the naming of things, and in so doing create social realities. But, of course, poets and mystics also serve that cultural function. Words not only describe but words, and actions, disclose reality.

Let us not err so far on the side of epistemology that we assume that the world is only what we create it to be. Thought can cast conceptual boundaries around objects, and is free to roam wildly among hypothetical realities – but concrete reality is something one "bumps into" and calls to be
dealt with (as in Dick's “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away”). Our goal in this chapter is to support a more adequate intuition of when and how ideas are likely to be inflicted with various sorts of demi-reality – we are trying to "mind the gap" between the real and ideas.

The symbolic impulse: contours of the real vs. ideas. The third "historical arc" that we painted above proposed that the story of human wisdom can be told in terms of increasing depth and clarity in how one understands the relationship between the real vs. ideas – i.e. how one maps out demi-reality. Demi-reality can be described – and ameliorated – in several ways. First, through the basic habits of critical thinking and humility, i.e. reflecting on whether an idea might be biased based on one's unexamined assumptions or egotistic attachments. Second, one can reduce demi-reality through methodologies such as the scientific method or multi-stakeholder dialogues. These 3rdPP methods are well known (though not necessarily practiced). Our focus here is on 4thPP approaches (and beyond) for understanding and ameliorating demi-reality – illustrating principles that are not quite as apparent to the average person (or even the average scholar or spiritual sage). To this end we will more deeply explore the relationship between ideas and the real by noting some fundamental properties of reality vs. ideas – specifically the structural differences between concrete reality and mental constructs. We will use the term "epistemic drives" for tendencies of the mind that bias conceptualization or interpretation.

First, consider concepts, which are the fundamental building blocks of ideas (or similarly, consider words, which are the building blocks of language). All abstract thought (or at least all socially shared thought) is built using words or concepts that, essentially, split the world into categories. Reality is rarely as simple as these categories. In the very act of speaking or conceptualizing one produces some demi-reality – even though language it is an indispensible tool and an unavoidable element of culture. (We use the term demi-real rather than falsehood or imagination because ideas are real in that, through people's actions, they have causative impact on concrete reality.)

The faculty of using concepts, a cognitive tendency that we will call the "symbolic impulse," implicitly confers certain false properties upon reality. It makes reality appear as if it is composed of tidy categories with clear boundaries. One often knows and compensates for the fact that reality does not exist in this tidy way, but still, there is an aspect of cognition (the symbolic impulse) that compels one in this direction. If one calls someone an "introvert" or an "intelligent person" we might need to add qualifiers that nuance the starkness of the categories (e.g. "usually an introvert" or "intelligent but not very wise"). Of course, categories express important truths as well as demi-realities: all fish and all cities do have something in common worth highlighting. The symbolic impulse, or we could say language itself, is, as many a sage has noted, is both a blessing and a curse.

Abstractions are simplifications over real objects that ignore certain properties and highlight others. A tree can be a plant, an alive being, a piece of wood, a scaffold for climbing, a structural element of a shelter, etc. – and with each naming we emphasize something and ignore something else about the object, generating another morsel of demi-reality.

The drive to categorize combined with the drive to abstract creates hierarchies of categories such as taxonomies. We have learned to comprehend many such "epistemic forms." Other forms
include tables, Venn diagrams, scatterplot graphs, etc. Such models seem to explain much and empower us – and often they do – but with each tidy organization some demi-reality is created as a byproduct.

We have mentioned another epistemic drive: the pull toward conceptual oneness, unity, totality, or essentialism exhibited in metaphysical thinking. This can make concepts appear to cover more range, or explain more of reality, than they actually do. The more abstract a concept is, the more it may relate to “questions of ultimate concern,” and thus acquires more meaning-generative importance. A dilemma results from the fact that the most abstract concepts can contain the most demi-reality. The ideas people become most attached to may be the most nebulous. The conceptual boundaries over which people fight the most aggressive battles can have the vaguest of demarcations. The more vague or subjective an idea, the harder one must argue for its objective truth, and the more one must strain reason to champion it. This is of course often the case in religious and spiritual discourse.

We will return later to discuss how cognitive science has investigated epistemic drives. But here our goal is to outline some of the properties that conceptualization, or thought in general, confers upon reality, and compare those properties with fundamentally valid properties of perceptual reality. This becomes one tool for reducing demi-reality through post-metaphysical thinking. One can notice when one's perceptions (and conceptions) of reality contain demi-real properties that might be conferred by epistemic drives, vs. when one's perceptions (and conceptions) of reality contain properties more typical of reality itself. I.E. we can learn to better mind the gap between the real and ideas.

**Repleteness and projected properties.** Actual objects in concrete reality are "replete" – which is to say they cannot be completely described with a finite number of properties. Concrete reality is also said to "withdraw" from begin captured by categories and ideas. The closer one looks, the more detail one finds. Thus, any finite description of a dog, a fork, a city, a family, etc. will be incomplete. The abstractions used to describe actual objects – brown, made of silver, democratic, happy, etc. – capture only a facet of the object, and actual objects can be described with ever-increasing levels of depth from endlessly multiplying perspectives.

Concrete reality is not only replete with seemingly endless details, it is unfathomably complex, harboring interrelationships among the endless details (parts), at many levels of emergence, arising co-dependently. An actual person, for example, is replete and hyper-complex. In minding the gap between reality and ideas, one can track, in a rough sense, when one is moving more toward the repleteness and complexity that characterize the contours of concrete objects, vs. the simplicity that characterizes ideas and ideals.

We must make clear here that the repleteness and complexity of real objects are challenges for the conscious linguistic mind – i.e. for the symbolic impulse. Objects withdraw as one tries to describe them with concepts and words. But at the level of unconscious raw experience, or "being," there is no problem. The physical body interacts smoothly and (usually) unproblematically with physical objects despite their repleteness and complexity. The "social body" participates in social interactions (usually) without getting hung up their on massive complexity. The automatic unconscious layer of the body/mind spawns conversations, plays sports, parents children, and
mingles at social gatherings – just doing and not thinking about what one is doing. (See more in the Deep Dive box on The Unconscious in a later section.)

Abstractions are created by highlighting common properties of objects and discarding other properties as irrelevant (for the purpose at hand). For example, tool, chair, and democracy are (moderately) abstract concepts that group less abstract objects together into a class with common properties. Human language and reason depend heavily on the capacity to create abstractions – so far so good. But each abstract concept becomes an entity that can take on a life of its own, somewhat separate from the objects that originally defined it. For example, one may come to learn or believe certain things about tools (or chairs or democracies) that do not hold for all of the instances of the class. One may associate democracies with capitalism, or workmanship with tools – when in fact the associate does not always hold true. In this way properties are projected onto objects based upon the class(es) that we ensconce them in.

Ideally, reason includes an ongoing dialectic between concrete reality and abstract ideas – testing for demi-reality and modifying ideas and ideals as necessary. But of course this is often not the case, and abstractions that contain fallacious associations spread and wreak havoc (in religious and spiritual thinking, and elsewhere). The useful purity of the abstraction can become the totalizing cognitive hegemony of the ideal entity or the ideological vision.

These problematics find one extreme in metaphysical objects. Ideals such as God, Spirit, Eros, élan vital, and Gaia are more than abstractions over objects in the world. And, because they are thought to exist in some (metaphysical) reality, they are more than metaphorical extensions of concrete reality. Such objects are pure of the gritty details and repleteness of concrete reality, not because of the practical utility of the generalization, but because such purity is essential to their very nature. Because such concepts are only useful because they influence concrete life, it is inevitable that their purity, in addition to its benefits, is projected upon and clashes with "reality" in a proliferation of the demi-real. Ideals such as God can become "reified" in the mind to take on concrete features and be projected onto the world – e.g. the old man with a white beard who is both loving and harshly just.

Metaphysical objects, being unconstrained by the rules of both concrete reality and subjective reality, are free to accumulate ad-hoc properties with no crosschecking with objective facts or subjective insights. As long as they remain logically consistent within the bounds of some worldview or dogma, they propagate freely among past and potential "believers."

For example, consider the metaphysical concept of Gaia – a vision of the earth as a quasi-conscious living system. Gaia refers to more than an emergent system of systems, it imbues this meta-system (the earth) with additional properties and explanatory narratives that, while seductive and meaningful, blur the distinction between facts and values, science and imagination. Earth, now as Gaia, takes on qualities of the protective yet wrathful mother, or perhaps the vulnerable nursery that we must nurture. The concept of Gaia can be skillfully used to coax the qualities of mutual dependence, care, respect, and gratitude from the mythical level of collective consciousness. But at the extreme the narrative of Gaia becomes a fiction that limits pragmatic possibilities in reality rather than being a conceptual tool held accountable to the contingencies of reality.
This can happen with any metaphysical object. Properties such as intentionality, omnipresence, kindness, and perfection can easily accrue onto non-living abstractions to take up the detail-sparse space opened up by high abstraction. Any property that enhances the deeper purpose or intention motivating an ideology can be attracted to and attached to an object's definition. The concepts of Spirit or Consciousness accrue omnipresence because accruing those properties meets the psychological, cultural, or political needs that created the ideals in the first place. In so doing the concept gains larger "meaning" but withdraws further from actuality.

As another example, consider the scientific concept of gravity. It is an abstraction with a simple definition and discoverable nature. If gravity were to be appropriated for religious purposes to become "Gravity," it would be assumed to exist in a different way, and, over time, would accrue new properties from magical and mythical thinking, which would simply be believed, and would be beyond empirical validation. Being part of reality one might assume that Gravity is replete as well, and one might, in a proto-scientific inquiry, endeavor to inquire into the many properties of the "thing" that exists "out there" – an object now completely unmoored from its simple original definition. Gravity then becomes mysterious, not in the way that quasars or neutrinos are mysterious, but in the way that Zeus and Aliens and Fairies are mysterious – as if they were actual entities, complex compositions having autonomous replete natures. In doing so we seem to know more than we do, and create additional levels of bias, illusion, and certainty – rather than employing the negative capability of holding unknowing and paradox.

Below we include three side-bar Deeper Dives titled "Enfoldment paradoxes," "Faux dualities and paradoxes," and "Illusory recursions" that describe additional ways that ideas import demi-real properties upon concrete reality.

The reproduction of metaphysical concepts such as God, Eros, and Absolute Self within a community of believers may seem to have more utility than hazard. But, in the modern cosmopolitan hyper-connected world, it is better for ideas to have "portability." The fallibilities and indeterminacies of ideas might be safely ignored within "the choir" of a particular community or world view, but ideas, especially metaphysical ideas, become problematized when one wants to: (a) cross disciplinary boundaries to interact with other communities, (b) apply these ideas and explain one's purposes to stakeholders, or (c) have a constructive dialogue with others who don't agree with some aspect of the theory or model.

I call this the "idea portability principle:" that understanding and dealing with the indeterminacy of ideas is more important the greater the distance between the worldviews or beliefs of interlocutors. Reaching out to, positively affecting, and being affected by individuals with other world-views is central to any sustainable ethical and emancipatory vision of human potential.

Deeper Dive: Faux dualities and paradoxes

It may be that in some way, "I love her and I hate her," or that "its sort of a fruit and sort of a vegetable," but the symbolic impulse insists that I either love or hate her; and that its either a fruit or a vegetable. Above we argued for approaches that resist the symbolic impulse, and the vain confrontations it entails, to allow one to say, for example, "I love her in a sense; I hate her in a sense," and to get on with exploring what is revealed about life within each of those senses. Some may struggle with the notion that a person may be a progressive but also, in a sense, a conservative (and in another sense neither) –
though at more mature levels of cognitive development such false dualities loose their insistence and force.

Though a mature person may easily avoid being distracted by such faux paradoxes in concrete everyday life, faux paradoxes and false dualities run deep. They are more difficult to identify and weed out within abstract thought, and they persistently plague even sophisticated philosophical and spiritual dialogue. For example, it might seem impossible that a thing can be, for example: both spirit and matter, both interior and exterior, both individual and collective; both a state and a stage; or both empty and full. (Kant, who stands at the juncture between 3rdPP and 4thPP cognition, historically ushering in the later, struggled with paradoxical "antimonies." He had to resort to metaphysics to muffle their disturbing character). Physicists continue to struggle with how light can be both a particle and a wave. In all of these cases, an object that defies abstract categories should not be seen as a paradoxical mystery of the universe, but rather as an indication that certain human categories fail to be useful for certain questions. For example light is one thing that appears particle-like in some contexts and wave-like in others – we don't seem to have the perceptual primitives or metaphorical resources to comfortably comprehend an object that is simultaneously both. "To be or not to be?" We might answer: perhaps both and neither (as suggested by Indian philosopher Nagarjuna) – or we can reject the question as unhelpful.

Post-modern philosophers Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida are known for exploring how language and culture manufacture dualities. To create a category X is to simultaneously raise the possibility of not-X. Constructing "liberal" co-begets "conservative," as with "good vs. evil" and "sane vs. crazy." The symbolic impulse that wants one to place people into one or the other category is, of course, a powerful tool of thought, but it also creates great suffering. In spiritual contexts, the modern mind easily senses the fallacies within polarities like "good vs. evil," "saint vs. sinner," "believer vs. non-believer," and "heaven vs. hell." But more subtle dualities remain. For example, above we questioned the usefulness of the "Absolute vs. Relative" Two-Truths doctrine.

Base or concrete reality (we claim here) is not structured through simple categories – which, rather, are imposed upon it by the symbolic impulse. When we use the concept "ego" (or self) the symbolic impulse steers us into conversations about egolessness (or selflessness) – "Does mystical sage X have an ego?" or "Is spiritual achievement level Y devoid of ego?" Increasingly we are learning that – damn it! – all of our so-called enlightened teachers sure seem to have some sort of ego-thing going on. The more useful (4thPP/5thPP) question is "how does ego/self manifest" for a given person or level (or does the concept itself cease to make useful distinctions in some contexts?)? The same is true for being vs. non-being, awake vs. non-awake, liberation vs. delusion, nature vs. nurture...all polarities that have some use, but run out of steam when closer scrutiny is necessary.

The magical strata of cognition, which does not well differentiate interiors from exteriors, experiences a type of mystical elation within the symbolic impulse. In constructing a concept, for example "dark," the concept of "light" presents itself so immediately and strongly that both seem to exist in a hyper-real Platonic world of Forms (rather than a demi-real world of human construction).

In philosophy Kant answered Descartes’ theoretical split between mind vs. matter with his theory of phenomena (experience) vs. noumena (reality's unknowable "thing in itself"). Hegel then critiqued Kant's unknowability of reality by showing how subject and object interpenetrate with each other. But all of these philosophers built their theories atop conceptual dualisms (including Hegel's synthesis and antithesis). The demi-reality introduced by these dualities inevitably leaves weaknesses in a theory that are picked apart by subsequent thinkers. There is no escape from an infinite sequence of renovations for such theories if they are built upon clean-cut categories.
In the synthetic approach attributed to Hegel, a contradictory thesis and antithesis are resolved into a synthesis, a concept at an emergent higher level of understanding. However, sometimes the thesis and antithesis are best tolerated or emptied rather than transcended. If the contradiction or duality is seen as an epiphenomena, i.e. a demi-real artifact of the symbolic impulse, then the better approach is to release the concepts' hold on meaning-making.

The classical Greek laws of logic are 3rdPP principles that assume pristine categories satisfying the symbolic impulse. These laws are: the law of identity: 'Whatever is, is' (A=A); the law of contradiction: 'Nothing can both be and not be' (A and not-A cannot both be true); and the law of the excluded middle: 'Everything must either be or not be" (Either A is true, or not-A is true). At the 4thPP action logic one allows for the fallibility of these laws. While acknowledging their value in many contexts, one can conceptualize the grey zones and liminal spaces of a "fuzzier" logic.

Because they are so intimately tied to language and other cognitive functions, dualities will remain a given. In addition to reflecting on their limitations we can also see them as gifts. They, especially the potent dualities found in spiritual discourse, point to very real tensions that exist in the conceptual or perceptual mind. We can use the energy behind such dualities, for example, saints and sinners, freedom and dependence, mind and matter, to generate potentially healing insights.

Deeper Dive: Enfoldment paradoxes

Concrete objects in reality obey laws that abstract concepts in the mind do not. In concrete reality if one object is fully contained by another, the later cannot contain the former. But this principle does not apply to abstractions. If one is under the spell of the symbolic impulse, one can become baffled when abstract ideas behave differently than concrete objects. For example, is ontology explained by (covered within) epistemology or is it the other way around? It often happens that a theory or framework can be seen by its adherent to completely supersede, explain, and contain another theory; while adherents of the second theory will claim the opposite – that their theory supersedes, explains, and contains the first. A neutral onlooker might see that, in a sense, both are correct.

Is mind inside matter, as an emergent phenomenon of the brain and evolution? Or is matter (and all reality) inside the mind (or Mind) or inside of consciousness (or Consciousness)? Is non-dual realization above and transcending regular consciousness or below and underpinning it? Such questions are unanswerable paradoxes of enfoldment, but only if one expects abstractions to obey the laws of concrete reality.

The same phenomena seen in metaphorical enfoldment can be seen in metaphorical underpinning. For example, is Consciousness the foundational essence of all reality? Or maybe its Love, or Creative Potential, or Unmanifest Potential... When all of these objects are seen as concepts rather than metaphysical realities – as tools we use, perspectives we take, and artifacts we play with – such confusions about absolutes, foundations, and essences are seen through.

Deeper Dive: Illusory recursions

Another casualty of the symbolic impulse, is the perception of superfluous recursive fractal structures. These can be seen in conceptual systems including Yin/Yang or Masculine/Feminine polarity principles, astrology, and personality typing systems. For example, if one attempts to forcefully cleave reality into Yin and Yang categories, one eventually must admit that there is some Yin-like essence within the Yang category, and vice versa – resulting now in four categories. But then again, within the Yin-inside-the-
Yang, there can be found yet another essence of Yin, and so on, in an infinite recursion of conceptual fine-tuning through splitting. To the 2ndPP and 3rdPP mind it might seem fascinating that reality is so complex and mysterious. Yet this beautiful recursive structure is an illusion – an artifact of the original impulse to cleave. If one resists the symbolic impulse to partition reality into neat categories, the problem never arises.

Similarly, in astrology, which has 12 categories, one is first classified by one's sun sign. But personality is too complex for that, so one has a moon sign within the sun sign to add nuance and better approach reality. But of course two categories are insufficient so deeper analysis is done – adding additional layers of nuance, in a not-quite-infinite regress. The same happens with personality typing systems such as the Myers-Briggs 16-type system. The main classification is too simplistic and additional layers are added: perhaps one category is used for one's relationship to self and another for one's relationship to others, resulting in a 16x16 matrix of possibilities. Which is insufficient, so perhaps both the self-type and the others-type are subdivided into orientations to the past vs. the future, producing a 16x16x16 system.

The spectacle is comparable to the epicycles that Ptolemy invented to explain the motion of heavenly bodies. They were an epiphenomena created by assuming the planets revolve around the earth. It is not that such systems of classification are not useful – they provide powerful ways to describe real differences between entities. The problem comes when one takes them too seriously, as if reality must be constrained to fall within these man-made categories. Then the conceptual halls of mirrors become inevitable.

Concrete reality does of course contain objects exhibiting actual fractal patterns – we do not imply that such patterns are always illusory. But, I suspect that reality does not, in itself, contain paradoxes, but rather that each object or occurrence just "is what it is" regardless of whether humans can comprehend it.

**Adequatio.** In this final subsection we will tie the philosophical principles of epistemology and ontology from this chapter more closely to the concept of development explored in the prior chapter – and in so doing create a bridge to the next chapter on embodied cognition. As may already be clear to the reader, any answer to "what is real?" (or "what is true?") depends on the perspective that the question is asked from and answered from. Though there are many types of "perspectives," in an important way meaning-making depends on developmental perspective.

Above we have rejected the "view from nowhere", to say that all truth claims are made "by someone from somewhere." There are various ways to describe the someone and somewhere that shape each view of reality. Widely acknowledged shaping forces include a person's experience, knowledge, biases, intentions, culture, and theoretical framework. The contextual cues and emotional bio-physiology of the moment also impact one's "perspective." Less often acknowledged, but critically important, are developmentally-determined capacities. That is to say, one perceives objects according to the level of conceptual complexity that one has developed in any domain. For example, the expert woodsman sees objects and patterns in the wild that others do not see; and the experienced conflict mediator will see phenomena and opportunities unseen by others. If a thing cannot be "seen" by someone it is not "real" for that person. This follows Schumacher's (and, earlier, Plotinus') notion of *adequatio*, which says that "the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known" (Schumacher, 1977, p. 39).
Wilber and Esbjörn-Hargens propose a framework called "integral post-metaphysics" that reframes the question of whether something is real to ask how it is real for whom. The "how" refers to the methodology used to inquire and the "whom" refers to the developmentally-determined capacity of the observer/inquirer (Wilber 2006; Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010). Methodologies are classified according to the 8 "primordial perspectives" or "methodological zones" in Wilber's AQAL matrix. The details are beyond our scope, but the main idea is that, for example, the method used to observe or measure – for example a microscope, a telescope, subjective introspection, or using a population survey – will have a strong influence on the objects and patterns that can be see and deposited within the scope of "reality."

The classification of developmental levels in integral post-metaphysics is closely related to the person-perspective levels mentioned in this text. For a child at the magical level of development, Santa Claus is real. Among a group of children the question "What kind of cookies does Santa Clause like best?" is a valid question about reality. Santa Clause can also exist for us if we "suspend the disbelief" of higher developmental action logics and enter the magical thinking strata of consciousness.

Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman (2009) give the example of "ecosystem." An ecosystem can exist, and claims about one can be made, only for those who have an adequate understanding of the concept, which requires the capacity to think at a level of complexity that can perceive how phenomena and wholes emerge from the chaotic and extremely complex interdependencies of a large number of parts. Cultures that have no conceptualization of an ecosystem may have difficulty designing ways to monitor or improve its health (though, obviously, the converse is not necessarily true, since cultures with sufficient complexity might still neglect ecosystems). Complex and/or abstract objects such as "the self," "consciousness," "human development," and "participatory spirituality" will necessarily be understood differently according to one's "complexity capacity" within any given theme of inquiry.

Another perspective on adequatio uses the idea of "epistemic forms" – generic or formal structures of understanding that come with rules for manipulating them (Collins & Ferguson, 1993). One example is the list, which is anything with a beginning, a sequence and an end. The list has just three modes of manipulation: adding and removing elements, and sorting them – this defines the rules of the "epistemic game" playable with lists. Tables and hierarchies are more complicated epistemic forms than list, because they include and extend the forms and "games" of the list.

Linear or categorical (black and white) structures are simpler than graded/spectral, networked, or branching structures; which are in turn simpler than co-referential/paradoxical, interpenetrating/fractal/recursive/holographic, or constellational forms. Once one has mastered the general properties and dynamics of any epistemic form one can re-use that structure in multiple contexts – the 12 year old who "groks" the usefulness of tables has gained a powerful thinking tool. And conversely, if one has not built up an adequately complex cognitive toolbox of epistemic forms (and associated rules of the epistemic games), one cannot even "seen," never mind reason about, certain complex phenomena that others can see.
It is easy to put principles of adequatio to work in educational settings, as Collins and Ferguson did, and also easy to apply the related idea of meritocracy to assigning decision making to the most skilled – but it is difficult to apply it to subjects such as spirituality that rest closer to the heart of human identities. This is because it is difficult to avoid flavors of elitism or condescension if one claims a developmentally "higher ground" for oneself (or for another whom one references to support one's beliefs). In claiming developmental superiority, not only can it be socially awkward answering defensive charges of arrogance, but also, importantly, it is difficult to know when and how one's own biases make it seem that one possesses a superior encompassing perspective. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that it is, by definition, almost impossible for one to fully appreciate the implications and value of perspectives that are developmentally beyond where one is (for any given topic). For example, as Wilber explains with his "pre-trans-fallacy," to those at "conventional" action logics can incorrectly interpret the actions of post-conventional individuals as coming from pre-conventional motivations.

In practice what this means is that explanations or justifications referencing developmental "altitude" should be constrained according to a mutually agreed understanding of what developmental capacity means and how it is determined. This allows for discussion of the many ways ("developmental lines") that people can accumulate knowledge and wisdom (as well as they ways that people can be blind to what they don't know).

But doing this is not always pragmatically possible. The principle of adequatio can also be used to "manage expectations" regarding how much of one's understanding, or one's argument, is likely to be understood by others who have not had the opportunity to build cognitive complexity in the topic. It can also motivate one to help others build complexity and "perspectival range" rather than judging them as wrong or incompetent.

**Reification and Misplaced Concreteness**

A fascinating thing happens when ideas reach toward abstraction. Because of the deeply metaphorical nature of thought, which, as Lakoff shows is grounded in concrete sensory-motor constructs, abstract ideas cast a deep shadow back into the concrete strata of the mind even as they ascend to the heights of abstraction. This phenomena is called reification or misplaced concreteness (the later term was coined by Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, 1929).

The usual definition of reification is: when an abstract object or idea is treated as if it were concrete (materially real). It is a type of "fallacy," like other cognitive illusions, in that one under its influence does not know that one is being "tricked" by a distortion of the mind operating below conscious awareness. The phenomenon of reification accounts for, or is closely related to, a large number of the sources of belief fallibility (demi-reality) including many we have discussed. Phenomena related to reification include the following, all of which are relevant to spiritual beliefs:

- "Confusing the map with the territory" – i.e. thinking as if the ideas baked into a theory, model, or story are more real that what they represent, such that reality, or one's interpretation of reality, must bend to fit the map (as opposed to the other way around). Coined by Alfred Korzybski: "A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness"(1958, p. 58).
"The myth of the given" (coined by Wilfrid Sellars, 1956) – i.e. believing that one's perceptions of reality, which are in fact constructed subjective experiences, accurately represent objective reality.

The symbolic impulse – which treats abstract concepts as if they had the properties of concrete objects: well-defined boundaries, durability, location, etc.

Anthropomorphism – attributing human properties such as emotion and intentionality to natural or social objects, processes, or structures. For example: The Universe is kind; Mother Nature is protecting herself and will wipe out humanity if she needs to; the government wants all of my money and is forever scheming ways to take it.

Psychological projections – for example, when I assume that others must have the same beliefs or perceptions that I have (and I become frustrated when the don't); or when one projects one's emotions or intentions upon people or objects ("why is everyone always angry at me?").

Magical thinking – we have noted that magical thinking includes a confounding of exteriors and interiors, including projecting ideas and feelings out onto the world, e.g. the child freighted by the monster imagined under the bed, and the adult feeling chastised by God imagined as a man with a white beard living in the sky. The magical attribution of "real" powers to words and symbols is another form of reification.

Metaphysical "locations" – when one places an idea in a "world" that is beyond space and time, but assumed to still somehow exist outside of subjectivity. For example, Plato's realm of Ideals, which hold the ideal forms of the Triangle and the Tiger, from which emanate all actual concrete triangles and tigers.

Metaphysical objects – we noted that metaphysics is "the doctrine of ideas that equates being with thought," and that metaphysical objects such as Gaia, Mother Nature, Spirit, and "collective we" beings are "free to accumulate ad-hoc properties with no crosschecking with objective facts or subjective insights."

We see that the tendency of the mind to reify abstractions is widespread and multi-faceted. Actually, reification (misplaced concreteness) is more complicated than many realize. This is for reasons we have outlined above. Within its definition – i.e. treating abstractions as if they were concretely real – the concepts "abstract" and "concrete" (or real) are metaphorical pluralisms with an inconvenient range of meanings. We have discussed the many ways a thing can be real, or more-or-less real; and we have described a "ladder" of degrees of abstraction. Thus, we must conclude that reification is not a binary category but (surprise!) a graded category that admits to degrees of misplaced concreteness; and that the "fallacy" of misplaced concreteness is sometimes not so much of a fallacy after all.

For example, "blueness" is an abstraction and a quality constructed in the visual cortex, but in most contexts it is unproblematic to treat blueness as a real property of objects. Physicists propose the abstract concept of "force" to represent the relationship between mass and acceleration (F=ma), but they go further to treat forces as if they were real things in the cosmos. "Depression" is a somewhat abstract construct, and is not a daemon lurking in an actual metaphysical world trying to hunt us down, yet we must consider it real to seriously invest in treatments for it. A thing does not need to be made of material substance to be real – e.g. a decade. Lakoff's Primary Theory Of Metaphor claims that all abstract concepts are understood only in terms of concrete constructs, which implies that some degree of reification is happening in almost all beliefs. Look at that last
sentence – do theories make "claims" – is that anthropomorphic? Does it really matter? (Oh no, now I'm seeing reification in everything – "really" links to objective reality, and "matter" links to concrete matter.) If the phenomena are so ubiquitous and benign, why bother becoming aware of it?

But of course, reification it is not always benign. We have illustrated how sometimes-pernicious reification manifests differently within different developmental action logics. In 1stPP subjective objects and feelings are projected onto exteriors. In 2ndPP the stories we tell ourselves are assumed to be objectively real. At 3rdPP our magnificent, sublime, and elaborate models and theories hypnotize us into submission – we operate within seemingly objective "paradigms" that contain unexplored projections upon reality. The more abstract the idea, the more subtle and deeper the "shadow cast back into the concrete strata of the mind."

Process philosopher Bonnitta Roy quips "perhaps the only difference between children finding horses in clouds and philosophers discovering metaphysical properties in Consciousness is that the children know they are participating in their discoveries by adding imagination to perception whereas the Philosopher's do not". At the level of concrete objects (1stPP and 2ndPP) even children can know when they are making-believe (though they often do not). At the level of high abstractions however (3rdPP), even eminent philosophers don't catch this trick of the mind in the act.

**The reification of soul, spirit, consciousness, Eros and archetypes.** In spiritual discourses soul, spirit, Higher Self (or Unique Self, or True Self), and consciousness seem to be both requisite and hotly debated concepts. Can the post-metaphysical perspective clarify some of the noise and dampen some of the ideological inflammation? One could argue that reification is behind much of the unnecessary fervor and angst.

First we can note that soul, spirit, Self, and consciousness are abstract concepts that, like all abstractions, admit to metaphorical pluralisms and indeterminate boundaries and definitions. Are they then fuzzy attempts to signify things that "really exist" but are difficult to put a finger on because they are complex and subtle? Or are they abstractions wholly created by the mind that are then projected out into a metaphysical world beyond time and space (like heaven but more abstract)? Given our post-metaphysical approach, we can reject the notion that they exist in some actual but metaphysical realm. But isn't it possible that such concepts are imperfect attempts to describe real phenomena? We must give the potentially unsatisfying answer: "probably partly."

These spiritual concepts may be the best we can currently do to make meaning of processes well beyond our understanding. But to the extent that we treat them as well-defined givens, or grasp tightly to their definition or use, or twist reality to make it conform to our preconceptions – we have moved dangerously into the territory of misplaced concreteness. Concepts such as Higher Self, Unique Self, True Self, Absolute Self, Soul, etc. can be quite useful in differentiating subtly different aspects of experience, but they should not be taken as Platonic Ideals or discrete forms in the metaphysical substrate. It might be clearer to say, for example, "The Unique Self aspect of the experience of self" – to make it clear one is referring to a property rather than an object, and thus avoid the strong (understandably human) tendency to reify Unique Self into something that defines
reality rather than the other way around. (See more about the concept of Consciousness in the Deep Dive box on that topic later; and for discussion of the self that "lives on," see the Deeper Dive on Supranormal entities.)

As another example, Wilber offers a framework for understanding how all objects in the cosmos (holons) develop or evolve – i.e. through the four interdependent primordial processes of Eros, Agape, Agency, and Communion (self-transcendence toward the higher, loving care of the lower-parts, self-preservation toward wholeness, and relationship toward emergence; Wilber, 2001). The cosmic "force" of Eros is common within other spiritual narratives as well. Again, such concepts are useful to differentiate vaguely perceived (subjective, un-measurable, unverifiable) properties or processes that seem ubiquitous throughout creation, and we can put them to good use while "minding the gap" of misplaced concreteness.

Concepts at the extremes of abstraction may suffer the most from the dislocated shadow projecting back to the concrete strata. In our discussion of Absolute Reality (or Absolute Truth) vs. Relative Reality (or Relative Truth), we noted how, given the definition of the absolute, nothing factual or actual could be said about it. What one is left with is poetry, paradox, or obscurity. The ontological interpretation of non-duality is similarly problematic. One cannot conceive of it without inferring its opposite, which is itself a duality. Similarly with the concept of emptiness – a deep exploration of the emptiness of anything leads one to acknowledge its "fullness" (or co-dependent arising). Emptiness is easily transformed from a perspective or property, i.e. all phenomena are empty in a sense, into an object called "Emptiness," which then, as an object, cannot be empty.

With all such highly abstract concepts, the drive to reify ultimately leads to contradictions. At the extreme, just as the 2ndPP mind can become mad with conspiracy theories (narratives), the 3rdPP (and later) mind can literally become insane with abstractions. Paradoxes arise that are unsolvable sources of tension at 3rdPP. Abstraction itself can be reified into a God or the foundational essence of reality. One can ruminate endlessly on the being of being, or awareness of awareness...

Metaphysical reification happens with moderately abstract gestalts, including so-called archetypes, as well as the highly abstract totalities mentioned above. Eros, The Lover, the Higher Self, The King, the Trickster, the etc. are psychological archetypes (though Wilber and others understand Eros in a more absolute sense). They can be productively understood as patterns of implicit belief structure that are universal in humans because all humans share in certain aspects of the drama of life, some of which we inherit from our animal ancestors (including: having parents along with the potentials for experiencing nurturing, helplessness, and abandonment; sexual attraction along with its implications for jealousy, devotion, and rejection; dominance hierarchies with their implications for competition, leadership, and tyranny; etc.). Archetypes are thus collectively shared, but to project them into metaphysical realms, where they become as eternal quasi-divine forces that reach down to influence humanity, is unnecessary from a post-metaphysical stance.

Archetypes and the spiritual concepts discussed above can be useful, but as high abstractions they are heavily clothed in hallucinatory projections such as faux-dualities. The drive to reify these
constructs works diametrically against one's capacity to separate the usefulness from the illusion (i.e. mind the gap of the demi-real). Thus the usefulness of archetypes and spiritual concepts such as spirit and soul are improved, rather than deconstructed, through post-metaphysical thinking.

Concepts such as spirit, soul, Higher Self, and Eros work well within magical and mythical modes of consciousness, sometimes super-charged with 3rdPP abstraction powers. Their main use is for making meaning within our "questions of ultimate concern." Even though they seem important, we should not argue about them as if (3rdPP) "truths" can be found there. In a future chapter we will suggest that "phenomenological" approaches may be the most productive knowledge-building methods for our age; while also suggesting that we should not jettison such metaphysical concepts, but choose and use them wisely.

**Embodied Cognition and Epistemic Drives**

**From 4th into 5th Person Perspective**

In this chapter we pivot from a strictly philosophical treatment of post-metaphysics and spirituality to one that relates more to (1) cognitive science and (2) felt experience. As readers will no doubt agree, any spirituality or metaphysics capable of sustaining humans into the next era must be grounded in the physical body and the concrete ethics of social life – even as it reaches into sublime visions and ideals that transcend those realities. Thus, we will explore human *drives* as they relate to the development of meaning-making processes; and will explore the implications of human reason being situated in a physical, biological, socially-embedded *body*. This exploration opens up the space for a more phenomenological inquiry into post-metaphysics – i.e., a felt understanding of the moment-to-moment interplay of confidence, uncertainty, curiosity, and dissonance that ground the search for meaning in the emotional movements of thought and in the ego's tremulous journey of self-determination, self-discovery, and self-liberation. What does it look like and feel like to shift into a post-metaphysical perspective on spirituality (or on anything)?

In one sense this text's themes have followed a developmental sequence that we can now extend into 5thPP. We began with a focus on the Magical and Mythical levels of cognition (1stPP, 2ndPP), which are about the stories we tell ourselves about what is real and true. We mentioned how the story-telling and object-crafting functions of mind carry forward into higher layers of consciousness, where abstraction and logic influence the mystical and metaphysical stories that we narrate. Though we mentioned that developmental theories are strongly grounded in science, we did not ground our argument in scientific findings. We used the developmental framework (of person-perspectives) as an orienting generalization to help understand a complex topic, and invited the reader to hold it lightly as a meaning-making tool, in a type of meta-story framing, without including scientific evidence for each of the many attributes we give each developmental level. The Interlude chapter included historically-oriented narratives, lifting our story-telling and meaning-making to a larger context. In a sense the approach up to this point was to tell a convincing and useful story, which is a 2ndPP approach to knowledge-building.

Then, in the next chapter, we moved to a "philosophical" approach that was more analytic, using more 3rdPP modes of inquiry. This 3rdPP mode was based on "rational reconstruction," i.e. logical arguments about what must be the case for a phenomenon to exist as observed. Though we did not
include much reference to (3rdPP) scientific findings, the overall character was still from a 3rdPP playbook. We also included invitations into 4thPP reasoning, by offering multiple perspectives to triangulate upon the complex systems of ideas that constitutes post-metaphysical thinking; and by inviting the reader to consider more intimately how post-metaphysical principles apply to one's own thought processes.

In this chapter we continue appeals to 3rdPP and 4thPP thinking, but include considerations that invite the reader into a 5thPP understanding of meaning-making. So far we have not much mentioned 5thPP, so let's explore its characteristics briefly.

**Approaching 5thPP through individual and collective orientations.** At 3rdPP one can see how thought and belief are influenced by what might be called "irrational" aspects of mind. It becomes a project then to clean up and perfect thinking and knowledge through rigor and reason. In religious contexts this can translate into more humanistic and less metaphysical interpretations of traditional wisdom. In spiritual contexts it can translate into an appreciation of contemplative practices for observing the mind and learning how the mind (or thought/emotion/sensation) works, toward the goals of cleansing thought and action of impurities, and realizing an inner peace that projects outward for others.

At 4thPP one shifts focus from the personalized aspects of "thinking/feeling," which can be experienced reflectively, to a collectively oriented focus on belief systems. At 3rdPP, with training, one can witness the nature of one's thoughts and emotions, including how one's emotions influence one's thoughts; and how one's desires influence one's beliefs. One cannot similarly look within to see, for example, prejudices born of misinformation, or that one's worldview is constrained by one's upbringing in Western Society. Revealing this stratum of demi-reality is a collective effort.

To access 4thPP insights I must listen to you, and "we" must listen to "them," in order to reveal belief limitations. Though we cannot directly observe cultural biases within the self, we can notice general patterns in how they operate in complex social flows of communicative action and knowledge formation, and we can become sensitive to the possibility that any belief could be fallible in ways that we cannot determine by ourselves. Truth-finding and reality-checking become more intimately linked with ethical concerns; our inquiry becomes ever-more necessarily participatory; and we realize that those who differ from us the most may hold the keys to our liberation from self-delusion.

At 4thPP one is also exploring the self more deeply. From the 3rdPP reflection on thought as it manifests in the moment, and knowledge as something that can be ever improved, one advances to noticing how the mind contains a cacophony of voices and perspectives that must be met, listened to, coordinated, and integrated – not only contemplatively "observed with equanimity." This listening is yet another project of opening to the complexity of diverse perspectives and allowing something new to emerge on its own terms, rather than efforting to tidy up a natural diversity as if it could be managed into compliance (at 3rdPP). At late 4thPP the self can be experienced as deeply intimate with all humans, and deeply at peace with the self's many parts (this is one possible manifestation of late 4thPP, though it is not by any means guaranteed).
In a sense, all of this at 4thPP is still dealing with the mind and self in terms of beliefs, stories, and narratives. We want to hear them, to give them voice and let them play together, and allow them to co-exist in peace or resolve into ever more beautiful meta-narratives – whether the stories exist among people or within the self. The narrative aspect of meaning-making can find both a resting place in depth and a great breadth in wisdom here.

Two aspects of 5thPP. At 5thPP there is yet another shift in the focus of attention. Rather than focusing on the interplay of narratives one naturally begins to deconstruct what it means to have a narrative. One more deeply sees the movements of mind that construct meaning "out of nothing," so to speak. There are two aspects to this movement. The first movement is a deeper glimpse into the emptiness of the self or ego. "Who is this self that seems to need meaning and needs to assimilate and excrete stories?" As the basis of cognitive operations rests more in raw awareness than in thinking, one's sense of self streams from empty-yet-alive awareness that can witnesses objects and stories arising in consciousness. The "I am" and "I am nothing" of spiritual lore takes on an experiential reality.

The second movement is a deconstructive glimpse into the emptiness of concepts – the building blocks of stories. Not only does one reflect critically upon the truth of (or perspectives on) an idea as whole, seeing it as constructed and biased in all the ways mentioned above, but one begins to deconstruct language itself, specifically the validity of conceptions (and perceptions). We have already entered into this territory in our philosophical ponderings above. From 5thPP one might put aside a question such as "Can love heal the world?" and notice more fundamentally how "love" "heal" and "world" have ambiguous definitions – meanings that may shift in the middle of a conversation. One might feel into an answer, but distrusts permanently putting it into words. In addition one can discover it more revealing to feel into the question itself.

4thPP experiences ideas as contingent stories that float in a context-dependent space of possible interpretations – that find temporary stability when interpretations agree. 5thPP moves deeper, experiencing words and concepts as fuzzy signifiers, each an entire world of possible meanings, that slide and stretch from moment to moment – finding momentary stability when the mind grasps to fixate upon a meaning. While 4thPP inquires about the validity and bias of meaning-making, 5thPP asks, in a sense, "what is the meaning (or function) of meaning-making?"

Another name for 5thPP (actually early 5thPP) is "construct aware." Susanne Cook-Greuter, who was the first to deeply explore this terrain developmentally, describes construct-aware this way: "[One becomes] cognizant of the pitfalls of the language habit [and starts] to realize the absurdity [or] limits of human map making. [The] linguistic process of splitting into polar opposites and the attending value judgments can become conscious...[one becomes] aware of the pseudo-reality created by words...aware of the profound splits and paradoxes inherent in rational thought...Good and evil, life and death, beauty and ugliness may now appear as two sides of the same coin, as mutually necessitating and defining each other" (2000, p. 21-30).

(Note again that development is not a strict ladder-like phenomenon. For example, one with a solidly developed 4thPP action logic can continue deepening 2ndPP and 3rdPP skills, and is probably already beginning to experience the types of insights we attribute to 5thPP.)
For an excellent example of a type of playfully metaphorical and construct-aware prose that gives a flavor of 5thPP thinking, see the article “Generative (En)closures, Bubbles, and Magic Circles” by Bruce Alderman (with contributions from Layman Pascal and Edward Berge) in this issue of Integral Review. Also, John Churchill (2018) illustrates the parallels between the three great epochs (“Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma”) of Buddhist philosophy and insights about consciousness arising from 3rdPP, 4thPP, and 5thPP action logics (or modes of awareness), respectively.

Each developmental level includes exterior and interior aspects, and construct-aware thought is the exterior orientation of 5thPP consciousness. It is a level of sophistication in one's understanding of reality – as it appears in perception and conception. Concepts, percepts, i.e. objects as-they-appear, are seen to be, in a sense, "empty." Turning this piercing lens inward one begins to experience the self as empty as well, and begins to identify more with the bare processes of awareness than with traditional ego structures (a capacity also called "presence"). Bare awareness has been called "awareness without an object," and at this stage other aspects of consciousness can be similarly stripped down, yielding experiences such as seeking without an object (open awareness), faith without an object, and compassion without an object.

At 5thPP and higher the deconstruction of language impulses can lead to a stable stage of what has been called "non-symbolic experience," in which the perpetual "voice in the head" disappears to lay bare a "depersonalized" awareness (Castillo, 1990; Yaden et al., 2017). This experience is generally accessible as a temporary state through contemplative practices. However, achieving such states, which are in effect experiences of open perception and minimal conception, does not in any way guarantee that when one re-engages in "thinking," dialogue, and problem solving, that one will have a construct-aware appreciation of the indeterminacies and fallibilities of ideas. Those skills are built along related, but separate, channels. (We say a bit more about 5thPP below in the Deeper Dive box on The Unconscious.)

The 5thPP action logic "ups the game" of post-metaphysical thinking in the ways noted above. The "sources of indeterminacy" of reason and belief expand from reflecting on the truthfulness of claims to reflecting on the conceptualization of the objects within those truth-claims, including the object called the self. So far, we have given a rather philosophical explanation of 5thPP. But we can also look to science for justifications for 5thPP insights into the nature of self and language. Since our inquiry is into post-metaphysics, we emphasize the study of concept-formation rather than ego-formation. Though outside our scope, the curious reader can find many scientific studies informing the emerging understanding of how the self is composed and constructed (e.g. Thompson, 2014; Yaden et al., 2017; Morin, 2006; Davidson et al., 2012).

**Deeper Dive: Angels and other supranormal entities**

What about angels, aliens, channeled entities, spirits, ghosts, and life after death? – Are they real?

For many modern spiritual "seekers" and spiritual "listeners" the topic of supranormal beings is an important element of spiritual-but-not-religious discourse. And it is a rich topic for metaphysical and post-metaphysical consideration. I count myself among those who have had a few encounters with such beings (or "beings"), both as an internal experience and through an intermediary who claimed to be in
contact with such beings. If you travel within the circles that I do (and also within other cultural "bubbles"), it is not easy to cavalierly write off some of these experiences.

Are angels, aliens, channeled entities, and spirits real? I don't know. I know that I don't know. I think that "we" don't know. And I believe that nobody can say for sure one way or the other. So I believe that "I don't know" is the most accurate answer to the question. But let's not stop there. There is much we can learn by investigating this fertile field of knowing and non-knowing. (BTW, this may imply that any "I know" with great certainty may be the least accurate possible answer one could give.)

As in other "application areas" of post-metaphysical thinking, I will not discuss the specifics of the various themes of supranormal (supernatural, paranormal) entities – each being an entire field of its own (in history, culture, pseudo-science, and sometimes in scientific study). We can speak of them together because they share the same positioning from a post-metaphysical stance.

Most would agree that encounters with supranormal beings, especially those experienced internally, involve some sort of contact with one's unconscious mind (which may or may not be associated with a "collective unconscious" – see the Deeper Dive on that topic). Where people differ is on whether the unconscious mind can act as a portal to or intermediary with non-ordinary realms of existence. That is: a primary point of contention or clarification is whether supranormal entities are sourced in (1) the individual unconscious (subjective reality); (2) a collective unconscious (intersubjective reality); or (3) an actual autonomous other "consciousness" (objective reality) (– or some combination of these three).

Encounters with supranormal entities are well known to happen through contemplative or trance states, consuming entheogens, or other altered or liminal states of consciousness such as hypnogogic (dream-like) states; or second-hand through encounters with shamanistic individuals who may themselves be in such states. The question of whether these experiences are completely subjective fabrications of the mind (or hoaxes) is complicated by many reports of people receiving information that one "should not be able to know" or that seem magically corroborated between more than one person. In addition, aside from the widespread anecdotal stories, there are empirical studies on these and other paranormal phenomena that give some people enough evidence to believe that they are scientifically demonstrated (Murphy, 1992).

However, due to (1) the comparable bulk of empirical evidence suggesting the opposite, i.e. that each such phenomena are not "real", and (2) the fact that, even in scientific areas such as climate science and medicine, the validity of the scientific method itself (as practiced) is quite complicated – I will not here take sides on the general question of empirical proof, as I have other points to make. Many have their minds made up on either side of the question of whether supranormal entities are real – and pointers to empirical or logical arguments are all too easy to counter with alternative empirical or logical arguments (e.g. see Schwartz & Simon, 2002; McCann & David, 2018). The audience I write for here are those who want to engage in the delicate balancing act of respecting that something seems true and real about encounters with supranormal beings, while engaging both an open mind and the rational mind.

First, to those having experiences of supranormal entities, the experiences are very real; and quite often the sense that one is in contact with another being feels extremely real. Second, many of those who believe in supranormal entities are intelligent, rational, and psychologically mature and healthy. Third many who believe that they have had experiences with supranormal entities are interpreting those experiences in ways that seem to add significant value and meaning to their lives and the lives of others, in ways that do not seem to pose perceptible or significant harm.
Perhaps the question then is "why does it matter" what anyone believes? The better question is "how does it matter?" – and for that we can take a developmental approach. Here again, the question is one of coordinating different action logics (a 4thPP skill).

Defenders of the reality of supranormal beings tend to point to their positive manifestations (especially in New Age circles); and critics of the idea like to point to the downside of "superstition," including how irrational beliefs lead to irrational behaviors. Of course both are partially correct. We have discussed the vitalizing importance of the magical strata of consciousness, and also how allowing the magical strata to gain control of one's belief's and actions can be problematic, even dangerous. Proponents of supranormal entities would not agree that they are "simply" products of the magical mind, but they often describe the communication between such entities and humans as being through the unconscious, magical, dream-state, or pre-language layers of the mind. Therefore the same precautions about the pre-rational strata of consciousness can be applied.

A primary principle, articulated explicitly here but also held implicitly by many, is that (a healthy manifestation of) each strata of mind should maintain its proper hierarchical relationship with the others. Lower layers provide raw information, life energy, and meaning to higher layers; and higher layers sense/monitor and coordinate/regulate lower layers. Each higher layer, from magical to mythical to rational to trans-rational, should be able to (in an ideal healthy mind) "make the call" about trusting and using what the lower layer(s) are "saying."

For example, if one experiences a non-ordinary being telling or showing one something – in a dream, a trance, a psychedelic trip, etc. – the (1stPP) perception of that being and their emotional intention is interpreted by the (2ndPP) narrative mind, which casts the message in some larger context or story. And the (3rdPP) rational mind can decide whether that being and that story should be ignored, down-played, or re-interpreted. Likewise, 4thPP mind can judge whether the rational mind has not over-functioned and quashed beneficial life-force and psychic information from lower levels (as well as putting the whole system in a larger life context).

At each level the available complexity of intelligence can decide how to process information from the lower levels in such a way that it is beneficial to the overall wellbeing of the self. In a healthy psyche each layer "knows how" to reject or re-interpret information for the good of the self, and each layer is set up to be able to do that with a bit more complexity and perspective than the prior. A poorly functioning psyche (unhealthy, at least in that moment) will make a bad decision for the larger self. It may let a dangerous or non-useful idea "in the door;" or fail to check the credentials or intentions of the (real or magical) supranormal being; or cast an otherwise positive idea with a hateful or demoralizing slant; or rationalize a story that is unworthy of keeping; or silence the rational mind to allow imagined daemons to become real.

This principle is valid regardless of one's metaphysical stance. Many already implicitly apply it. Open-minded skeptics will allow otherwise "rational" acquaintances to believe in supernatural beings as long as no harm is done. Those believers who regularly immerse themselves in contact with supranormal beings are discerning in their uptake of information from these sources. Both open-minded skeptics and reasonable believers are wary of those who seem psychologically compromised, naive, or narcissistic – it does not matter whether the supranormal experiences of those people are real or not, they should still be listened to at arms length if at all (and it may be more important to support their journey to psychic health or maturity than engage with their "story").

All of the above was written with an open mind about the possibility of supranormal beings communicating with humans – an openness I, for now, intend to maintain because it seems to support a fuller experience of life. Yet below I share some thoughts that bring additional skepticism to such beliefs.
Here's the thing. We know that the unconscious mind can serve up astonishing material:

- In dreams we can have full hallucinations that are completely believed (within the dream).
- We have noted elsewhere how the brain sends anticipatory signals to the senses that can project expectations or imaginations onto sensory experience.
- Optical illusions and various types of perpetual distortions tell us that our senses can lie.
- In deep daydreaming or reverie memories and images can seem quite real.
- Psychedelic drugs, and psychotic mental conditions, can create full-blown hallucinations.
- It is quite common to hear voices in one's head (well, for me it is) – and sometimes these can command a special air of certainty or authoritative depth.
- Through special training, e.g. in Theravada kasina meditations, practitioners can develop the ability to hallucinate (e.g. see deities, or other forms) with eye wide open in the waking state.
- The creative imagination is ingenious. Crafters of stories and novels sometimes describe how narratives, detailed scenes, plotlines, personalities, and whole worlds just appear to them – gifted from the realms of the unconscious. Some authors describe a process of letting their characters come to life and tell the author what the character will say or do. For many artists, like mystics, the creative process is one of listening, not doing.

I am constantly amazed by the detail, scope, depth, and brilliance of what a good novelist can create. Some fictions contain, perhaps in coded or metaphorical terms, wisdom as deep as any sage (or spirit or alien) has said. Some authors and artists claim no authorship for their products, and attribute their creations to "the universe" or "collective consciousness." Likewise, the unconscious mind within each of us can serve up material of surprising detail, depth, and intelligence.

For someone with certain metaphysical assumptions about the world, it would not be difficult to imagine that messages from the unconscious, delivered through the daydream-like reverie of normal waking consciousness, or through the more dream-like states of trance or psychedelics that may include vivid visions – that these messages come, not simply from the individual unconscious, but are communications from a supernormal being. All that we know about how the "magical" strata of mind works, including its confounding of interior realities with exterior realities, supports a psychological explanation of such phenomena. However, for me, it does not explain (or "explain away") all of the anecdotal and scientific information that I am aware of. Thus: "I don't know."

Finally, in passing, I will say that the same analysis holds for the phenomena, popular in New Age and spiritual circles, of "synchronicities" (meaningful or magical coincidences), affirmations, distance healing, and "manifesting one's reality." Though close observation will show that much of what is reported under these phenomena are imagined (i.e. magical thinking), there is sufficient empirical and scholarly work to give believers some purchase. Our point here again, that the above analysis gives the scientifically minded and the spiritually minded some room for respectful dialogue.

### Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism

**Metaphysics and the embodied mind.** We will focus on the work of George Lakoff and colleagues, whose scientific investigation into concept formation has profound implications for all of philosophy and spirituality, and for reason itself. In *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind & its Challenge to Western Thought*, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) make the radical claim that "the question of what we take truth to be is ... a matter for cognitive science because it depends on the nature of human understanding ... Truth is, for this reason, not something subject to definition by
an a-priori philosophy" (p. 108). The implications of Lakoff and Johnson’s “Embodied Realism” are important because, as they put it: "radical change in our understanding of reason [leads to] a radical change in our understanding of ourselves" (p. 3). Lakoff and Johnson go on to say that "More than two millennia of a-priori philosophical speculations about [the nature of] reason are over," and that because "findings from the science of the mind are inconsistent with central parts of Western philosophy … philosophy can never be the same again" (p. 4). We can add: nor can spirituality ever be the same again.

Lakoff and Johnson mount a full-frontal attack on the long tradition, within philosophy and "scientific realism," of using reason alone to reveal the essential nature of reality. In so doing they implicate modernity’s (3rdPP) predominant mode of reasoning (in addition to metaphysical religious arguments based on logical inference). They describe traditional "disembodied objective scientific realism" as containing three claims or assumptions (p. 90): (1) there is a world independent of our understanding of it; (2) we can have stable (practical, trustable) knowledge of it; and (3) our concepts and forms of reason are not constrained by physicality, allowing science to discover absolute truths. They take the first two as true – while the goal of their book is to rebuke the third claim.

This territory is already familiar to us. The first two claims were echoed in our discussion of ontology, where we said that it is a performative contradiction to reject the assumptions that reality is objectively real, structured, and partly comprehensible – i.e. if we are "serious" we have no choice but to accept these "truths." For example, as Lakoff & Johnson put it, though all knowledge is fallible and provisional "we are not likely to discover that there are no such things as cells or that DNA does not have a double-helix structure" (p. 89). The third claim injects the epistemological principle that human understanding cannot produce absolute truths. Thus their argument parallels our description of post-metaphysics, but the "embodied" path they take to their conclusions, based on scientific findings, provides fresh insights and deeper grounding for the conclusions we have already reached, and thus provides additional support for post-metaphysical thinking.

Lakoff and Johnson describe the three major findings of cognitive science this way (p. 3-4): (1) the mind is inherently embodied; (2) thought is mostly unconscious; and (3) abstract concepts are largely metaphorical, with the third of these being the focus of their contribution. As to the first of these, this is implied in our notion that truth claims are "by someone from somewhere," and key strains of research and theory on embodied cognition were mentioned in the section on "A Brief History of Belief Fallibility." We have also already implied the second of these findings in our discussions of how the magical and mythic structures of the mind, as unconscious substrates for conscious reasoning, influence thought and belief (and see the Deeper Dive on the unconscious). We also began an inquiry into the third finding on the nature of abstract concepts – an inquiry that Lakoff and Johnson will help us deepen.

Lakoff and Johnson are telling us that the understanding of human reason underpinning classical philosophy is deeply flawed, and thus are many of its methods and conclusions. Later we will apply their findings to spiritual concepts and beliefs as well. They continue by saying (p. 4-8, emphasis added):
"Reason is not disembodied [but] arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience [such that] every structure of reason ... comes from the details of our embodiment, [from] the same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around ... There is no Cartesian dualistic person with a mind separate and independent from a body."

"Reason is evolutionary ... [it builds upon forms present in] 'lower animals' ... reason makes use of, rather than transcends, our animal nature...Reason is not dispassionate, but emotionally engaged."

"Reason is not 'universal' in the transcendent sense; that is, it is not part of the structure of the universe. It is [however] a structure shared universally by all human beings. "Phenomenological introspection alone [can not] discover everything there is to know about the mind."

"Since reason is shaped by the body, it is not radically free [and] we have no absolute freedom in Kant's sense ... no full autonomy." "The utilitarian [rational fully autonomous] person [posited by economists] does not exist."

And, to the post-modernists: "There is no ... decentered subjective ... poststructuralist person ... for whom all meaning is arbitrary, totally relative, and purely historically contingent, unconstrained by body and brain."

We might also suggest that spirit, soul, consciousness, and divinity, similarly: are not disembodied, are entangled with emotions and cultural contexts, are evolutionary, are not completely transcendent or metaphysically universal, and can not be understood through individual introspection alone.

We began this text with Exhibit A, which illustrated spiritual teachers making claims about Consciousness, God, Soul, Spirit, the Universe or Cosmos, Nature, Reality, the Non-Dual, and the Source or Ground of Being – using descriptors including absolute, ultimate, infinite, supreme, essential, fundamental, limitless, eternal, unmanifest, ever-present, unbounded, formless, perfect, and universal. Such ideas are appealing and powerful in part because they address questions of ultimate concern in ways that can activate the entire "stack" of developmental action logics alive in contemporary culture. They tap into the 1stPP and 2ndPP magical and mythical modes of meaning making that 4thPP aims to re-integrate into consciousness. They use 3rdPP levels of abstraction to lift the spirit into sublime realms, and 3rdPP logical arguments to posit an Ultimate or Non-Dual Reality that seemingly releases spiritual claims from scientific scrutiny.

But, as Lakoff and Johnson make clear, absolutist and externalist spiritual claims cannot withstand an embodied world-view. Our goal has been to help the essential insights and modes of Being testified by our spiritual teachers to survive contemporary rigors and critiques. Lakoff and Johnson's Embodied Realism deconstructs spiritual metaphysics, spiritual truths, spiritual narratives, and spiritual logics by exposing indeterminacies at the fundamental level of language, concepts, and physicality. It forces us to re-craft spiritual metaphysics as resting on a real-istic substrate, and in so doing helps motivate an embodied vision of a post-metaphysical spirituality of the future.

**Graded concepts and Prototype Theory.** We have already mentioned what I call the "symbolic impulse" – the tendency of the mind to use conceptual categories that split the world
into parts while joining parts into categories (e.g. the concept "spiritual" separates spiritual from non-spiritual things and joins things thought to be spiritual). When one employs the knife-and-glue of the concept, important truths and nuances can get left on the cutting room floor, so to speak, as those troublesome grey areas are ignored. There is something deep and strong within cognition that wants to treat abstract concepts (e.g. ego, compassion, evolution, Eros, subjectivity, democracy, free will) as if they are well-defined boxes that things fall within or outside of – but this is almost never the case. As Gregory Bateson says: "[the] world begins by making splits, then drawing boundaries, then solidifying these boundaries. Then we fool ourselves into believing what we have made ourselves see. Solidifying boundaries is very comfortable, because it allows us to deny our experience...We miss the whole system" (1978, p. 44). With each split-and-join operation we risk making two types of errors: overgeneralization and overspecialization, i.e. treating things as similar that are in some important way different, and treating things as different that are in some important way similar (analogous to Type I and Type II errors from statistical analysis).

"Prototype Theory" in cognitive science has revealed how the nature of concepts differs from what we normally assume about them (Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Lakoff, 1987). All concepts – not just poorly defined, culturally relevant, or complex ones – have "graded" or indeterminate boundaries (though some are more indeterminate than others). Conceptual categories universally admit to fuzzy boundaries as an outcome of how cognition works. One can make efforts to define concepts more clearly, yet specifying exactly what sits at the blurry edges of conceptual boundaries will vary in each context, and the indeterminacy itself is a universal cognitive phenomenon.

Many academic authors bemoan, in their introductory paragraphs, that one of the problems needing to be addressed in their field is insufficient agreement or excessive ambiguity. As Michael Shermer puts it, scholarship is "notoriously fraught with definitional disagreements" (2011, p. 53). What Descartes said four centuries ago is still true: "[philosophy] has been cultivated for many centuries by the best minds that have ever lived and that nevertheless no single thing is to be found in it which is not a subject of dispute and in consequence is not dubious" (1637, p. 10). Descartes was not a post-metaphysical thinker, however, because he believed that he had discovered a theory not subject to this dilemma – he did not count himself among the philosophers plagued by knowledge indeterminacy. A 4thPP/5thPP approach takes indeterminacy as a given in embodied human reason – something to be managed or embraced, but not overcome. The indeterminacy of concepts suggests humility but need not lead to an impasse. Along similar lines is Rowson's quote above: "Spirituality needs definition, but it doesn’t need a definition" (2014, p. 28).

Concepts are grounded in memory structures built upon actual exemplars observed in the past, and noting specific (real or hypothetical) exemplars is a necessary step in explaining, arguing for, or explicitly modifying, any concept definition (Elster, 1999; Lakatos, 1976; Mervis & Rosh, 1981). Research in Prototype Theory shows that some conceptual exemplars are more central than others, where the most central are called "prototypes" of the concept. The traditional logic-based notion of concepts from Aristotelian Logics, based on necessary and sufficient conditions, does not match well to actual human cognition. One can usually imagine things that exist in the gray area between being X and not-X – things that are sort-of X or more-or-less X.

Lakoff and Johnson describe how graded concepts lead to graded propositions that "...contain linear scales [that] define the degree to which a given property holds" (p. 288). Graded concept
boundaries make universalizing claims of the form "all X's are Y" particularly fallible, because there will always be examples of things that are not exactly X but not exactly not-X either. It would be more correct to say "all X's are Y to the extent that" instances of X and Y are prototypical of the categories as the speaker intends them." Disagreements about whether "all X's are Y" will often hinge on the fact that the objects offered up as exemplars may not be included in both party's meaning of X or Y. In a tense argument over whether animals have "language," parties may actually agree on the behavioral facts, and just disagree on which behaviors count within the definition of "language." A lot of energy can be wasted over unexplored definitional differences. The cognitive science behind concept formation therefor supports our earlier notion of the "in a sense..." attitude to collective meaning-making, which advocates considering the range of meanings (or exemplars) that different interlocutors may be implying (i.e. "interpretive pluralism").

In the Deeper Dive on "Faux dualities and paradoxes" we described how the symbolic impulse can trick conception and perception into organizing the world into tidy categories, manufacturing fake dualities and paradoxes. We mentioned mundane dualisms – fruit/vegetable, liberal/conservative, wave/particle, love/hate, male/female, nature/nurture, thinking/feeling; and dualisms entangled in spiritual and philosophical discourse – good/evil, saint/sinner, dark/light, spirit/matter, mind/body, interior/exterior, individual/collective, state/stage, empty/full, absolute/relative, self/selfless, and being/non-being. Lakoff's Embodied Realism, based on solid science, is a kind of proof that all such dualisms are misleading, and not representative of reality.

Often, we realize that reality is not so simple, and use language (e.g. with qualifiers and hedges) to compensate for the distortions introduced by sharp categorical edges – but the underlying pull of the symbolic impulse remains, even if subtle and tamed. Sophisticated modern thinkers are well familiar with the idea that sharp categories are problematic, but fully applying or embodying this principle is rare – our words and actions belie a deeper "belief" that the categories and dualities are real.

We noted, as has been said by many, that the false conceptual battle lines carved into human consciousness can create confusion, enslavement, and suffering. Paul Marshal describes this as the "pathology of the paradigm of simplicity [of] Cartesian clear and distinct ideas, analytical reductionism of whole into parts, and isolation of objects from their environmental contexts" (2012, p. 21). Living beyond this pathology is part of what is entailed by 5thPP consciousness.

As Cook-Greuter notes, one can achieve an understanding of thought and language that readily perceives these "pitfalls" and "absurdities," and witnesses the creation of boundaries and dualities. This construct aware skill includes interpreting categories more flexibly as having graded (or more complex) boundaries that can shift without notice, as Lakoff's work shows is the case. It also includes having a meta-cognitive sense for how concept meanings depend on the exemplars that come to mind in a given context. One can generously give examples and ask others for clarifying examples. Construct-aware understanding includes noticing how concepts co-define each other. In the Buddhist tradition this is related to the ideas of emptiness and "dependent origination" (or co-dependent arising).
Dependent origination has (at least) two senses – and both implicate a 5thPP view of reality. (Developmentally, 5thPP involves an immediate and visceral perception of this principle, while an intellectual understanding of it may start at late 3rdPP and mature in 4thPP.) One sense is the ontological understanding that the existence and nature of any object has been conditioned upon the existence and nature of many other objects. One can extend this idea recursively to see that, in a sense, all objects are intertwined – emerging and evolving within a vast network of co-arising entities. In this sense, the perception of something as an individual separate object is an illusion hiding the fact that it is intimately connected with, theoretically, "all" of reality. Objects are "empty" of the solid reality they seem to have. Another route to this emptiness is through the scientific understanding that, at the level of atoms or subatomic particles or string theory, we see that solid objects are mostly space, or made of energy rather than matter, or made of nothing but information or differences.

The other sense of dependent origination is epistemological. Within our perception and conception of the word, each object arises in relationship to many others. Again, the perception/conception of an object being separate and individual is an illusion, hiding the fact that we understand it only in relationship with, theoretically, everything else in consciousness. Our perceptions and conceptions are thus said to be empty. Not because there is nothing there, like a blank slate, but because how things appear is empty of objective truth.

Ego and abstract concepts. The symbolic impulse interacts strongly with the egoic impulse. It seems that for ideas and concepts that one is more "attached" to, conceptual boundaries tighten, appearing more distinct and certain. As we have noted, demi-reality is not only about what one believes, but also about the certainty and importance with which one holds beliefs. The emotions that arise when the sense of self is threatened interact with an "amygdala hijacking" process in the brain, and thought becomes less flexible. We have noted that more abstract concepts can take on more meaningfulness, and become more attached to egoic functioning. Unfortunately, it appears that the ideas most important to us are the most difficult to gain perspective on – the most difficult to see as indeterminate, co-arising, empty, soft-boundaried, etc.

Lakoff and colleagues' research on conceptual structures provides scientific evidence for what we have argued for philosophically. The indeterminacy of concepts becomes progressively worse the more abstract they are, i.e. the further removed from concrete sensory experiences and exemplars. We noted that abstractions can implicitly confer false properties onto objects, and that indeterminacy in concept definitions leads to indeterminacy in statements (truth claims). Chris Argyris, a well-known theorist in the field of "learning organizations" says: "The likelihood of differences in the interpretations of different observers increases the higher one goes on the ladder of inference" (1995, p 58) – which is closely related to the ladder of abstraction. Carolan (2004) uses the term "epistemological distance" to describe this phenomenon. Rungs along the ladder of epistemological distance are steps of increased abstraction, inference, or contingency that lead one ever further from simple concrete reality (or "facts").

Thus, the useful purity of the abstraction can become the totalizing cognitive hegemony, or the "repressive metaphysical projection" of the ideal entity or the ideological vision (what Marshall calls the grandiose "pathology of the paradigm of simplicity...").
We have discussed some of the most abstract concepts in spirituality and metaphysics. We quoted Habermas with “the One and the Many, unity and plurality, designates the theme that has governed metaphysics from its inception [as far back as Plato]” (1996. p. 115). We noted how metaphysical thinking is a movement of mystical thinking into a greater abstraction, with Russell characterizing it as indicating an "uncreated, indestructible,unchanging, indivisible" nature that is beyond time and space. "Absolute" (vs. relative) Truth or Reality incurs the problems of highly abstract ideals, as does the concept of non-duality and any abstract totalizing or essentialist concept. God, especially if taken as a metaphysical abstraction rather than a literal being, is a highly abstract concept.

As to "What is the good?", one of the most important metaphysical questions of philosophy and human "ultimate concern," Lakoff's answer might be simple: it is simply a word – an abstract concept that we have invented, and which has no meaning independent of our deliberations. Of course, this partial answer does not satisfy the essential question of how humans define, work towards, and negotiate the good, but it does help us take a productively post-metaphysical approach to the inquiry. What Embodied Realism tells us is simply to approach such ideas and ideals with a humility and humor appropriate to their indeterminacy.

**Metaphorical pluralism.** Lakoff and Johnson's theory contains one important insight we have yet to disclose. If the reader is finding our dismantling of conceptual categories fascinating or unsettling, then things are about to get a bit more fascinating or unsettling. Thus far Embodied Realism has given scientific evidence that challenges what we could call the "simple" mental model of tidy conceptual categories, and exposed how conceptual boundaries are graded or fuzzy (abstract concepts being more problematic), and dependent on exemplars (in particular prototypical exemplars). Lakoff and Johnson further show how abstract concepts have even more complex and deeply problematic natures because they are "metaphorical pluralisms."

The reader is likely to be familiar with the notion that much of language and thought is metaphorical. Lakoff and Johnson argue that thought and reason are primarily and fundamentally metaphorical, and that the metaphors we employ are grounded in our embodiment – i.e., that abstract thought is composed of conceptual building blocks at the sensory-motor level.

Of course, there are an infinite number of potential variations built up from any set of primitive building blocks – so metaphorical pluralism shows how thought is limited in the sense of being constructed from particular parts, while it remains virtually unlimited in the sense of the number of permutations of those parts. The key point for us is the (perhaps exaggerated) conclusion that if it can't be built up from basic sensory-motor primitives, we can't think it. Our embodied experience determines the limited conceptual pallet that we have at our disposal with which to paint all of our ideas (a pallet determined both by the genetically established structure of the brain and the embodied experiences of early childhood cognitive development).

Developmental theories (Piaget, 1972; Fischer 1980; Commons 1984; Kegan, 1994) show us how mental constructs are built up from lower level constructs, in response to interaction with and pressures from the environment. With each construct building upon priors, all thought and belief ultimately grounds in sensory-motor foundations (plus the pre-given cognitive processes of the brain, such as attention and memory).
Lakoff and Johnson show how all abstract concepts "such as importance, similarity, difficulty, and morality," and our abstract understanding of subjective experiences such as "desire, affection, intimacy, and achievement," are based upon concrete metaphors (p. 45). "As rich as these experiences are, much of the way we conceptualize them, reason about them, and visualize them come from [concrete, mostly sensory-motor] domains of experience" (p. 45). For example, our understanding of friendship or intimacy is not simply related to experiences and concepts of closeness, warmth, smiling, touch, and satisfying conversation, in a sense it is the combination of such things and nothing more.

One can think of the abstract concept as the node in a semantic network that has no content in itself, but serves as the connection point pulling together other nodes (which, according to Lakoff and Johnson, bottom out in concrete experiential categories). This connection between abstract thought and concrete experience is at the center of Lakoff and Johnson's 'Primary Theory of Metaphor." In their theory "metaphor is not the result of...interpretation [it is] a matter of immediate conceptual mapping via neural connections" (emphasis in original; p. 57). (Non-abstract or literal ideas need not be metaphorical; grasping a hammer is literal, while grasping an idea is metaphorical.)

Lakoff and Johnson map out the sensory-motor roots of many abstract concepts. I list some of them below. The first concept in each list is abstract and the second shows one of its concrete metaphorical groundings: importance as bigness, happy as up, bad as stinky, difficulties as heavy burdens, more as up, relationships as enclosures, and organization as physical structure (PITF, p. 50-54). Additional concepts that are more relevant to our spiritual and philosophical inquiry include: knowing or understanding as seeing or grasping, similarity as closeness, time as motion, change or transformation as motion, states as locations, purpose as destinations or desired objects, and causes as physical forces.

The metaphorical connections between abstract ideas and concrete metaphors are not always simple or obvious. Primary metaphors are combined in complex ways. For example, Lakoff and Johnson examine the "life as a journey" metaphor and uncover a plethora of metaphorical interpretations. Another example is importance, which is metaphorically associated with bigness and other sensory-motor metaphors.

Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* is not only about the pervasive role of metaphor in reason and language (their prior books *Women, fire, and dangerous things*, Lakoff 1987; and *Metaphors we live by*, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, covered that territory). They have bigger fish to fry. They are out to show how the most prestigious of all ideas and theories, philosophical and scientific ones, which are also among the most abstract ideas and theories, are on dubious ground. "Our most fundamental concepts – time, events, causation, the mind, the self, and morality – are multiply metaphorical" (or metaphorically pluralistic, p. 128). It shows that abstract ideas point not out to eternal truths but back to concrete embodied experience. Metaphysical philosophical arguments seem to be telling us more about human understanding than the cosmos.

In one sense, scholars are well aware of the definitional pluralism of concepts. Scholars have written entire books exploring single constructs such as cosmopolitanism, hope, patriotism, being, the self, care, bullshit, or insecurity (this random list is just from scanning the bookshelf to my
left). But metaphorical pluralism strikes deeper than the understandings of definitional indeterminacy or the metaphorical linguistic relationships.

**Time and causality.** We can now relate these ideas to ontological questions in philosophy (and later, spirituality). Lakoff and Johnson show that many abstract concepts are understood in terms of a "metaphorical patchwork, sometimes conceptualized by one metaphor, and at other times by another." For example, consider our concept of time, which is based on a patchwork conglomerate of more fundamental experiences and schema, mostly involving space and motion. The future is in front of us and the past is behind us. We face the future. Time passes by or the time has arrived. Time durations can be large or small. One date is close to another. Events occur at times or in time. Also mentioned is the "time as a resource" metaphor – we can waste time, steal time, budget our time, etc. (These examples are for English language speakers, but the authors give interesting examples of alternative conceptualizations from other languages and cultures.)

These metaphors "structure not only the way we conceptualize the relationship between events and time but the very way we experience time" (p. 153). "We have found that we cannot think (much less talk) about time without those metaphors" (p 166). Thus "the metaphorical conceptualization of time is constitutive, at least in significant part, of our concept of time"(p. 166). That is, the metaphors are not just an aspect of our understanding of time, but together they are our understanding of time.

Lakoff and Johnson go on to "consider the classical ontological question: Does time exist independent of minds, and if so, what are its properties? [We] reject the question. It is a loaded question" (p. 167). In other words, answers to the question are meaningless or not useful. "Yet the biological and cognitive construction of time does not make it subjective or arbitrary or merely cultural...the metaphors are not arbitrary; they are deeply motivated. They permit the measurement of time, our very notion of history, the science of physics, and much more" (p. 168). The metaphors are "apt" and extremely useful, but "being metaphors, can get us into silliness if we take them literally." And, reading Lakoff and Johnson, there seems to be much of such silliness in classical philosophy.

Importantly, the metaphors that underlie a particular concept can be incompatible or contradictory, and yet we unreflectively jump from one metaphorical basis to another. For example, on the nature of causality Lakoff and Johnson's analysis shows that "over the course of history, philosophers have formulated a wide variety of theories of causation, each substantively different from the others and therefore each with its own distinct logic" (p. 173). Are they talking about the same thing? "Philosophers may disagree as to what is the right theory of causation, but the philosophical community recognizes all of them as theories of the same thing. Why should philosophers have come up with this particular range of theories of causation?" We will never answer this question if we only keep looking "out there" to the external world of physics for the real answer. The answer is revealed only when we acknowledge the embodied metaphorical nature of the concept itself.

Like the concepts of chair and game (try to define them!), the concept of causation is understood in terms of a loose collection of features and exemplars having a fuzzy "family resemblance" or "multivalent radial structure" but having no precise definition, specific nature or essence beyond
human cogitation. Though having diverse senses, these concepts have an undeniable unity. The various senses of the word have enough overlap of use and understanding that the mishmash holds together as a single conceptual gestalt for us most of the time.

**Other metaphorical pluralisms.** Lakoff and Johnson continue with an in-depth analysis of constructs more central to spirituality. They elaborate on *mind, consciousness, self, free will, object, truth,* and *reality* and identify the metaphorical pluralisms of each. Above we noted that because all such abstract concepts are graded, metaphorical pluralisms, and/or otherwise indeterminate, that any *claims* containing them are likewise fallible.

Many classic philosophical and academic debates lose much of their steam in the light of Embodied Realism. Do slugs have *emotions*? Are dolphins *intelligent*? Are computers intelligent (could they become so)? Do apes use *language*? Are rocks or trees or atoms *conscious*? Do humans have *free will*? Do we have a *soul*? Heated arguments ensue without a thorough investigation into how each party's interpretation of abstract concepts may differ.

Slugs, dolphins, apes, computers, rocks, atoms and people do what they are observed to do, and scientists can propose deeper mechanisms that predict or explain phenomena. But the yes-or-no categorical types of questions are uninteresting in the light of Embodied Realism. Humans have free will in a sense and they don't in another sense (arguments on both sides are no doubt familiar to the reader). Dolphins are intelligent depending on the central exemplars and metaphors that are built into one's meaning of intelligent (this does not mean that it is useless to study dolphin intelligence). Is moral development justice-based, as Kohlberg found, or care-base, as Gilliam found? Both types of phenomena are observed and there are important questions of how/when/why/who to be investigated, but whether moral development "is" categorically this-or-that is not among them.

### Deeper Dive: More metaphorical pluralisms

We mentioned that Kirkham wrote an entire book and the meanings of *Truth* used by philosophers. The oft-cited definition of knowledge as "justified true belief" is condemned to indeterminacy by metaphorical pluralism. Philosophers who argue about this definition of knowledge never seem to agree on the definitions (or prototypical exemplars) of "justified," "true," or "belief" (see Gettier, 1963).

Even the verb "to be" is a metaphorical pluralism. According to Lakoff and Johnson, it can imply identity, class membership, existence, or predication. (President Clinton famously and disastrously said, as he was trying to deceive his interrogators: "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is...") Alfred Korzybski describes E-Prime, "a version of the English language that excludes all forms of the verb to be [as a] device to clarify thinking and strengthen writing [that] leads to a less dogmatic style of language that reduces the possibility of misunderstanding and conflict...For example, the sentence 'the film was good' could translate into E-Prime as 'I liked the film' or as 'the film made me laugh.' The E-Prime versions communicate the speaker's experience rather than judgment, making it harder for the writer or reader to confuse opinion with fact" (Wikipedia August 20, 2018).

Similar to Lakoff, Esbjörn-Hargens (2010) proposes that many objects of deliberation are "decentered multiple objects" that exhibit an "ontological pluralism." That is, when interlocutors
(experts or citizens) talk about a complex object such as "climate change," they are often referring to different aspects of the totality of the hyper-object.

The theory of metaphorical pluralisms, backed up by research in cognitive science, along with the rest of Embodied Realism, should strike fear, or at least doubt, into the heart of many spiritual belief systems. Indeed, given what we now know about the mind, "philosophy can never be the same again," nor can spirituality or religion. Which is what we could expect and desire in a post-metaphysical milieu.

Epistemic Drives

From thinking to sensing. Gentle reader, if you are still with me, it is with delighted appreciation that I invite you to relax and take a deep breath, as we are rounding the last corners and the conclusion of our exploration is within sight. I started this text by describing how post-metaphysics refers to a humble and reflective attitude on truth and belief. It is about an orientation to knowledge, but therefore ultimately about the relationship between self and the world (and self and others). Here post-metaphysics joins arms with spirituality and ethics. With that deep breath I invite you to sense into the implications of the remaining discussion, and allow your, possibly tired, analytical mind to rest a little.

We have journeyed from a descriptive and heuristic narrative to a more logical and philosophical approach, then brought in cognitive psychology to help establish an embodied and more personal frame for post-metaphysical thinking. Next we will move into an even more intimate connection with the topic, by exploring the emotion-laden experiential aspects of thinking and being post-metaphysical. For in the end, post-metaphysical thinking is about caring enough about truth that one opens to the disconcerting 'truths about truth;' and it is about caring enough about others that one is motivated to reduce the demi-realities in belief systems that cause suffering. We are enculturated within what Gebser calls a "deficient mental" mode of consciousness, in which demi-real metaphysical projections are deeply entrenched in the modern mind. This is why we have offered a wide variety of perspectives to triangulate upon an intellectual understanding of these phenomena. But in the end applying this meta-knowledge is more about attitude and sensing than about knowledge and theory.

We have used a developmental model to separate the magical, mythical, and rational layers of the mind that contribute in different ways to mystical, metaphysical, and spiritual thinking. Russell was quoted as saying that mystical wisdom is largely a "way of feeling" and an "attitude toward life, not...a creed about the world." At the 4thPP action logic one begins to perceive how emotion, ego, language, and reason interact in unhelpful ways, which can motivate deeper self-understanding. We have noted how egocic factors exacerbate demi-realities in thought, as in amplifying the contractive aspects of the symbolic impulse. Generally, stress, threat, complexity, or urgency can increase the ego's need for certainty – its avoidance of uncertainty. These factors can "downshift" cognition to more primitive levels and inhibit reflective meta-skills (though it is also true that challenges can motivate one to rise to the occasion). Similarly, we can hypothesize that cultivating trust, harmony, openness, care, and curiosity supports post-metaphysical thinking.
Epistemic drives. I use the term "epistemic drive" as an umbrella term for any tendency of thought that influences what is perceived as real or true. The term drive calls attention to the embodied felt-sense aspect of reason. We have already discussed several of these drives. The symbolic impulse (with all of its subparts, e.g. the tendency to conceptualize in terms of dualities) is an epistemic drive, as is the egoic drive to identify with and tightly clutch one's beliefs. The drives to make meaning, find patterns ("patternicity"), and maintain certainty in the face of dissonance, uncertainty, and unknowing are also epistemic drives. In our descriptions of magical, mythical, and rational thinking one can identify many emotion-like impulses that influence thought and belief formation.

Table 1. Metaphysical and balancing drives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphysical drives (toward...)</th>
<th>Balancing drives (toward...)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction (ideals, transcendence)</td>
<td>Concreteness (tangible, sensory, immanent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Specialization (the specific, details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration (wholes, holism)</td>
<td>Differentiation (parts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal (totalizing, absolute)</td>
<td>Relative or contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental (essential, central)</td>
<td>Consequential (peripheral or subordinate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanence (predictability)</td>
<td>Change (transient, unpredictable, chaotic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity (clarity)</td>
<td>Complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity/The One (singularity)</td>
<td>Multiplicity (the many)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete (comprehensive; total; systemic)</td>
<td>Partiality (deconstruction, liminality, mystery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Difference (diversity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection, purity</td>
<td>Imperfection, grittiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainty (confirmation bias)</td>
<td>Novelty, surprise, open to the unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness, specialness</td>
<td>Ordinariness (commonality)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epistemic drives are analogous to biologically innate "emotional" drives, e.g. the drive to reproduce, the fight/flight/freeze responses, territoriality, maternal/paternal care, and social dominance/submissiveness drives – but would seem to involve higher brain centers. As some readers will notice, my framing of epistemic drives is related to some "cognitive biases" and "logical fallacies" (see Kahneman et al., 1982; Shermer, 2011; and Wikipedia contains excellent summaries of these); and is also related to some psychological "archetypes" and "personality types" that implicate styles of thinking. The usual treatment of cognitive biases emphasizes the results of fallible cognition and the shape of systematic distortions in beliefs. My use of epistemic drives emphasizes the impulse or motivation that draws one into enacting these distortions. The goal is to support a reflective perception of when these drives are active in any moment. (Note that, though cognitive biases have been researched extensively, as have the epistemic drives described in Lakoff's work, our treatment of epistemic drives rests on common-sense arguments rather than science.)

A plethora of drives or hard-wired urges exist within humans, mostly dormant until conditions trigger them, and often operating in competition (will I fight or run? Eat, work, or play?). Like other drives, epistemic drives are pervasive unconscious processes that, on the one hand, can have
unseen control over us, and on the other hand, can be observed and managed through learned metacognitive (or meta-emotional) skills. As with biological drives to eat (or over-eat), sexually flirt, protect territory, etc., our lives are improved when we reach a stage of development in which we are aware of, and can control or compensate for, these impulses (i.e., when "subject becomes object" for any given drive).

As with biological drives, one never completely outgrows or eliminate epistemic drives; since they can raise their heads unexpectedly in some contexts, and can operate in surprisingly subtle ways. This calls for attentiveness and responsiveness. One becomes aware of and learns to manage them at ever deeper and more nuanced levels – the developmental learning process continues indefinitely. As was clear in the discussion of mystical and metaphysical thinking, epistemic drives are as active and forceful in leaders, mystics, and geniuses as they are in the rest of us.

In our list of epistemic drives those listed as "metaphysical drives" seem to be most related to what motivates metaphysical thinking as we have described it. I suggest that each drive is balanced by a contrasting drive (or, more accurately, is balanced by a set or "ecology " of other drives), as is the case with many biological drives. For example, biologically we have drives for fight vs. flight, action vs. rest, taking vs. giving, etc. In our discussions of metaphysical thinking we have emphasized drives including abstraction, certainty, and unity, suggesting that these drives sometimes overreach – but surely the mind has balancing instincts and needs, for example toward the concrete, the novel, and the diverse. Each individual will manifest a different composition of more active (or habitual) and less active drives, and we suggest, quite tentatively, that the drives listed in the metaphysical drives column characterize what draws one toward metaphysical thinking.

Clearly these "drives" are not psychologically separate – they overlap quite a bit. For example, the symbolic impulse is aligned with drives toward abstraction, generalization, simplicity, unity, and certainty (among others). The general "meaning making" drive relates to many of the metaphysical drives as well. Perhaps a small set of foundational drives would provide an adequate theoretical pallet to cover them all – I have not attempted to produce one. My goal here is to illustrate the scope of these drives rather than provide a definitive taxonomy or theory (in fact, Embodied Realism explains why a tidy set of categories may be impossible).

Our list is suggestive rather than comprehensive. It would be possible to associate these drives with researched phenomena in cognitive biases or archetypes. There are no doubt correlations between the strength of certain epistemic drives and personality factors such as openness and conscientiousness – but exploring such theoretical connections is not relevant to our goal in this chapter of turning attention inward toward embodiment. The invitation here is simply to develop a capacity to feel into such drives rather than think about them – to experience the pull of these urges. If the reader feels a desire to transform this informal mishmash of overlapping concepts into a refined theory she will be moving in the opposite direction! But if you are draw to do that, don't despair – pause and feel the part of you that wants to do that.

One can become aware of that in the human mind which dearly wants to pull the disparate, the many, the diverse into a unifying whole; or achieve the simplicity and power of a general concept or rule; or rest in what is at the center of things (or underneath things). There is a sense of ease,
certainty, and mastery when one ignores details and differences and trusts a sturdy generality; a sense of elegance and wholeness when one embraces many things into a circle of unity. One obtains satisfaction from ordering things or collecting them into tidy groups. The inquisitive and meaning-hungry mind wants to know the causal root, foundation, source, or origin of things.

We do not imply that these tendencies of mind are fraudulent – we are suggesting an awareness of how and when they are active. Physicist/philosopher David Bohm called this self-perception capacity "propiroception of thought" – a term that metaphorically extends the body's ability to feel its own movements (propiroception) into an awareness of the movements of thought itself. He says "we could say that practically all the problems of the human race are due to the fact that thought is not [usually] proprioceptive" (Bohm, 1996, p. 25).

Science has shown incontrovertibly that the emotional and perceptual functions of the brain are inextricably linked to its rational functions (Damasio, 1999; Goleman, 1995). At 3rdPP consciousness, most individuals can clearly see how emotions influence actions and how emotions influence thought – e.g. one can notice how being frustrated about bad weather causes one to be impatient with family members; or how being enamored of a speaker can make one less likely to critique their ideas. The 4thPP/5thPP sensibilities that we are describing here are subtler. Though the experience may be somewhat different for each individual, thinking and questioning each feel like something different; as do focusing one's attention and widening it. I.E. there are felt-sense experiences that co-occur with the cognitive activities of intellectual reasoning. There are also felt-sense experiences associated with thinking in magical, mystical, or metaphysical modes of thought. Various aspects of what we could call spiritual thinking have felt-sense correlates as well. To notice that one might be thinking too abstractly, or one is grasping for too much certainty, or craving simplicity, or is coercing another into agreement, or is escaping into a magical fantasy world, or is leaving practical considerations behind at risk of a "spiritual bypass" – these types of awarenesses are more like emotional (meta-emotional) awareness than rational inferences.

Each epistemic drive serves a positive function in the overall goals of finding truths and making meaning in life. But they can also over-function to create biases, errors, and ethical problems. Phenomena such as grandiosity, hegemony, elitism, and proto-fascism are extreme cases. But in less extreme ways the subtle influence of such drives pervades the creation, consumption, and promotion of theories, models, and belief systems – including spiritual ones. In our narrative on "historical arcs" we imply that humanity needs to understand the mind better – to strengthen modes of awareness that can notice when the rational mind is over-reaching, and when other aspects of the mind are too weak. Awareness is the first step to adaptation. A proprioceptive sensitivity to the inner movements of epistemic drives is just that capacity. Post-metaphysical thinking necessarily includes a kind of post-metaphysical feeling/sensing.

Although in specific situations the "balancing drives" in the table can be overactive as well, in our exploration of metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking we have emphasized the list of "metaphysical drives," as it seems that both modern Western culture and contemporary spirituality err too far in those directions. Strengthening the balancing drives, in individuals, contexts, or cultures, is one path to ameliorating these errors. The term "negative capability" mentioned above captures many of those balancing drives. And of course, cultivating basic human emotional
orientations such as humility, curiosity, generosity, compassion, and respect are powerful antidotes that would significantly support post-metaphysical thinking.

A complementary approach is to cultivate the habit of reflecting on one's motivations behind belief-formation or belief-propagation. The cognitive task of identifying what needs are being met – safety, comfort, solidarity, creativity, understanding, control, influence, service, etc. – is closely related to the felt-sense proprioception of thought. It must be admitted that these suggestions are mundane. Humility, self-understanding, service, compassion...nothing new there – yet they are in such short supply in the public sphere of belief-formation. Our explorations are meant to explain why they are difficult to embody in a complex world, and also help us manifest them more robustly.

A post-metaphysical spiritual community would also be a post-metaphysical knowledge-building community, and one of its characteristics would be sufficient trust and depth of self-reflection that members could question the epistemic drives (and the quasi-hidden motives) that might lie underneath their individual and collective beliefs and decision-making. Such communities can proclaim humility, curiosity, generosity, compassion, and respect as explicitly shared values.

Deeper Dive: Consciousness

Consciousness is a deep topic. Perhaps unnecessarily deep. Thinkers from experienced scientists to pub-pundits have ideas about what consciousness is. Consciousness has even been proposed as the fundamental substrate of existence. Some have tried to link consciousness to quantum entanglement and the collapse of the quantum wave function, but these are metaphorical, not scientific, associations. The dramatized educational video "Through the Wormhole: The Universe is Conscious" (at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkdR_wXxjsw) says (at about 50 seconds) that "we can change the way reality behaves just by looking at it" and that the famous Double-Slit Experiment "will make you question whether reality exists at all." Such statements are meant to activate the magical and mythical levels of meaning-making of the novice. They are both meaning-generative and troublesome for reasons we have discussed at length. From the post-metaphysical perspective presented in this text, one can make several observations about Consciousness:

- The "hard problem" of consciousness, i.e. how it is possible that dead matter can have feelings or sentience (and the related problem of how mind or consciousness can have an effect on matter; see Chalmers, 1996), is a non-question – a faux-paradox. The question is a child of the symbolic impulse creating a conceptual split between mind and matter, subject and object, which was taken up by Descartes and many following him. An embodied philosophy (or psychology or spirituality) assumes that mind and matter are intricately connected and co-emergent, and have never really been separate. The hard problem is no problem in this sense (and see Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

- Consciousness, as understood by many, is a misplaced concreteness. There is no thing or process existing in the universe to be found that will explain all of what is loaded onto the word, though science continues to discover individual mechanisms that explain aspects of what it refers to. When the abstract concept "consciousness" is reified and projected out as a thing, it causes those hypnotized by its grandeur to go looking for "it," forgetting that, as an idea, it is a conceptual tool that we created in our attempt to explain a complex set of phenomena. This complex set of phenomena is real, but, as a reified projection, consciousness accumulates spurious properties based on our epistemic drives; properties that distract us from focusing on basic reality.
Consciousness is an abstract concept predisposed to metaphorical pluralism. Those studying it are far from agreeing on a definition. That the key concept bringing the "science of consciousness" community together is so poorly defined suggests the unlikeliness of deriving valid theories, or even of knowing how to set up or interpret experiments – until that is cleared up. The various metaphysical definitions of consciousness that place it in a realm beyond mind and matter are fallacious, for all the reasons explained in this text. More objective definitions can allow real science to progress without concern over what it "really is." However if one tries to limit the definition to one that could be measured and that all would agree upon, its meaning might evaporate before one's very eyes.

"Consciousness" is a graded concept, even though it is often treated categorically. The sturdiest meanings of consciousness are: (1) it is simply experience, i.e. what it feels like to be alive; and (2) it describes what the mind does. The first, an interiorist definition, is described in the next item. The second, an exteriorist definition, allows for scientific explorations of consciousness in animals, plants, and humans. In such explorations one does not have to haggle over the metaphysics or the definition of the term; one can agree to disagree on its definition and stick to the observed phenomena. A plant does this under these conditions; a raven does that under those conditions...consciousness can be seen as graded concept admitting to degrees, according to however one chooses to define it.

From a phenomenological perspective, consciousness is what it feels like to be alive or aware (depending on how one wants to define it) (see Metzinger, 2004; Clark, 1996). From an evolutionary and neuroscience perspective, we know that animal intelligence becomes more complex and sophisticated through successive layers of neurons that can sense (i.e. are connected to) "lower" layers. (This accumulative layering of neurons – or hierarchical functional units of the brain – happens over the span of species evolution; and also over the span of individual human cognitive development.) An amoeba moves through a biochemical mechanism connecting the state of its environment directly to its tail-like pseudopod. More complex animals with nervous systems sense the environment and respond through stimulus-to-response reflex pathways. Higher order animals can sense these reflexes through complex sensory-motor structures. Successive layers can sense/monitor and coordinate/regulate lower layers – and it is the sensing/monitoring function that appears as "conscious" "awareness." At some level of complexity an animal can feel that it is feeling, i.e. monitor and adapt to the automatic impulses arising in its mind/body. Escalating this capacity, human's can feel that they feel, think about their thinking, and be aware of their awareness.

This is a simplified model of neural architecture, when in fact the sensing of sensing of sensing of sensing ... may pass through hundreds or even thousands of layers (or neurons) within the hierarchical "stack" of human cognition. Some of these connections are below consciousness and awareness, and some are not. In the section on phenomenology we suggested that the feeling of infinity made perfect sense given how many connections were alive to awareness (or sub-awareness) in any moment. The same is true of consciousness. When one senses into being conscious or aware, one usually taps into an experience of vast depth and extensive spaciousness. This is what it feels like for the human to sense its consciousness. In fact, in a sense, conscious is what it feels like to be aware (even if one is not aware of their awareness). In misplaced concreteness, this feeling is projected out as something that must exist "out there" as a vast and expansive process or entity.

The force behind epistemic drives explains why the topic of Consciousness should be so popular and alluring – it brings together one of the deepest questions of science with one of the deepest mysteries of human existence. It is not difficult to literally feel the strong meaning-making pull of
such an idea within the mind. Swimming in theories of consciousness can send chills up the spine
and trigger a feeling of luminous import.

- Consciousness is implicated in mystical experiences as well as ordinary ones. Mystical
experiences and flow-states involve an expansive radiance of awareness. Such experiences are
more likely to reify consciousness than the mundane experience of consciousness as just thinking,
sensing, or feeling. Also consciousness is at a level of abstraction and indeterminacy comparable
to other concepts common to mysticism, and is well linked to "questions of ultimate concern," so
it is quite susceptible to the problems discussed in our section on mystical thinking.

All of this does not alter the facts that consciousness is a useful concept for making meaning in
spiritual discourse; an important thing to study scientifically; and an empowering capacity to develop
personally. It's just that all three of these use different definitions of consciousness. One can still make
progress in all of these areas if one takes a humble post-metaphysical attitude toward concept definitions
("interpretive pluralism") and has a meta-cognitive sense of what action logic is being used in any
moment. In dialogue, let's say at an academic conference on "Spirituality and the Brain," one can become
aware of when a conversation veers off of factual-feeling scientific consideration and is carried along by
the rapid current and wonderful feelings of deep meaning that such a topic delivers (perhaps supported
by a few beers). One does not need to back off from the conversation, but can continue to let one's
imagination run wild with possibilities, now free from having to argue so strongly about who is right.
One can loosen the shackles of traditional "rationality" and let the mind work holistically and intuitively,
allowing novel metaphors to burst from the unconscious, or noticing fresh patterns and possibilities that
might some day be tested. One can keep asking: "in what sense might that unbelievable idea be right?"
to create a more superfluid context for insight generation. Next morning: its back to the lab.

**Deeper Dive: The Unconscious**

In contrast to the concept of Consciousness, which, I believe, is hyper-valued, over-used, and extra-
muddled, the Unconscious is, though similarly muddled in its uses, very important to explore, understand,
and clarify. This is because, in many discussions of psychology, philosophy, spirituality, and human
potential, there is an insufficient distinction and clarity about when one is referring to conscious (or
explicit) vs. unconscious (or tacit) knowledge and thought. This is in part because the territory is complex
and casting functional conceptual boundaries around the important phenomena is challenging – but we
can explore it briefly here with enough resolution to inform our exploration of post-metaphysical
thinking.

In the Interlude chapter we argued that: the key challenge facing humanity today is understanding the
human mind; and the progress of human development can be described in terms of "minding the gap"
between ideas and reality. Here the unconscious plays a pivotal role. In early stages of development
(1stPP, 2ndPP) the unconscious is completely hidden. In middle stages (3rdPP and 4thPP) the conscious
mind or self increasingly sees, tries to manage, and attempts to heal or integrate unconscious material.
Here, one might intellectually understand that, say, "95% of our thinking is unconscious," but one does
not experience oneself in that way. (One of Lakoff's "three major findings of cognitive science" was
"thought is mostly unconscious.")

At later stages (5thPP and above) a type of figure/ground reversal emerges. One becomes less
identified with one's group, "identity," beliefs, and thoughts, and more identified with the experience of
presence, awareness, aliveness, peaceful silence, emptiness/fullness, and/or Being that remains when
those other things are released. The aspect of "emptiness" here is in the contrast between new and old
modes of awareness – since so much has been dropped. A metaphysical interpretation of these phenomena places consciousness in some spiritually advanced realm. Yet actually, it is an experience of "looking" into the very "full," stark yet vibrant, dark yet blinding, invisible yet immense, realm of the unconscious mind. It is metaphorically like the observer sitting at the event horizon of a black hole, with "black body radiation" streaming away from the impenetrable darkness. In the figure-ground switch, one realizes that the self primarily is that unknown realm.

That is to say, my unconscious is fundamentally who I am (as an interior – it also involves a deeper sense of embodiment, so interior and exterior are felt to interpenetrate). One observes actions, thoughts and feelings arise and pass; one sees that one has beliefs and needs; one even observes oneself "making decisions" but, from this new perspective, "I" am not deciding to do any of those things. If I am honest with myself, I don't really know how I produce the stream of words that come out when I have a dinner conversation. I don't know how I understand things when I read words on a page. I see that I decide to do something, but I can't see how I decided to decide that. As was mentioned, cognitive science is showing empirically how the unconscious makes decisions before the conscious mind appears to "decide" (Roskies, 2006). The unconscious holds a literally unimaginable amount of information; and it has a literally unfathomable influence on our thinking, acting, and believing. But, in a sense, we are that.

It was very late, i.e. only recently, in the historical development of philosophical thought, that humankind "discovered" that we have an unconscious. Though there were intimations of the notion all along the way, our current understanding began at around the time of (and in large part thanks to) Sigmund Freud. Carl Jung, as most readers will know, added key elements to the understanding of the unconscious that scholars and researchers continue to develop. At face value the concept is simple: there are aspects of how the mind works that one is not aware of. However, as we illustrated in the "historical arcs" titled "A brief history of belief fallibility" and "An evolution in understanding ideas vs. the real," the admission that a significant part of one's human Being (and thinking and knowing) happens beyond one's awareness and control was a disturbing insight that humans tended to resist for generations of thinkers (and knowers).

It seems true that Eastern religions and philosophers tended to explore human interiors more extensively than in the West, but even the most advanced such cultures, including the Indo-Tibetan Vajrayana sects of "the Third Turning of the Wheel of Buddhism," developed a deep understanding of perception, conception, and self-sense, but did not develop a sophisticated understanding of psychological "shadow" or the socially constructed nature of ideas (see Wilber, 2000). (And most Buddhist schools, and other ancient wisdom traditions as well, do not demonstrate what we call a construct-aware treatment of concepts.)

The unconscious has a close relationship with the collective. So much of what we learn and who we are grows directly from interactions with others – through family, social, and work contacts, and through communications media. The beliefs and habit patterns that define the self are as much, or more, the products of others and of cultural norms, as they are of one's own decisions or unique experiences. Some would say that the conscious sense of individuality is a veneer over the deeper unconscious reality of our collectivity. Thus, in a sense, the unconscious is collective. (See below for a Deeper Dive on "Collective consciousness and we-beings.")

We will not try to explain or explore the extensive territory of "the unconscious mind" here, but rather will try to show why it is important to differentiate the conscious/explicit/declarative from unconscious/implicit/tacit strata of mind in discussing spiritual (and psychological) phenomena – a concern closely related to our emphasis on embodiment.
So much is at stake at the intersection of mind and matter, subjectivity and objectivity, thinking and acting. As we have argued, these are false dualities that have some meaning-making usefulness, but the symbolic impulse drives one to ignore whatever is in the fuzzy area between, and outside of, these dualities. But in this case it is not that we ignore an indistinct but rarely significant set of phenomena at the borders of a conceptual boundary, but rather that these dualities incline one to ignore a gargantuan phenomenon that sits, often invisibly, right in the center: the unconscious (the elephant in the room, so to speak). The unconscious is sort-of subject, because it is about one's interior; but it is sort-of object because it is a thing outside of awareness and control that greatly affects one. Likewise it can be described in terms of thinking, albeit subterranean thought, yet it is also intimately tied to one's actions and impulses, and the embodied self. It is no wonder that, focused on those misleading dualities, it took centuries for humanity (Western culture at least) to notice that the unconscious exists.

Unconscious "material" includes memories, beliefs, sensations, and cognitive processes – that one is unaware of. Contemplative practices increase one's awareness of otherwise unconscious sensations, feelings, and thoughts. All of the sources of fallibility and epistemic drives mentioned in this text are unconscious processes. Post-metaphysical thinking includes becoming aware of these processes at work. Intentional learning is largely a process of filling the unconscious mind with material that the conscious mind deems useful. The usual goal is to practice skills until they become automatic, i.e. "unconscious."

As basic psychoanalytic theory tells us, it is all too easy to project material hidden in the depths of the unconscious onto the external world. In fact the mind is organized to do just this through reification and projection. This is one reason it is so important to be curious about what lay beneath – because what is not seen, especially if it is emotionally potent, is very likely to be projected as demi-reality. In projecting outward one ("magically") transforms what is I/me/mine into you/they/it. I need not expand on the tragic and ubiquitous consequences of this tendency of mind.

The unconscious holds many treasures to be retrieved (in addition to monstrosities to be dealt with). All of what we have said about opening to the gifts of the magical strata of consciousness is basically about accessing resources in the unconscious. Insight, creativity, intuition, emotional vitality, and sensory clarity spring from the unconscious. The spiritually alive and wise life is in contact with its depths. But also: "beware – there go Dragons."

There are basically two ways to get a sense of what happens in one's unconscious. First, one can bring material that is hidden, repressed, or suppressed into awareness. One can also train oneself to become aware of cognitive processes that are usually ignored, such as subtle body sensations and the machinations of thought. However, not every aspect of the unconscious can be made transparent to awareness. For example, I will probably never see directly into the part of the mind that allows me to read sentences and turn them into meaning. So there is a stratum, a penumbra, of unconscious material that one could, theoretically or potentially, become aware of; and deeper layers that are probably forever beyond awareness.

A second way to become aware of the workings of one's unconscious is through observing the manifest results of unconscious processes. One can notice that every time one walks into a Japanese restaurant one feels anxious – and use that fact to explore the self more deeply. Others can bring clues of unconscious processes to one's attention, such as noting behaviors that seem "unconscious" or speech that seems contradictory. (Note that I am not suggesting that anything that can be dredged from the depths of the unconscious onto the shores of consciousness should be.) Scientists can run experiments, drawing conclusions based on observing many people, to tell us things about how our unconscious mind works, for example that we tend to remember the first and last things we are told better that the middle things.
Minding the gap between ideas and reality involves learning about the unconscious. It is invisible to us (except for those parts of its penumbra that we come to see), yet we can describe some of its properties. In our differentiation of ideas vs. the real, the unconscious is actually part of the real. In our explanation of ideas we characterized them in terms of explicit thoughts and beliefs in the form of (implied or spoken) linguistic concepts and statements – thus ideas are susceptible to the complications (and simplifications) of the symbolic impulse. The unconscious operates largely outside of language (though conceptual boundaries are certainly at play in some unconscious processes). The unconscious, as real, is "replete" with practically infinite detail and complexity. It is impenetrable and "withdraws" from knowing it both in the obvious way that it is the hidden part of the mind, but also in the way that it is like any other aspect of "reality."

As mentioned in our reference to Jason Brown's work, thought is understood to emerge through overlapping waves of signals that start at the lowest strata of the unconscious mind and progress through developmental strata – from magical through mythical and finally to rational (or meta-rational) modes of cognition. Pre-formed thoughts, emerging from the unconscious and bursting into consciousness, are carved, crafted, and painted, via the symbolic impulse – to take the shapes dictated by language and concepts. When one struggles to put an idea into words, or closely observes the process of writing a poem, or notices the pre-formation of ideas in the silent mind, one can notice how ideas begin in a place without language and emerge into language. When we say that the magical action logic is a relatively simplistic, i.e. non-complex, mode of thought, we are referring to the conceptual and language-bound structures it serves to consciousness; but not to the unconscious mind that it is intimately connected to, which is replete and complex.

Phenomenology and Infinity

If old-style metaphysics is to be questioned, what then becomes of spirituality and religion? Given what we have said about the indeterminacies of language and the truth-distorting force of epistemic drives, what becomes of the search for answers to questions of ultimate concern? We have suggested some alternatives to common modes of spiritual or metaphysical thinking. One is a developmental approach to metaphysics that understands and allows for the gifts of each level of consciousness (magical, mythical, rational, etc.), and reflectively chooses or constructs a metaphysics for human self-understanding and action. Another is the self-reflective approach of building awareness skills for noticing how epistemic drives are at play in belief formation and communication – one can notice the pulls and motivations toward metaphysical thinking.

A third approach, compatible to those two, is to eschew the creation and use of metaphysical objects, place less emphasis on abstractions, and stick more closely to the ground of experience. In the search for spiritual truths and "the real," experience is our closest encounter with reality. Exposing the sources of fallibility of reason and belief does not need to leave one dry, empty, isolated, or without meaning. In releasing the grasp of abstract ideas and ideals we still have each other; we still have life, love, creativity, passion... – all the richness of a lived life. Our explorations of how meaning making is fallible and fragile need not make life feel meaningless.

Love remains. For example, consider love. Love can be explained objectively through various 3rdPP lenses. Love is a response that results from certain neurotransmitters and neural pathway activations in the body. Love is a set of behavioral responses that evolution has programmed into human genetics to ensure the survival of the species. Love can be subcategorized based on the
mammalian instincts of parental caretaking, romantic/sexual lust, social bonding, and the infant's merging with the mother. But none of this changes the experiential facts of love. A 3rdPP analysis of love can help one understand one's experience, but it need not diminish love's experiential depth, complexity, mystery, or rapture.

Love, in its various guises as care, compassion, devotion, etc. is central to religious and spiritual self-understanding. 2ndPP action logics construct moral and metaphysical narratives about what love is and how one should act. 3rdPP abstractions can super-charge these narratives to project universals such as Eros, Divine Spirit, or Universal Love out into the cosmos. We construct the metaphysical object of Love or Eros as a universal force or attractor, as a property of God, or as the essential ground of Being. These narratives can serve a useful purpose, but in this text we invite a post-metaphysical reflective distance from metaphysical narratives.

Again, we suggest grounding in the experience of Love. For first and foremost, I find myself as one who loves. If I open to that experience ever more deeply I find ever deeper resources of love. I do not need a 2ndPP story about God or Spirit or Cosmic Essence to know this about myself. I do not need a 3rdPP biological or evolutionary or psychodynamic explanation to know this about myself. Yet, once one locates love within, and empathetically senses that others share the same deep resource, it might be useful to intentionally adopt a metaphysics grounded in love. But only after grounding that metaphysics in an experience (rather than a disembodied abstraction).

From a post-metaphysical perspective, my experience is the ground for such truths. 2ndPP narratives and 3rdP explanations can add essential layers of meaning, but should supplement my experience, rather than constrain it by telling me what or how I should, or can, experience love. With experience as the ground, and collective participation and sharing as the primary method of meaning-generation, one can allow stories and explanations to be chosen wisely and held lightly, which allows for flexibility and change as new perspectives and new individuals enter our awareness. Such a metaphysics nourishes the magical and mythical layers of consciousness with sustainable meaning-making resources. It responds to who we are rather than defines or controls who we are. It can also provide differentiations or highlight questions that spur collective reflection and growth.

High stages of psychological or spiritual maturation (i.e. at a construct aware action logic) may reveal how, in a sense, love is empty. But it is only empty of the stories we have projected upon it. The human experience of love, and the human potential to love in ever-deeper ways, are givens – they are part of reality as aspects of our endowed humanity. With deeper engagement love is seen in its fullness as well as its emptiness. In a sense, "love is all there is," and Love is the universal ground of Being, but these words are best understood to point to an experience or a way of being, rather than a romantic but abstract metaphysical belief.

In general we can say of many of the themes in this text, that "deconstructing" the meaning of, for example, spirit, Eros, Gaia, or collective consciousness, through scientific, psychological, or philosophical analysis, need not leave such things inert within the psyche. As with love, the experiences associated with such ideas remain important and primary to human spirituality. Scientific understanding does not reduce the sense in which birth, death, and love are truly "miracles" to behold.
Phenomenology. Descartes is said to have started Western society down a painful path of dualistic thinking with his "I think therefore I am," which conceptually separates mind from body, subject from object — creating faux-paradoxes and other problems. A more apt and embodied aphorism would be "I experience, therefor I am." In philosophy "phenomenology" is the term used for methods that focus on experience as sources of truth. Though the more nuanced forms of this methodology are associated with early 20th century philosophers including Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, it harks back much earlier, for example in our above quote of the 14th Century text on "The Cloud of Unknowing," which said "go after experience rather than knowledge..." Modern phenomenology is an important aspect of post-metaphysical thinking.

We have already touched on aspects of phenomenology above. We have implied that Truth and Certainty are, in a sense, merely experiences. If one listens to the variety of perspectives on any given subject, one must conclude that a lot of people are mostly wrong about some things, including some who are absolutely sure of themselves. What "true" statements have in common, is not that they are true, but that they feel true to the speaker. Similarly, the certainty or importance with which someone holds a truth seems little related to its correspondence with reality. Certainty and importance are, in a sense, feelings. And as discussed previously, mystical experience is often associated with a feeling of boundless clarity, wisdom, confidence, and yes, "truthiness." The demi-real involves not just erroneous ideas, but an erroneous certainty or importance of ideas.

Even "reality" can be linked to phenomenology, as science has discovered that there are specific cognitive functions that make things appear and feel real, as opposed to dream-like, imaginary, or un-real. Oliver Sachs (1990) describes cognitive pathologies called depersonalization and derealization (disorders of the ontological felt-sense), in which individuals feel as if they are observing themselves from outside of their body, or feel as if the objects perceived around them aren't real. Scholars of contemplative practices know that such experiences need not be considered pathological, and can be experienced by otherwise healthy individuals at various locations along the path to experiencing the self-construct as empty.

The above deconstruction of the experiences of truth, certainty, and realness apply differently to different action logics. At 1stPP feeling certain is inseparable from truth and realness. At 2ndPP certainty implies that a person has a pre-rehearsed justification for their beliefs about reality. At 3rdPP the certainty of an idea is based more on following valid empirical methodology and passing the tests of logical consistency and peer critique. But although truth, certainty, and realness have different sources at each level, in the end believing something is true or real with certainty has a strong phenomenological component, regardless of one's action logic.

Next we will apply a phenomenological approach to the philosophically and spiritually troubled concept of "free will."

Is free will free? Just as there are people with a scientific bent who elevate Consciousness to such an extent that they claim it is the fundamental essence of physical reality, there are also those of a scientific bent who dismiss consciousness to such an extent that there is a serious scholarly conversation about whether free will exists. Cognitive science research has shown that, at least in certain experiments, the brain decides what action a subject will take before and quite independently of the apparent or conscious "decision" to act (Roskies, 2006). Some claim they are
proving that free will is an illusion, and others are alarmed about what that would mean for human self-understanding, and for practical social structures such as a legal system that considers not only actions, but also intentions (Harris, 2014).

Important questions do come out of such research, but the binary question "do humans have free will?" is not one of them. This is because, as explained above "free will" is a metaphorical pluralism with no single meaning. So, we are finding that in one sense, people don't have free will in the way one might assume, but that in another sense (or senses) they do have free will. Importantly, people do have free will from a phenomenological perspective. I find myself as one who experiences free will, regardless of (or in addition to) what the scientists tell me. Just as a deeper scientific understanding of love need not diminish the experience of love, the important personal and social construct of free will need not be obliterated because science shows it to be, in one sense, empty.

Actually, for millennia serious practitioners of contemplative practices have already learned that, in some respects, the experience of free will is indeed empty. This will not lead the meditator into nihilism unless they apply a black-and-white action logic to the experience and see only two possibilities: free will exists or it does not. The combination of black-and-white action logics and higher-level contemplative experiences can lead to a “spiritual bypass” phenomenon. For example, a person can use her experience of "no self," i.e. witnessing thought and action as manifesting automatically without any control from a "self" – as an excuse to unplug from the real practical necessities and moral obligations of life.

It may be the case that the "decisions" behind most or all of human action and thought emanate from the unconscious, but this does not need to refute free will (and see the Deeper Dive on the Unconscious). A common (useful, if overly simplified) model in cognitive science differentiates two modes of thought: fast, automatic, intuitive, and unconscious (sometimes called System 1); vs. slower, reflective, rational, and conscious (System 2). (see Kahneman et al., 1982; Evans & Stanovich, 2013). The reflective system is thought to engage when the automatic system reaches an impasse or challenge. It seems that one of the roles of the reflective system, and perhaps its major role, is to set up experiences that, in effect, re-program the automatic system. Put simply, even if most of our thoughts and actions are automatic (lacking free will), we engage in intentional learning (and unlearning) processes to train the unconscious to do better in the future, and thus do have this type of control of and responsibility for our lives.

Let's apply a phenomenological approach to some of the themes from the metaphysical statements in Exhibit A.

Feeling and being infinite and empty. In the first chapter we noted that "along the further reaches of the spiritual or psychological path to radical stages of consciousness one can encounter experiences such as profound states of emptiness, bliss, boundlessness, expansiveness, one-pointedness, oneness, and/or compassion." The Two Truths Doctrine used by many spiritual teachers associates such experiences with the metaphysically Absolute, Ultimate, Primordial, Empty, and/or Infinite. These sublime experiences are thought to reveal and give evidence of another realm or an Ultimate Reality. Such narratives might be useful to allow those who have not had such experiences to be motivated to seek them; or to admire those who have attained them –
arguably dubious purposes. But for those who have had such experiences, it would seem that metaphysical narratives diminish one's experience more than helping to deepen, integrate, or understand it.

For example, Wilber's quote includes: "an ultimate unity, oneness, infinite harmony and interconnectedness with the entire universe – the discovery of our real Self, Big Mind, the groundless Ground of all Being, the Supreme Identity, the Great Liberation in infinite Spirit." How does one (Wilber or any of the others quoted) move from an experience that can best be described as a feeling of infinity, or unity, or oneness, or complete emptiness – to a claim about the nature of reality and the cosmos? Under what authority, or using what action logic, is one authorized to make such totalizing proclamations?

As we have said, eternalist claims are taken as valid because this language game, including metaphysical realms and beliefs taken from spiritual authorities, was the accepted mode in the 2ndPP traditions that many spiritual teachers draw from. The human mind simply cannot experience literal infinity – that would take either an infinitely large brain, or if one finds that too reductive, and infinitely large consciousness. The die-hard mystic might say – "Oh, you see, that proves it! – because when you are in that state you are at one with God, with everything." But that sort of self-justifying circular logic is not invited to the humble party of post-metaphysics.

So let's feel into it instead, phenomenologically. A deep gaze into the ocean's horizon or the night sky evokes a sense of vastness. Pause to breathe in that vision. If one focuses on or practices any experience, it can deepen in a somewhat recursive way. One can feel vastness on top of vastness, or one-pointedness at the center of one-pointedness, etc. At around 3rdPP consciousness, the concrete feeling of vastness is abstracted and infinity becomes a possible object of thought, allowing one to imagine, and talk about, the idea of space or time or number extending out hypothetically indefinitely with no end (to both the infinitely large and the infinitely small). Analogously, there was a time when culture(s) developed an early 3rdPP and discovered the concept of infinity, which was eventually formalized as a mathematical construct. The abstract concept of infinity remains metaphorically associated with the concrete experiences of vastness, awe, and incomprehensibility.

How can it be that something "feels" infinite – if we reject the metaphysical notion that one must then be in touch with actual infinity, or God, etc.? I will offer a plausible explanation.

The sublime mystical states of boundlessness, union, bliss, one-pointedness, etc. are examples of what psychologists call "flow states" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kotler & Wheal, 2017). Though these words point to different flavors along a continuum of experiences, any one of these states actually feels at least a little bit like all of the others, and the concepts are connected in a tangle of Metaphorical Pluralisms. The experiences of being/feeling infinitely large and infinitely small are actually closely related, and often co-occur in contemplative practice.

Flow states can be understood as neural activation with great coherence of free-flowing connection across large swaths of the brain. It feels like something when our brains are "lit up" with an unusual degree of synchronous activity (as it feels like something to have a dull mind).
This is because parts of the brain are dedicated to monitoring other parts of the brain allowing one to "sense" aspects of one's thinking and feeling (i.e., what we called proprioception of thought).

There are 1 billion trillion stars in the observable universe – about 10 times the number of grains of sand on the earth; and about half a trillion stars in our galaxy alone. These are incomprehensible quantities. The human mind did not evolve to be able to adequately comprehend the difference between, say a billion, and billion trillion, in a direct experiential way. There are about 100 billion neurons in the brain. Each neuron can have up to 10,000 connections. Scientists estimate that the number of neural connections (synapses) exceeds the number of stars in the galaxy by a factor of 1000.

So, what does it feel like when the brain in a flow state experiences that many of its neurons firing in a synchronous pattern? Pretty much exactly like infinity – as close as we can have it. One cannot blame mystics and spiritualists of ancient times for equating such experiences with the concepts of infinity and boundlessness. Even today, we have no better concepts for describing such sublime experiences than the highly abstracted concept of infinity (or emptiness, which might correspond to the fact that the brain is in a synchronous superfluid state, seemingly empty of chaotic conflicting signals). But one can eschew taking the metaphysical leap of believing what ancient wisdom traditions tell one about the actual cosmos based on such experiences.

Finally, we can link the experiences of vast expansiveness and one-pointed emptiness with two complimentary cognitive processes: scanning and focusing. These can be understood as the most fundamental functions of animal-body awareness. Animal cognition includes a primordial "seeking" drive that underlies both approach towards desired things and avoidance of undesired things (Panksepp, 2005). This core awareness capacity requires two modes: focusing in to gain more detail, and scoping back to see a bigger picture. Wide-angled open awareness is restful and expansive, yet alert; while focused attention is more energized and piercing, gathering specific information in preparation for potential action or decision. In human experience one can feel the play of these two modes of awareness in sight, sound, touch, and inner thought – as one naturally moves between a peripheral-vision-like expansive mode and a more focused attention, according to the needs of the moment. When these core processes are refined or expanded to a sublime degree, as can happen in flow states, contemplative practices, or illumined moments of insight, the experience is magnified. At the extreme of expansive awareness is the experience of infinity, and at the extreme of focused awareness is the experience of one-pointedness or even emptiness. As we have indicated, there does seem to be a mode of cognition that activates both of these modes simultaneously (or interpenetratively), as in flow states the experiences of the infinitely large and the infinitely small are phenomenologically quite close.

Time, space, light, shadow – and spiritual clarity. In addition to feelings of expansiveness and single-pointedness, mystical experiences and flow states can include the related experiences of "timelessness" and "spacelessness." Within 2ndPP action logics it is easy to project these experiences out into claims about reality. The mystic who experiences something outside of time might conclude that time does not really exist, or that they have accessed a realm of objective reality that is beyond time – and similarly with space and the experiences outside of spaciality. We can suggest an alternative (post-metaphysical) explanation for such experiences.
As expanded upon at length in the Wisdom Skills (draft) book, and also somewhat in the Appendix of this book, human wisdom can be understood in terms of two processes: *complexity capacity* and *spiritual clarity*. "Complexity capacity" is the developmental growth process of that accounts for all forms of skill, knowledge, meaning-making, and belief formation. The life path of accumulating knowledge and skill involves building cognitive associations and feedback connections in successive layers of complexity and depth within the brain/mind. In this text we describe the development of complexity capacity in terms of the 1st through 5th person-perspectives.

Along the life path some of what one learns turns out to be non-useful or harmful, and a type of "unlearning" is necessary to establish a healthier or more mature psyche. Aspects of such unlearning are described at length in schools of psychotherapy and in schools of contemplative practice. "Spiritual clarity" is our term for the incremental results of this unlearning, healing, deconstruction, or "shadow work." Similarly, from the perspective of contemplative practice, Churchill (2017) describes the "post-formal metacognitive skills" needed to deconstruct aspects of the self, leading to psychological liberation.

One can visit earlier states in a controlled fashion without fully "regressing" to them. For example, in psychotherapy one might be flooded with the memories and feelings of a difficult moment in childhood. One can maintain an adult meta-cognition that allows for a re-interpretation of the memory and a re-integration of suppressed feelings, without fully regressing to the earlier age and action logic. Multiple action-logics can be "on line" in consciousness simultaneously, though one's mental focus and performance seem to be oriented to one mode in any given moment.

Importantly, we can tie each element of shadow-work to the developmental level at which the problematic learning (sometimes seen as kinks in the flow of psychic life energy or creative awareness) occurred. For the newborn time, space, and self do not exist. Psychological science has revealed much about how the human perceptions of time, space, and self are constructed incrementally for the infant and toddler (e.g. Baillargeon, 2001). Putting all of this together, we can understand spiritually "advanced" states or realizations of timelessness, spacelessness, and egolessness in terms of one's awareness gaining access to developmentally *primitive* states of being. Such access is possible when the neurological connections that constitute our *constructed* experiences of time, space, or ego, are released, seen through, or bypassed to reveal early states of undifferentiated perception.

Thus, the growth of wisdom includes both movements of increasing complexity (in understanding interiors and exteriors), and movements of, as Bonnitta Roy calls it, releasing complexity (2018). For example, life's insults combined with the symbolic impulse compel us to form countless categories and meta-categories that may, upon deeper reflection, be found to be empty and/or pernicious.

The process does not stop with releasing or deconstructing, as, once "conditioning," "attachments," or "blocks" are seen through, luminous psychic energy and brave new insights are often released. But even though the insights may *feel* sublime and profound, from a post-metaphysical perspective, one still does not have license to transform the experience of
undifferentiated infant consciousness into a claim about how time and space do not really exist as such in objective reality (we can leave that claim to the scientists).

Likewise, one who experiences the, sometimes ecstatically blissful, infant state of undifferentiated merger, might find insights about the nature of self (and about interpersonal realities), but such experiences alone do not give license to claim that one has discovered that the universe is nothing but love (or pure consciousness, etc.). Mystical experiences can thus be understood differently: not as solely "high" states achieved through access to a metaphysical or spiritual realm, but as access to developmentally early states, closer to the animal world than the adult world, which are then interpreted by the adult mind to reveal meaningful insights.

For example, to "Be Here Now" is to access an important primitive state of mind that has been obscured by the mayhem of fast-paced outward-facing modernity. For most of us to live in the "timeless now" is also a developmentally advanced practice because, once an important aspect of the self has been cast into shadow, one requires a higher subject-to-object self-awareness to notice and be motivated to re-access, re-activate, re-interpret, and integrate such occluded capacities.

**Spiritual synesthesia.** The phenomenological approach also helps explain how Metaphysical Pluralisms have implications for deeply "spiritual" or flow states. Cognitive scientists have explored what is called synesthesia, in which different senses can involuntarily influence each other and merge (Sacks, 2010; Hubbard & Ramachandran, 2005). For example, a person may experience a faint sense of the color blue whenever they hear a flute; or a faint smell of perfume when they hear the number 21 spoken. The infant brain is in complete synesthesia since the different senses have not even been tuned or differentiated yet. Their eyes do not see and their ears do not hear "things" in the in "booming buzzing confusion" of primordial consciousness – stimulus from the senses inundates the brain with meaningless and indistinguishable noise until, bit by bit, the brain organizes itself to perceive objects. But even in the fully formed adult mind, the brain manifests at least faint traces of synesthesia. And through various practices, or through mind-altering drugs, synesthesia can be experienced more prominently.

The profusion of synesthesia in early states of consciousness helps explain the paradoxical metaphorical and phenomenological pluralisms and co-arising’s found in contemplative and mystical experiences. Timelessness and spacelessness are interwoven; infinity and one-pointedness are interwoven; sensations of rapturous bliss can be intermingled with sensations of free-falling disequilibrium; states of transcendent luminosity are intimately close to states of profoundly silent darkness; one-ness with everything is mixed with complete emptiness – Oh ... My ... God! (which itself takes on a kind of literalness).

Gaining temporary or stable access to modes of experience prior to the construction of objects defined by separate sensory channels can explain experiences like auras, light-bodies, channeled messages, and hearing an Om-like cosmic hum of existence. This is not to say that such experiences are unreal, but only to say that an intuition or abstract insight that is not normally connected to a sensory channel, can, through synesthesia, manifest through a sensory channel (or across sensory channels).
For example, a person may, through a means other than visual, be sensitive to faint emotional and "energetic" signals emanating from others' bodies. A synesthesia-involved neural connection could turn this vague feeling into a set of visual colors, providing a clearer signal for the observer to make meaning of. Given what we now know about the brain, which sends anticipatory signals to sense organs as well as receiving signals from them, it is entirely possible that, especially with practice, one could see auras around another person's body through such a synesthetic process.

In sum, through a phenomenological approach one can accept and make use of occult-like experiences of timelessness, spacelessness, selflessness, infinity, and emptiness without resorting to problematic metaphysics. The reader can supplement our discussion of phenomenology and metaphysics by looking at the two Deeper Dives below, on "Collective consciousness and we-beings" and "Subtle energies and bodies."

**Deeper Dive: Collective consciousness and we-beings**

Many in progressive cultural movements are experimenting with group practices that include meditation, dialogue, and/or ritual (see overviews in Murray, 2016; Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016). I find these projects to be very hopeful and supportive of human evolution overall. Here I wish only to comment on the metaphysical and post-metaphysical trends in this field.

The subject of human collectivity invokes phenomena such as collective intelligence, collective spirit, collective presence, collective will, collective pain, etc. These phenomena are sometimes interpreted metaphysically as pointing to reified objects such as a "Higher We," Spirit, "Circle Being," "Collective Consciousness," or "intersubjective field" that emerges from the group. Below we noted that, "in a sense, the unconscious is collective" — but this was not a (classically) metaphysical claim. Emergent objects and properties are real, in the way that a flock of birds is real, and a sports team is real. But, as systems theorists have clarified, collectives and individuals have important differences that should not be confused (Luhmann et al., 2013). At the group level structural and relational properties emerge that are at a different order than the individual. For example, water can be wet but it makes no sense to describe a water molecule as being wet; and an automobile has a "gas millage" property that does not apply to any of its parts.

As we noted with the concepts of Gaia and universal Consciousness (or Mind), when one reifies an experience, idea, or ideal and turns it into an object one tends to project demi-real properties upon that object. A Collective can be characterized by the statistical properties of its parts, and thus a group of individuals can have an average happiness, a most common fear, or an agreed-upon goal, but it can be problematic to posit a collective group Being that might have thoughts, intentions, or emotions of or by itself. Doing so can make one vulnerable to an over-influence by the magical level of consciousness. At the group level there definitely is a "collective consciousness" in the sense of an aggregate over the group, but that collective is nothing like a flesh-and-blood "being."

As social animals we have instinctive drives to put aside our autonomy and mentally merge with the pack, tribe, or crowd under certain circumstances. In such a state one's awareness is tuned to be able to follow the group or a leader. The human ability to use language to create abstract objects and compelling narratives exacerbates both the positive and negative aspects of orienting to the collective. In "group-mind" state, one becomes more permeable to the outside influences of love, solidarity, fear, panic, rage, humiliation, etc. Thus we can observe both collective intelligence and collective stupidity in groups (Surowiecki, 2004; Masu & Benkler, 2008).
Metaphysical objects, as abstractions, are usually massively simpler than reality, and orienting to such objects can blind one to concrete details and concerns. Though they take on a "reality" of their own, they are initially made up of our projections, and thus when we orient to a metaphysical object and "listen" to it we are creating a magnifying feedback loop for our own (individual or collective) unconscious material. This amounts to a falling asleep that is in the opposite direction of "waking up" by making one's unconscious material visible or transparent. Through activation of the magical mind the "larger than life" collective being can assume projected qualities of, for example, the perfectly loving mother or the dominating father to which one regressively relinquishes autonomy.

What about a phenomenological approach to collective consciousness? Under the right circumstances, being in a group can invoke the experience of feeling like an organ within a larger living whole. One can enter into deeper levels of trust, openness, and egolessness to access new truths and healings within the self. Ideas and voices emerge from dialogue that transcend what any individual could have produced. One can enter a flow state in which it seems as though one's speech is one of the many voices within the head of a collective being. These are not metaphysical claims, but attempts to describe experience.

Ideally, members of an intentional group experience will be able to move flexibly through different action logics, putting the rational mind aside to open to the gifts of magical and mythical consciousness, while maintaining the ability to witness, evaluate, and dialogue about what is happening with the wisdom of a 3rd or 4th person perspective. Metaphysical and metaphorical concepts such as "We Being," or "the we without a they," or "the miracle of the we" can be powerful forces of good, if held through a post-metaphysical perspective. Such ideals should be used to supplement, but not replace, the positive experiences of collective consciousness.

**Deeper Dive: Subtle energies and subtle bodies**

The topic of subtle energies and the subtle body is complex but worth mentioning. On the one hand, science has not discovered mechanisms or explanations for much of the human experience, including: (1) the aspects of interiorly-oriented contemplative and yogic inquiry that have been understood in terms of the charka or subtle energy theories of ancient traditions; (2) aspects of exteriorly-oriented phenomena such as empathic connections and healing intentions that have been explained through metaphysical frameworks such as prana, shaktipat, élan vital, Qi, kundalini, etc.

We have noted that the 2ndPP meaning-making drive, sometimes infused with early 3rdPP abstraction power, is naturally compelled to construct non-scientific, i.e. metaphysical, narratives that explain significant phenomena that are unexplainable by scientific means. But, as noted, the meaning-making satisfaction of these stories comes at a price, as demi-real layers of additional properties and ideological certainties tend to accumulate upon reified metaphysical objects. As one example, many use the term "energy" to describe flows of sensation through the body (or flows of sensation that seem to extend beyond the body). Baring scientific measurements, the use of the term "energy" in such situations usually turns a metaphor into a reified though demi-real phenomena. This is an example of the "magical" confounding of interior experience with "real" exterior phenomena.

All of this is not to suggest throwing out ancient maps of subtle energies, chakras, etc., but to hold them lightly and not assume that they represent a final explanation of cosmic essences and invisible forces. An alternative to creating ideological metaphysical "explanations" is to engage negative capability and remain open to and comfortable with the unknown, and allow 3rdPP science (and higher order action logics) to replace ancient beliefs with durable explanations at whatever pace those "truths" come.
And they do come. Research at the Heart Math Institute (see McCraty, 2003) has discovered that the heart produces a significant amount of electromagnetic energy – its subtle signals might be able to be felt by other animals many feet away. The maps of subtle energies that yogis feel flowing within the "subtle body" do not seem to correspond to structures in the nervous system or circulatory system, but new research is suggesting that they may correspond well with structures within the lymphatic or fascia systems, and that 'energetic' healing can be understood through known science (Oschman, 2015; Winstead-Fry & Kijek, 1999; Reite & Zimmerman, 1978). Though it sometimes has an uncomfortable overlap with pseudo-science culture, valid scientific methods are exploring how the sciences of liquid crystals, non-linear fluid dynamics, laser-like light pulses, and quantum entanglement may explain aspects of human biology.

We can envision a post-metaphysical understanding of subtle energies and related phenomena that is grounded in science and phenomenology, that respects the useful knowledge passed on from ancient traditions, but without adopting the old metaphysics of imagining a subtle realm beyond time, space, mass, and energy. Our understanding of time, space, mass, and energy will surely evolve, probably in surprising ways, but it is better to allow such knowledge to evolve through 3rdP (or beyond) methods than through 2ndPP reification that projects imagined underlying explanations onto a metaphysical substrate of the cosmos.

In addition, the science and spirituality of the next generation should be linked through post-metaphysical thinking, including phenomenology. The experiences that we attribute to a subtle body or Qi energy are profound resources for self-understanding. Yogic and contemplative practices that refine such experiences should be considered essential sources of information in a 4thPP science of the body (for example, see the "experiential anatomy" approach of BBC (Olsen & McHose, 2004)).

Conclusions and Summary

(1) Humanity has reached a crossroads in its cultural (or consciousness) evolution. Since the dawn of the modern age we have relied upon our powers of intellect, looking outward to craft a world bursting with technological miracles built upon accumulating scientific knowledge. But we are waking up to "externalities" that, alongside the undeniable benefits of our powerful intellect, are creating world-shattering phenomena such as species extinction, environmental degradation, and unprecedented rates of depression, obesity, suicide, terrorism...the long list of global "crises" is familiar to all. It may be that humanity's list of major troubles has always been long, but only recently, anthropologically speaking, is it true that our biggest threats are products of the human mind and of human nature, as opposed to being about the human relationship with Nature.

Religion and spirituality have traditionally provided the meaning-making resources to protect us from despair and confusion in the face of life's "questions of ultimate concern." But, tethered to metaphysical modes of meaning-making, traditional spiritual narratives are ill-equipped for the current era. Any spirituality, or any world-view, that offers a bridge to a sustainable future must look further inward – into the interior landscape. It must offer sufficient wisdom about the human condition, including the limitations of human reason, to evolve human culture beyond the so-called "deficient mental" cul-de-sac of modernity.

Any such spirituality must put the modern intellect in perspective by supporting an enlightened re-integration of the magical and mythical layers of the human being, while developing a keen awareness of the dynamic unconscious drives emanating from those levels. It must re-enchant,
Illuminate, and oversee, not suppress or deny, the layers of consciousness that confer emotional vitality and meaning to the objects we perceive (and conceive). Modern manifestations of secular humanism and interfaith religiosity, by themselves, are too subdued to spark the radical experiences of connection, insight, majesty, luminosity, boundlessness, oneness, wholeness, and emptiness that spring from the archetypal strata of the mind (or "soul"). On the other hand, wide-eyed idealistic "spiritual" frameworks for life often ignore both concrete realities and the darker threats of magical/mythical thinking.

The mystical sages and shamanistic healers of the future only need to understand and skillfully activate the magical (including "archetypal" and some of the "mythical") strata of consciousness, as they always have—ideally from a place of great care and skillful means. They do not need to "believe in" literal or metaphysical manifestations of magical beings and phenomena to do their important work. Concepts such as Spirit and Soul continue to be rich ideas for the metaphorical and metaphysical (and post-metaphysical) dimensions of human Being. We do not want to reject them, but rather find modes of belief-holding and dialogue that move flexibly between levels of interpretation, knowing the ideas are tools for mutual understanding and liberation, rather than realities we are subject to.

(2) Our treatment of the landscape of the contemporary "spiritual but not religious" has been, I think appropriately, slanted towards concepts borrowed from Eastern religions. Starting with the quotes in Exhibit A, and throughout, we have highlighted the related concepts of Absolute (or Ultimate) Reality (or Truth), Ground of Being, and Emptiness. This territory that mystics experience and point us toward, is, I would agree, an essential, perhaps the essential, focus of the spiritual journey. The knowing of this territory (which is also, paradoxically, an unknowing) is accompanied by profound compassion, selflessness, bliss, expansiveness, one-pointedness, lucidity, peace, freedom, and/or sacredness. Not as ends in themselves, but as resources of human potential that can make a difference to others and for our world.

Mystics, and the codified mysticism found in esoteric religious texts, has always known that this territory is ineffable, easily misunderstood, and easily taken as an object of egotistic fixation; and have tried in various ways to describe the wrong turns and dead-ends along "the path." These provisos, plus trying to limit certain teachings to those with specific attainments, were the best they could do to negotiate the dance between making knowledge available and avoiding its misuse in their era.

What we are suggesting in this text is that, in the modern and post-modern context, the quasi-literal language of absolutes and ultimates is no longer an appropriate metaphysics. First, this is because, at least as they are often framed, they grate against the expected norms of rational discourse. Second, it is because the emerging capacities of 4thPP (and 5thPP) action logics allow for a post-metaphysical languaging and comprehension that better meets the underlying goals of the spiritual (and esoteric religious) teachings.

(3) In this text I have offered a post-metaphysical perspective on ideas and ideals woven into contemporary "spiritual but not religious" discourse. The topics covered, sometimes briefly and sometimes in depth, include (in brackets is the section containing that theme):
Quotes from contemporary teachers/mystics making claims about Soul, Spirit, Godhead, Consciousness, Reality, Source, Non-duality, etc. – that include metaphysical descriptors such as absolute, ultimate, infinite, supreme, essential, primordial, eternal, formless, perfect, and universal. [The metaphysics to Come]

An analysis of the "Two Truths Doctrine" that posits Absolute Reality (or Truth) in contrast to Relative Reality (or Truth); including a discussion of emptiness and dependent origination. [Two truths: One Problem]

Gaia – the Earth as a being. [Constructing the Real]

Recursively structured classification frameworks such as Yin/Yang, Masculine/Feminine, astrology, and personality typing systems. [Constructing the Real]

Soul, Spirit, Higher Self, Unique Self, True Self, Absolute Self. [Reification and Misplaced Concreteness]

Eros and Archetypes (Lover, King, Trickster, etc.) (with a short treatment of absolute reality and emptiness) [Reification and Misplaced Concreteness]

Spiritually potent dualisms including: good/evil, saint/sinner, dark/light, spirit/matter, mind/body, interior/exterior, individual/collective, state/stage, empty/full, absolute/relative, self/selfless, and being/non-being. [Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism]

Emptiness and Dependent Origination (co-dependent arising), revisited. [Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism]

Time and Causality; plus a brief tap at the questions: Do slugs have emotions? Are dolphins intelligent? Are computers intelligent? Do apes use language? Are rocks or trees or atoms conscious? Do we have a soul? [Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism]

Metaphysical descriptors such as absolute, ultimate, infinite, supreme, essential, primordial, eternal, formless, perfect, and universal--revisited on phenomenological grounds [Epistemic Drives]

Consciousness and the Unconscious. [Epistemic Drives]

Love and free will [Phenomenology and Infinity]

Infinity, emptiness, one-pointedness [Phenomenology and Infinity]

Timelessness, spacelessness, unity, and selflessness. [Phenomenology and INFINITY]

Auras, light-bodies, channeled messages, and the cosmic hum of existence. [Phenomenology and Infinity]

Collective consciousness and We-beings. [Phenomenology and Infinity]

Subtle energies and subtle bodies (distance healing, chakras, prana, Élan Vital, Qi; synchronicities, affirmations). [Phenomenology and Infinity]

As the reader knows, these topics were not explored in terms the specific beliefs surrounding their use, but in general terms of how they relate to metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking.

Throughout the text I tried to "practice what I was preaching" by laying bare the indeterminacies, fallibilities, and metaphorical pluralisms of the central concepts of my framework. Models such as the five person-perspectives; concepts such as truth, reality, reason, consciousness, and reification; and dualities such as ontology/epistemology, reality/ideas, interiors/exterior, metaphysics/post-metaphysics, reason/emotion, and concrete/abstract – were all revealed to have fuzzy boundaries and inconvenient interdependencies.
(4) Questions of ultimate concern tap into our deepest needs, fears, and dreams. They are "ultimate" in at least two senses. First, they seem larger than we are – like obscure metaphysical mysteries or un-graspable "hyper-objects." But they are also ultimate because they are omnipresently immanent, touching the most minute, mundane, and intimate aspects of life. Renouncing the "ultimates" of eternalist truths, primordial foundations, and grand narratives does not mean we have to turn our backs to these questions.

Is there a God? – A Soul or Spirit? – A Purpose to life? – A life after death? – An Ultimate Reality? What is Consciousness? Is there a cosmic force of Eros? Do we have free will? What is the Good? ...

Viable answers will not be found in this text, nor within the frozen commandments of any future religion or spiritual framework. We can no longer look to eternally-true authorities for answers to these questions – we must develop ways of thinking that allow the answers to evolve with us and through us. Similarly, we can no longer afford to project the causes and sources of human love and resilience onto an imaginary metaphysical realm (God, Spirit, Cosmos, Eros, etc.) that then turns back to capture us with the force of its demi-real narrative. To be truly resilient we must ground our metaphysics and ethics in an ontology that embodies the realities of the human condition. Post-metaphysical thinking is not non-metaphysical thinking, but rather a stage of wisdom that supports us in collectively and reflectively constructing the metaphysical foundations of a thriving society.

The post-metaphysical injunction to reflect upon our metaphysics and metaphysical thinking, rejecting some of it but not all of it, is a nuanced affair. One needs to develop the skills of giving oneself fully (or almost fully) to the unknown territory of the unconscious, as it bubbles up through the magical strata of mind, at just the right times, yet while keeping lit the pilot light of rational (and post-rational) thought. Culturally, we must perform the developmentally sophisticated operations of de-reifying our Gods, i.e. bringing them down from the heavens and back into the workshop, where we can make adjustments, refinements, and do complete re-designs; to then be able to launch them back into the heavens, believing in them with all of our souls, but only while that serves our deepest needs.

Within this delicate dance I have tried to strike the right note between critique and appreciative inquiry. While exposing the many sources of indeterminacy in the contemporary spiritual meme-scape, I want to emphasize the importance of skillfully "suspensiong disbelief" (or play "the believing game") to access the magical, mystical, and metaphysical gifts of life, for example:

- To sense the large oak in the forest as a Being that I am intimately connected with – that whispers forgotten truths into my inner ear;
- To imagine that a Universal Love or Eros saturates the cosmos, animates life forms, breaths consciousness into my own being, and motivates cosmic evolution; and
- To experience the co-presence within a group as connected through a meta-being that contains us all in a higher wisdom, and into which I can release myself.

Such things are critical, not as literal indicators of metaphysical truths, but as experiences that can be penetrated for deeper, if fallible, truths. Importantly, post-metaphysical thinking must include a phenomenological inquiry into the truths found in raw experience – it cannot be limited
to abstract reasoning about "things" and "the other," or narratives comforting to Reason. In arriving at any shared world-view, i.e. in proclaiming what is "real" and how it is real, the metaphysics of the future must be influenced by both scientific methods and the deepest of human intuitions, metabolized through generative participation and caring dialogue.

(5) If, when looking within we see that the basis of our being shines with Love, we can then choose to adopt a metaphysics that activates the magical and mythical levels of being by feeling into the divinity and omnipresence of that Love. We can claim it as real. Similarly, we can plumb the depths of our experience to mine the resources of compassion, curiosity, forgiveness, gratitude, creativity, endurance, and integrity that can produce inspired actions and uplifting artifacts. For such a "deliberate metaphysics" we can craft a science-compatible Universe Story that includes metaphysical assumptions about the miraculous divinity of nature and the essential goodness of human nature (e.g., see Swimme & Berry; 1992; Dowd, 2008). We can allow for flexible, participatory, generative, local, and humble "grand narratives" addressing questions of ultimate concern.

If, on the other hand, an individual or group looks deeply within itself and, in that moment or continuously, does not find that the foundation is built from components such as love, curiosity, forgiveness, respect, and integrity, but rather finds pain, hatred, or fear at what seems to be the foundational layer, then this is a signal to call in resources for healing to mend the broken heart or traumatized mind; to transform the disfigured pathways of life-energy in the body/mind. It is not the time to re-imagine a new metaphysics, nor to reproduce a given one.

For those ensconced in "status quo" reality in between these two extremes, escaping from the metaphysical assumptions of the "consensus trap" will no doubt involve initial phases of dissonance and discomfort. I hope that the arguments made in this text will motivate such an inquiry and help one negotiate the transitions. And for anyone on such a journey – one that allows for hope while facing "reality" – grief and longing are bound to be constant companions that should be welcomed and listened to. Any future spirituality must include resources up to the task of navigating significant and unpredictable change. The metaphysics to come must account for the losses and emptiness(es) that come with healing and change.

(6) We have emphasized an embodied orientation to reason and belief-formation. Embodiment has many implications. Human reason is a wet-ware product of evolutionary caprice; and reason is influenced by unconscious drives and distortions born in the ancestral past and from the misfortunes of a lived life. Reason is intimately imbedded in the concrete processes of action and dialogue. Abstract concepts are grounded in sensory-motor primitives; and are "enacted" as much as conceived. Ideas are "tools" more than "truths," and lose relevance if they don't attend to the "seriousness" of pragmatic life. They also lose validity in the face of "performative contradictions." All of this speaks to the embodiment of Reason.

We have made heavy use of a developmental model describing 1stPP through 5thPP action logics. This framework is an orienting generalization and categorical simplification of the complexity of the human condition; however its contours are backed up by dozens of psychological theories and thousands of scientific studies. With each succeeding action logic consciousness builds capacities to see increasingly complex patterns in the world; and builds the
skills of ever-deeper self-understanding. The meaning-making drive operates at every developmental level of consciousness, answering life's ultimate questions by producing emotionally charged objects (1stPP), compelling narratives (2ndPP), reasonable truths (3rdPP), multi-perspectival wisdoms (4thPP), and empty-while-full pearls of holistic/cosmic insight (5thPP and above). Rather than fully characterize each action logic in one central place, I have chosen to spread an accumulation of descriptors of these levels throughout the text.

We have used the term "4th person perspective" (4thPP) to indicate the embodied "wisdom skills" that meet the requirements of a future-ready and present-grounded spirituality that can sense into how personal, cultural, and anthropological pasts live within the subterranean strata of the mind/body. At 4thPP many of the sources of fallibility within human ideas and ideals become known, and a deeper humility and self-understanding is possible. There are sources of fallibility at many cognitive levels including: perceptions, conceptions, beliefs, models/theories, and entire world-views. In this text we have focused on the level of conception, that is, at the level of concepts and objects, which touch the ontological and metaphysical questions about "What is real?" that underpin the "What is true/good?" questions behind beliefs, models, theories, and worldviews. We have also hinted at the wisdom skills associated with 5thPP that begin to emerge at 4thPP, including construct aware consciousness.

(5) A key aspect of 4thPP consciousness is a "post-metaphysical thinking" that, among other things, illuminates the nature of ideas and objects derived from metaphysical thinking. Along our journey we have illustrated the fallibilities and dangers that accompany the benefits of unreflective magical, mystical, and metaphysical thinking. To summarize, the sources of these fallibilities and dangers include:

- **Magical** modes of thought that confuse interior and exterior phenomena, and imbue non-living objects and abstractions with human properties such as intention and feeling.
- **Mythical** modes of thought that project story lines, including totalizing narratives, upon reality to satisfy the epistemic drive for the world to makes sense.
- **Hyper-rational** modes of thought that disenfranchise emotions and intuitions, and ignore that which can't be measured and that which can't be neatly categorized.
- **Metaphysical** modes of thought that invent realities beyond time, space, and matter as convenient "locations" to uncritically store beliefs and simplistic answers to complex life questions.
- **Epistemic drives** that compel us toward abstractions, ideals, universals, essentials, totalities, eternals, and infinities;
- The **symbolic drive** that cleaves reality into neat categories and dualities, producing demi-real byproducts such as faux-paradoxes.
- **Misplaced concreteness** (reification) that paints abstract ideas and ideals with demi-real properties of concrete objects.
- The impossibly objective "view from nowhere" that supports the individual analytical mind in drawing universal conclusions without reference to multiple perspectives and actual conversations.
- The **disembodied** character of modern and Western thought, which disjoins mind and matter, spirit and body, reason and intuition, thinking and acting/being – reductively favoring the
first and marginalizing the second of each of these; distancing us from the blood, sweat, tears, and sod of life.

This list is long but its items are so deeply related that the basic shifts in attitude and complexity found at 4thPP can work holistically towards reconciling all of them. This shift is neither easy nor guaranteed, but it is possible. Development happens when sufficient challenge meets sufficient support, and when the psyche is clear of shadow elements that are attached to the known. Perhaps paradoxically, because our world is rife with challenges adequate to this task, the best strategy for building 4thPP thinking is to release or deconstruct unnecessary complexity built up within lower strata, rather than effort to achieve a new level of complexity.

(7) As we come to see that many of the answers culturally handed down to us – wrapped in universal truths, fundamental essences, and grand narratives – are, in some sense, metaphysical counterfeits, post-metaphysical thinking allows us to pan the gold hidden within the sludge. It allows us to pierce the veil of certainty surrounding knowledge bequeathed by the crowd, admired teachers, or "pure" rationality. Post-metaphysical thinking can acknowledge and begin to adapt to the above sources of belief fallibility through tools, skills, and attitudes that we have mentioned, and summarize below:

- The **negative capability** of tolerance of, and playfulness with, uncertainty, ambiguity, and unknowing.
- Having an **embodied** philosophical orientation to reality (summarized just above) that views cognition as constrained by the contingencies of evolution, the physicality of the brain, and the drives of the socially-embedded being.
- **Minding the gap of demi-reality**, i.e. refining the skill of sensing the differential qualities of ideas/ideals vs. concrete reality.
- Developing a **construct aware** appreciation for the cognitive nature of concepts in language including: misplaced concreteness (reification), metaphorical pluralism, the symbolic impulse (categorical splitting that creates dualisms, faux-paradoxes, faux-fractals, and other demi-real illusions); and the graded, exemplar-based, and metaphorical nature of abstract concepts.
- The **interpretive pluralism** of assuming that claims are binary and questions have single answers; asking "in what sense" something is true or real (or not); and "under what definitions, and assuming what exemplars, can one acknowledge another's claim.
- The delicate developmental psychic choreography of balancing the (1stPP) "pleasure principle", (2ndPP) meaning-making drive, (3rdPP) "reality principle," and (4thPP) holistic drive; i.e. suspending rational judgment and opening to magical and mythical thinking, while maintaining enough post-rational wisdom-skill to avoid being swindled by the simplicity, naïveté, and narcissism of the primitive mind.
- Engage in the therapeutic or contemplative **shadow work** of reducing reality-distorting complexities, lacunas, and blockages to uncover, recover, or reconstruct the lower strata of the psyche.
- The **phenomenological approach** of: grounding spiritual truths in experiences – as opposed to allowing ideals or theories to limit experiences and dictate interpretations; developing a proprioceptive felt-sense for when the magical mind is keenly engaged; and feeling into the bundle of epistemic drives as they pull at one's attempts at meaning-making.
Nurture a *procedural rationality* that emphasizes how people think over what people think – replacing foundationalism with "fallibilism."

Taking a *participatory and dialogical* approach to building and applying knowledge about world, self, and society; seeking diverse perspectives and applying humility, openness, vulnerability, and curiosity to collective truth-seeing activities.

Holding searches for the "truth" and "reality" as fundamentally *ethical, emancipatory*, and self-emancipatory – as grounded in sincerity, authenticity, respect, gratitude, forgiveness, and care.

Using the *idea portability principle* while communicating one's beliefs – i.e., that the greater the distance between the worldviews or beliefs of interlocutors the more important it is to understand and compensate for indeterminacy.

Any sustainable spirituality (or world-view) of the future must have elements of the 4thPP post-metaphysical skills listed above, to allow humanity to address perennial "questions of ultimate concern" in ways that holistically meet the needs posed by multiple layers of the psyche. Obviously, this is not a how-to book containing practices and success stories related to these skills and attitudes. The focus has been on generative and clarifying ideas rather than practices, and I hope that the many invitations to connect the rather philosophical ideas to life experience have compensated for the degree of abstraction. The motivated reader can find many sources of practical advice on contemplative practice, psychotherapy, deep dialogue, and critical self-reflection elsewhere. And again, though this list may seem daunting, the elements are massively interconnected and co-creational, with each supporting the others in the developmental move into a 4thPP action logic.

**Epilogue.** This text is intentionally hopeful. The author realizes that humanity's myriad problems and "crises" look quite dire, and understands that a nearly miraculous degree of cultural consciousness transformation toward something like 4thPP, and/or an impractical proliferation of psychic healing, would be needed to reach a species-wide "tipping point" that would usher in a sustainable global human system. Perhaps I am pointing a flashlight down one of the more hopeful-looking roads leading out of a dimly lit crossroad along the Anthropocene; but I have little comprehension of who may go there, how long the road is, or what other resources are required for the journey. Actually, that metaphor is not very apt – I am offering a few conceptual tools for the suitcase and some compass points for the map for such a journey, rather than lighting up an entire road. But I am confident that the basic tools are necessary, sturdy in the right hands, and generally wieldable for those willing to practice.

I have suggested a clearing and cleaning out of unnecessary (classical) metaphysics and a collective re-building of a more nourishing and radiant *deliberative and embodied metaphysics*. The many perspectives I have given on this post-metaphysical approach may make this seem complicated and daunting. But, in a sense, it is as simple as looking into the eyes of others with openness and care, responding to the vulnerable human needs arising in that context, and translating one's response into a deliberate metaphysics by articulating the core values and beliefs that arise there. It is complex and daunting because the layers of demi-reality and egoic attachments that accumulate in the psyche in modern culture are indeed complex and daunting. Social structures reify and reinforce these patterns. Releasing this "baggage" can be disorienting and painful; and seem completely impractical in those back-alleys of culture that are maliciously committed to...
perpetuating the demi-real. But, I submit, all of this reality may be more malleable than we imagine. The science of chaotic systems allows for miracles in concrete reality.

Your author has ample direct (often humbling) experience in his own life that, in a sense, reality is constructed by one's projections onto it. At least at the local level of human interaction, a shift in attitude, a released fear or craving, a pause to wonder – can create a recognizable "ontological" change in others, as well as oneself. If the global indeed emerges from the local, these are powerful spiritual acts. I may not be able to bend a spoon with my mind, magically manifest the new car of my dreams, or heal a distant stranger with my prayers, but with every small step of taking responsibility for my actions, thoughts, beliefs, energetic presence, and even my emotions and the contents of my unconscious, I learn that the metaphysics that I embody co-creates a reality. If a sufficient number of people seemed to agree, not with my ideas but with a similar metaphysics, then maybe a new sun would peek through the clouds of our species-wide predicament. Perhaps it already has. Perhaps you are among those responsible for it.

References

References from Exhibit A:


Appendix – Developmental Basics

This appendix supplements the subsection "A developmental perspective" with details about cognitive or meaning-making development. In that section we briefly described the developmental stage model used in this paper as using these "action logic" levels:

- 1stPP: magical/impulsive,
- 2ndPP: mythical/conventional,
- 3rdPP: rational/autonomous, and
- 4thPP: meta-rational/pluralistic.

Additional details on each level are found in the side-bar Deeper Dive at the end of this Appendix.

The first term refers to the level of cognitive complexity that can be brought to bear in making meaning of the world. The second term refers to how that cognitive capacity manifests when it is applied to the subjective and intersubjective domains of I, me, you, us, and them in the psychosocial world.

Developmental theories have a variety of schemes for naming and describing such levels (e.g. see Fischer, 1980; Commons & Pekker, 2008; Wilber, 2000), but these will do for our purposes. The "1stPP, 2ndPP..." terminology refers to first, second...etc. *person-perspectives* or action logics, the naming convention used by O'Fallon's STAGES model (O'Fallon, 2011, 2013; Murray, 2017), and suggested in Cook-Greuter's Ego Development Model (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2011; Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009), and which is compatible with Kegan's "construct developmental" model (Kegan, 1994).

The developmental perspective is an extremely useful one that is applicable to almost every domain of human inquiry, yet is surprisingly absent from most disciplines. One of its main gifts is the following. In many areas questions of practical application return a plethora of answers, for example: What is the best type of government for a country? What psychotherapy method should my friend seek? How can educators support self-directed learning? What are good tips for a supervisor giving feedback to a supervisee? Should children be told partial truths or whole truths?

Such questions return such a wide variety of answers from different theories and experts that seeking expertise may only result in more confusion. Yet when one applies a developmental lens to the heap of answers for any of these questions, one often finds that the answers spread out prismatically into usable sub-sets. The answers to the questions depend on the developmental level of the target (or social context). So a developmental theory with six levels can organize the answers into six groups, providing some essential structure to the complex inquiry.

The categorical lines drawn are of course very approximate, and developmental theories vary on how they segment human development. So, for example, one theory might organize the answers into five sets and another seven. But the nature of the entire spectrum is substantially similar among these theories. The fundamental developmental process is that each level or stage builds upon, "sees," or "operates upon" the prior levels.
Psychological scholarship contains many developmental theories, dating famously back to Jean Piaget (1896 -1980) and even earlier (E.g. James Baldwin 1861 - 1934). These theories followed Darwin's (1809–1882) theory of evolution to deepen our understanding of how we became, and become, human. In a general sense, each human skill or capacity grows separately through developmental dynamics (e.g., music, athletic skill, logical skills, etc. – see Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences" 1983). But in this text we use the term "development" to refer specifically to the development or maturity of human meaning-making, as it is framed in Kegan's theory, or the ego, as it is framed Loevinger's theory, later updated by Cook-Greuter and O'Fallon. It can also be framed in terms of the development of "perspective taking" – but that term has other meanings that might confuse the subject so we use it less.

In Murray (2017) I give a summary of the ego development models of Loevinger, Cook-Greuter, Torbert, and O'Fallon, including references to scientific validity studies. Kegan's construct developmental model, which is very compatible with ego development, is explained in Kegan (1984). The primary theorists in the neo-Piagetian tradition are Fischer, Commons, and Dawson (see Fisher, 1908; Commons et al., 2008; Dawson, 2004). Wilber (2006) offers a model as an "orienting generalization" that synthesizes elements of all of these models, but does not contain the level of detail or rigor achieved by each of them.

Developmental stages (or levels or "action logics") are defined in terms of the structures of thinking, not its content. Development proceeds from more black-and-white, all-or-nothing, either-or, us-vs-them modes into thinking that takes multiple perspectives into account, reflects upon the context and limits of thinking, and tolerates uncertainty and paradox.

So called "neo-Piagetian" developmental theories suggests striking parallels in the development of meaning-making complexity in individuals over the life span vs. in cultures over historical or anthropological time spans. These theories use the idea of complexity (actually "hierarchical complexity") to track development in individuals from the simplicity of childhood into advanced stages of wisdom in adulthood. Though one should not make the mistake of assuming that the developmental complexity of cultures or groups evolves over time following the same mechanisms that drive an individual's development, the same complexity levels are still quite useful in describing the complexity of cultural and group dynamics. For example, the broad distinctions between magical/pre-operational, mythic/concrete-operational, and rational/formal-operational action logics, as they were defined for child-to-adult development, are useful in describing historical trends in philosophical and cultural thought.

**Caveats.** Though we consistently refer to developmental progressions in this text, several caveats warrant pre-stating. First, though the sequence of levels is fixed by definition because each builds upon the prior, developmental progress is not guaranteed for any individual or group, and development can stagnate or even regress. Second, meaning-making complexity is only one of many ways to characterize human differences and trends, and it must be emphasized that more complex is not necessarily "better." This is because the action logic used can be unnecessarily and problematically complex for a given context; and because complex thought can be used for narcissistic and nefarious reasons as well as for "good" reasons (as some frame it, some highly developed individuals harbor significant "shadow" material). Also, earlier or more "primitive" levels of cognition are actually more fundamental and important to the health of the whole person.
Third, it is an oversimplification to use developmental levels to form *caricatures of people or groups*. It is better to assume that the action logic that a person operates from varies according to context, though it may be useful to consider average modes (e.g. a "center of gravity") or general trends. Finally, like many constructs used in psychology and sociology, for example "extroversion," the developmental categories that we will use are composite *simplifications* from a large body of empirical research that contains nuances and differences of definition beyond our scope here.

Despite these caveats, developmental theory provides a very useful metric for some purposes, including ours here, since it parsimoniously charts the progression from pre-scientific thinking, to scientific rationalist thinking, to the post-modern critique of reason, to the post-metaphysical (or post-post-modern) integration of all those prior modalities. Throughout this text we make the case that post-metaphysical thinking, as defined by Habermas but also as an emerging contemporary wisdom in how knowledge is held in culture, maps roughly onto what developmentalists call "4th Person Perspective" (4thPP). Roughly speaking, 1stPP and 2ndPP map to pre-scientific thinking; 3rdPP maps to rational and scientific thinking; early 4thPP maps to the post-modern critique, and late or full 4thPP maps to post-metaphysical thinking. (Our purpose here is not to make a scientific or factual claim that 4thPP, as measured by developmental scientists, correlates with observed cultural trends. Rather, we are simply using an existing description of developmental action logics as an expedient and powerful framework that unites the diverse routes through which we will approach the topic of post-metaphysical thinking.

Readers of this journal are likely to be familiar with various theories of adult development, and how they, though diverse in content and origin, show a remarkable overlap in basic findings and principles. We discuss this territory in depth in the primary text on Wisdom Skills, but below will give a skeletal overview of the basic developmental sequence.

**Developmental Dynamics.** Each level builds upon the prior – it does not replace it. At best it "includes and transcends" the prior level(s), though aspects of each level can also become hidden, repressed, or distorted in the turbulent journey of growth to the next level. The earliest or deepest layers of our cognitive apparatus were "designed" through an evolutionary process that layers each capacity upon earlier ones. Cognitive and brain sciences confirm how the most primitive aspects of thought, including emotions, are essential aspects of all advanced rational thought. In fact, brain science maps out a rough progression of layers of neural substrate that support the notion of developmental action logics literally building upon each other.

Rather than pegging an individual or group "at" a developmental level, we assume that each individual has access to a *range* of developmental levels, and, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, manifests at different levels depending on the context. Under conditions of stress, complexity, or novelty, individuals may "downshift" from their typical action logic to a lower one, for example to a child-like state of unregulated emotions (the "amygdala hijack" famously described Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*). Individuals can also purposefully choose to suspend higher-level action logics to accentuate lower levels, as when accessing childlike playfulness or magical wonder. So-called peak experiences and flow states can temporarily sweep one into an uncharacteristically high action logic.
Developmental theories describe "phases" of learning within or between levels. Though most skills are learned through a combination of paying attention to specific aspects of the world and engaging in practice and/or repetition, skills eventually become automated and normalized, and move into the unconscious. Unless one is teaching others a skill or explicitly reflecting on it for some other reason, the details of how one actually accomplishes that skill can become hidden from consciousness. For example, with the help of others one can learn how to play tennis or be a good parent, but once one becomes skilled one may not be able to describe how one does these things.

The progression to higher (i.e. later) levels is called "vertical" (or hierarchical) growth. Learning involves the "horizontal" growth of a wide array of capacities at a particular level, followed by a vertical transition to the next level. (This is an extreme simplification – elaborated in the primary text on wisdom skills). A sufficient breadth, interconnection, and coherence of knowledge and skills are required for the emergence of a new level.

Healthy development is considered to include a robust (horizontal) range and diversity of skills at each level before the next level develops (vertically). Developmental theories hold that the emergence of a new level is triggered when an existing level of skill is experienced as insufficient to match the complexity of life's demands. For a variety of reasons, individuals may accrue a significant breadth of knowledge and then plateau at a particular developmental level, for example the mythical/conventional (2ndPP) level, without experiencing or adapting to conditions that shape the next level.

Most educated individuals in modern cultures operate at late 2ndPP or 3rdPP, with professionals and the well-educated tending to cluster around 3rdPP, and with decreasing percentages of the population achieving 4thPP and higher. Cultures tend to pull their members up to the average developmental level (i.e., enculturation) and inhibit individuals from developing much further, since doing so can threaten the status quo.

The mind in shadow. In addition to learning horizontally and developing vertically, some mental capacities or structures can become hidden, compromised, or even pathologically distorted, along the way. It is now well recognized that early, or more "primitive," layers of the psyche contain many patterns of thought and emotion that are invisible, repressed, or suppressed through the enculturation process. Sexual desire and rage are the most obvious examples. We are trained, often forced or coerced, into controlling and managing animal instincts and "childish" behaviors, presumably in order to be able to function acceptably in society.

Developmentally earlier modes of thought can be repressed or suppressed for adaptive purposes that serve a need at the time. The child may learn to "stuff" her anger because she learns that pro-social behavior gets more needs met; or she learns that expressing anger does not result in her needs being understood or met (and in dysfunctional families expressing one's needs may actually be dangerous to the child). But of course repressing one's anger can lead to psychological problems as an adult. Thus, along with the original benefits of suppressing or repressing primitive parts of the self, something is always lost as well.

The denied or resisted aspects of the self are never completely eliminated; they are merely removed from conscious thought and intentional action. As a result there are conflicts between
parts of the self – between the conscious and the unconscious (ego and id in Freud's terms), or between parts of the unconscious that manifest competing needs. Psychic energy can be bound up and distorted as a result. Creativity is another common casualty of such suppression and repression. Self-understanding and maturity are also compromised when aspects of the self are denied or invisible. The lowest layers of cognition are the most intimate with the mammalian/reptilian brain, and closest to emotional energy and bodily vitality; thus psychic inhibitions to the magical or mythical layers of the psyche can limit the full expression of one's humanity and potential.

Reflective and healing practices such as meditation or psychotherapy are often aimed at retrieving what was lost – to regain access to perceptual clarity, vitality, creativity, self-understanding, psychic wholeness, and psychological growth. Developmental theorists often contend that "cleaning up" shadow material in lower levels is more important that achieving ever-higher developmental levels. According to most theories, vertical development should not be forced because it happens naturally when an individual encounters new challenges, provided: (1) there is sufficient support; (2) sufficient horizontal knowledge has been learned; and (3) there is not too much shadow material inhibiting the growth process.

In the primary text on wisdom skills, I frame meaning-making maturity in terms of "wisdom skill" – a combination of "complexity capacity" plus "spiritual clarity." Spiritual clarity refers to psychological, cognitive, contemplative, or "spiritual" processes of becoming aware of and cleaning up or integrating the accumulation of negative patterns and beliefs. This healing or "ablation" of the hidden inconsistencies and tensions (shadows) within deeper layers of the psyche can be organized using the same levels as are used for developmental complexity. In other words, it is useful to categorize the pathologies or tensions according to the action logic level that they arose within or inhibit.

**Deeper Dive: Person perspective action logics.**

We can use our framework of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th person perspectives to outline this trajectory. Here are indications (not full definitions) of these levels:

- 1<sup>st</sup> PP: There is no reflection on truth or validity – one just does what one wants, or what one has been coerced into doing, and has a difficult time understanding why others don’t see the world as they do.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> PP: “I am right [or we are right] and others are wrong.” The reasoning is black and white, but there is an understanding that others have beliefs (i.e. interiors) – they are just wrong beliefs and the others need to be coerced or ignored. Beliefs are justified with reference to authorities, norms, or personal experience.
- Early 3<sup>rd</sup> PP: I am right [or we are right] but I can be expected to explain or justify myself by presenting information and logical reasons. Also, I can continue to learn to perfect my knowledge.
- Later 3<sup>rd</sup> PP: There is a right answer out there somewhere, and the goal is to use observation and reason to find it. I think I am right but it is possible that I will change if your argument is good enough.
- Early 4<sup>th</sup> PP: I think I am right but I realize that my belief, that all belief, is based on imperfect information and reasoning. I look forward to engaging with others with different perspectives in a process that will satisfy all of our needs as much as is possible.
- Later 4<sup>th</sup> PP: Knowledge and beliefs are complex, multi-layered phenomena, and diverse perspectives co-exist and co-create each other with dynamic systems of ideas. This is true not only
for social dialogues and “knowledge building communities,” but within each person there is a cacophony of voices and perspectives vying for dominance, and possibly open to integration.

**The STAGES Model.** Because we refer to O'Fallon's STAGES model a number of times in this text, we include a figure here, to clarify how the person-perspectives alternate between individual and collective modes, and the movement of passive to active modalities within a given level. For more info see O'Fallon (2011, 2013) and Murray (2017).
The Intersection of PatternDynamics and Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality: What Brings Us Together?

A Conversation between Tim Winton¹ and David MacLeod²

Recorded August 1, 2018 for Integral Review

¹ Tim Winton. I spent the early part of my working life planting trees in the wilderness and leading the development of an experimental sustainability education community. My central passion is learning from natural systems and applying these insights to creating a better world. We are in the middle of a planetary-scale transition. The linear and hierarchical, mechanistic worldview that underpins industrial growth is breaking down. The machine model is too simple for resolving the complex problems it has created. I believe managing the complexity challenge requires the shift to a living systems operating model – one that mimics nature’s ability to self-organize for more adaptive, innovative, and collaborative problem-solving.

From my observations of the natural world, organizational life, and engagement with the complexity sciences, I created PatternDynamics, a systems thinking framework designed for purpose-driven collaboration. I share it to support the development of self-organization skills for individuals and groups. Serial social entrepreneur working at the intersection of commerce, sustainability, and social change. Roles include forester, permaculture designer, organic farmer, sustainability educator, leadership coach, organizational consultant, executive, trustee, and board member. Award-winning independent scholar. Areas of expertise include ecological design, strategy, leadership decision making, integral theory and practice, team performance, self-organization, systems thinking training, and complex problem-solving.

I hold the rank of Nidan in Aikido Yuishinkai, a Diploma of Accredited Permaculture Design, and a BA in Literature. My meditation practice is grounded in the Pointing Out Way as taught by Daniel P. Brown, Ph.D. I split my time between my home in Byron Bay and an off-grid property in the hinterland of Northern NSW.

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² David MacLeod is a member of the PatternDynamics™ Community of Practice and am a trained PD Level 1 Workshop facilitator. With concern for community resilience, I was a co-initiator of Transition Whatcom, and was named an “Environmental Hero” by RE Sources for Sustainable Communities. I also initiated and served on a city and county appointed Energy Resource Scarcity/Peak Oil Task Force. My writing has been published by Resilience.org, Integral Leadership Review, and Beams & Struts. I presented at the Integral Theory Conference in 2015 on the topic Patterns for Navigating the Transition to a World in Energy Descent, which was subsequently published by Integral Leadership Review. Educational accomplishments include a Bachelor of Music degree from Western Washington University, a Permaculture Design Certificate, and I am an ASQ Certified Six Sigma Green Belt and Certified Quality Technician. I blog at https://integralpermaculture.wordpress.com, and have been a long time participant in the Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality Ning and Facebook forums.

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  (including Fig. 1. Diagram representing the process of integral Semiotic Realism)

Links to the Audios

(Italicized text below is hyperlinked).
  Part One: Context and the New Positioning of PatternDynamics (45 min)
  Part Two: PatternDynamics and its Relationship to Spiritual Practice (51 min)
  Part Three: A Deeper Dive into the Four Points of Applied PatternDynamics (51 min)

Narrative Summary and Reflective Review

The editors have asked me (Tim) to put together a narrative summary to accompany the bullet points David created to outline our conversation, “The Intersection of PatternDynamics and Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality.” We subtitled the talk: “What Brings Us Together.” I’ll recount how we explored that theme as well as include some reflections on the process of creating and recording our conversation and where those reflections might lead. Our talk extended to a rather long, long-form podcast recording in three parts. I’ll try and give the reader the opportunity to sense where they may want to dive in, if they do not have time for all three pieces.

Initially, when David approached me about writing a piece together for this edition of IR, I felt quite daunted. It’s been a while since I’ve had the time to take a deep dive into writing about anything related to integral theory. When I have written these types of articles and papers in the past, they tended to be all consuming, quite intense experiences. Deciding to use a conversational and somewhat informal format was a refreshing way to go about it. I think that our collaboration has yielded some results that we would not have generated with a more academic, written approach.

For instance, I’m sure I would not have been so willing to speculate on the types of correlations that may exist between some of the spiritual practices I’ve been engaged in lately, and my experience with PatternDynamics. Generally, in the past, I’ve been quite unwilling to discuss spirituality, as such – especially publicly – and definitely unwilling to talk about my own, or how I think it relates to PatternDynamics. Even in this talk there are multiple disclaimers by both David
and me about our concerns about errors and misrepresentations. David is an excellent thought partner. We share a foundational set of views grounded in ecology, sustainability, the systems disciplines, integral theory, and the practice of PatternDynamics. He has also quietly, but persistently, encouraged me, I think, to make more explicit the spiritual dimension of PatternDynamics, and to tell that through my own experience, rather than only as a set of abstract theories. I thank him for that. It was easier than I thought. In a lot of ways it felt like a coming out as a spiritual practitioner. I think my discomfort with the pursuit of spirituality in the postmodern West stems from the fetishism and dysfunction I’ve observed around it. I’ve written about this before, especially in relation to the integral community. This is the first time I’ve felt like I could openly talk about spirituality properly from a personal perspective. Writing about it as integral theory is one thing, revealing one’s personal spiritual experiences is quite another.

Being able to do that is in large part due to my meditation training within the Pointing Out the Great Way community, a unique approach to Indo-Tibetan spiritual development initiated by Dr. Daniel P. Brown, PhD. In it, Dr. Brown brings together the great wisdom traditions of Tibetan Buddhist lineages as well as the Bon tradition and Theravadin Buddhism with the study of neuroscience and the psychology of meditation. In it, the meditation instructions are extremely precise, and if followed correctly and validated by an instructor, then it is possible to get to the point where there is no doubt about the kind of meditation experience one is having. David and I spend a considerable amount of time discussing some of the general features of this meditation method, the core Buddhist theological concept of Paticca samuppada, and how related concepts in Dharma theory mesh with systems thinking and the generation of non-dual awareness. We do this primarily in the second half of Part 2 of our talk. Joanna Macy’s book, Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory, features prominently in this discussion as does Nancy Frankenberry’s Religion and Radical Empiricism.

Part 1 is spent on an overview of PatternDynamics, its development, its purpose, and how it works as a unifying force that brings us together.

In the beginning of Part 2 we discuss PatternDynamics as a bridge between the relative and absolute worlds, the curious ontological status of energy, and how its ‘winding up’ as higher energy quality leads to more and more complex forms and types of ‘consciousness.’

In Part 3 we take a deeper dive and bring in some of David’s work within the field of Radical Empiricism. We discuss four main topics here: understanding the PatternDynamics patterns as dharmas or the “felt qualities of experience” in the Radical Empiricist tradition; PatternDynamics as a pattern language in the tradition of process-relational philosophers and associated thinkers like Bernard Loomer, Alfred North Whitehead, William James, and Charles Sanders Peirce; the embodied PatternDynamics movement based workshop as a potential group spiritual practice; and, lastly, the concept of ‘facilitative shamanism’ in working with the patterns and energies that become available through post-formal development.

David and I cover a lot of ground. It’s not always obvious that all of these topics relate to our theme of ‘what brings us together.’ It is perhaps only by pointing out this theme explicitly in the beginning that it may be detected in each element. That type of signification is also a theme of our conversation that similarly may take some pointing out to become revealed.
I found it quite exhilarating to be so free to range around and loosely cobble together, what is a rather loose set of ideas—at least from a more rigorous academic perspective. David and I are aware of the problems with this approach and also the opportunity for the creative emergence of useful, if not yet fully tested, ideas.

One of the most interesting things to come out of our conversation (towards the end of Part 3) was the listing of a set of complex fields and practices that chunk together to form the basis of the foundational pattern within PatternDynamics called Source. These ‘complexes’ relate to Source’s self-organizing capacity or organizing intelligence, including purpose, pragmaticist orientated problem-solving, inquiry, spontaneity, presence, non-duality, and systems thinking. This chunking of what are technically referred to (within the study of hierarchical complexity) as abstractions into one integrated practice, or more technically, a principle of the felt sense of the flow of experience, is discussed as an example of the ‘second simplicity’—a simplicity that unifies all the complexity before it.

Of course, our conversation is for folks interested in Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality, not for the general or even curious reader. For most of what we discuss to be relevant, people will need to have a background in integral theory at a minimum and most likely a familiarity with the Ning forum and Facebook discussion group on integral post-metaphysical spirituality curated by Bruce Alderman. David and I are not academic philosophers or theorists. We are amateurs; I hope in the best sense of that word—dedicated, curious, and knowledgeable adherents to our disciplines. As practitioners we are also both householders practicing our post-metaphysical spirituality within the milieu of everyday, workaday life. Like amateur scientists before the professionalization of that type of inquiry, we hope that the thought experiments we have tinkered with here in the back sheds of our humble computers will contribute something useful to an emerging discipline.

Detailed Topic Map of the Audio Recordings

Part One: Context and the New Positioning of PatternDynamics

- Introduction
- How Tim Winton came to develop PD (PatternDynamics)
- How David MacLeod came to find an interest in PD
- PD as a language that helps people develop their systems thinking capacity and application
- PD in relation to post-metaphysical spiritual practice
- PD in leadership and organizational consulting
- A new positioning of PD oriented around the relationship between holistically aware systems thinking and traditional spiritual practice
- The essence of PD is the Source pattern, which is the generative capacity of the universe to create flourishing systems
- A possible chaotic transition or phase shift to a more unitive shared view on a planetary basis
- What brings us together? How do 8 billion people collaborate to form a viable planetary system?
- The more connected we become, the more divisive it’s made us
How do we balance and integrate for optimal health rather than get ideologically aligned with one approach or another? How do we unify and integrate the value propositions that each side brings?

- The subtle art of shifting the conversation to the systems level
- The power of “communicative action” (Habermas) and the core value proposition of PD: the ability to point out systemic dynamics in a way that people can see them; and then you have a reference or language with which to collectively communicate about how to balance and integrate
- “Facilitative Shamanism” as the third piece of PD
- Going to war with post-modernism vs. integrating post-modernism
- Defining Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality
- An over-arching cosmological umbrella
- Preserving the sacredness of the traditional view, but applying the co-creative post-modern insight

Part Two: PatternDynamics and its Relationship to Spiritual Practice

- Introduction
- No separation between the relative and the absolute, and conduct in the relative world is important
- PD as a bridge towards a more holistic and systemic sensibility that sees the patterns of energy that exist in both the inside and the outside world; integrated in a way that both scientific materialists and traditional spiritualists could honor
- The mysterious ontological status of energy, and the cosmology of PD
- The PD view is similar to that of many spiritual traditions that see reality as semiotic in nature – it is interpretive, dynamic, alive, conversational, inter-relational, and systemic.
- The pragmatism/pragmaticism of Charles Saunders Pearce; the systemic/Taoist/flow/systems view of integral theorist Edgar Morin; and the 4th Law of Thermodynamics from Howard T. Odum
- The “Pointing Out” style of teaching meditation, and its implications for PD
- Tim jumps out on a limb
- Lessons from Lectica (nod to Theo Dawson, Zak Stein, and Aftab Omer): Collective problem solving in early systems thinking, applying more robust standards in late systems understanding applied to culture, and then early principled thinking that is the second simplicity on the other side of complexity.
- More on the “Pointing Out Way” teaching of Daniel P. Brown
- The something that “pops” when we do the embodied pattern practice in the one day PD workshop – a non-dual awareness
- paticca samuppāda – dependent co-origination; Joanna Macy’s “Mutual Causality in Buddhism, and General Systems Theory.”
- The Dharma theory of Abhidharma Buddhism
- Dharmas as “felt qualities of experience / Whitehead’s concept of “categories of subjective form” / dharmas as energy patterns / PD patterns as dharmas
- Avoiding the mistake of reification
- Dharmas as adverbial rather than adjectival (nod to Bruce Alderman’s work)
- Gebser’s concept of the diaphainon
- Four Points of Applied PatternDynamics

1. Understanding the Patterns as dharmas or “felt qualities of experience” – always in flux, always in relationship to other Patterns. “To help us see more.”
2. PatternDynamics as a process-relational pattern language. Balancing and integrating the Patterns in collective conversation with other people. “To help us share more.”
3. The embodied PD group movement practice, taking an equal and central ongoing role in PD practice, not just an activity for the Level 1 Workshop. This activity helps connect us as a group in an ongoing Radical Empiricist “experience” practice – experiencing patterned energies, and connection to Source. “To help us live to deeper purpose.”
4. Emphasis on “Facilitative Shamanism” (Tim talks about seeing others do this, but David has seen him do it at PD Workshops) to bring in “a dimension of human experience that’s based on primal, archetypal shaping forces or patterns.” Teaching “the capacity to sense the dynamic at play and how to tweak that energy” (“knowing when to let happen and when to make happen,” as Gebser put it). This is “the ability to shift the conversation in a way that reveals the deeper reality of our inter-dependence.” And an example of what Lectica calls “early principled thinking” or “the second simplicity.” Beyond all Patterns, which are all ultimately empty or Void anyway; all simplified into Source.

Part Three: A Deeper Dive into the Four Points of Applied PatternDynamics

1. Understanding the Patterns as dharmas or “felt qualities of experience”
   a. Radical Empiricism (Nancy Frankenberry, Religion and Radical Empiricism; William James, Varieties of Religious Experience)
   b. Language/Thought/Linguistic expression, the challenges Radical Empiricism has faced, and the key insight of PatternDynamics
   c. The core dimensions of Source (Daniel P. Brown, Ph.D. Thesis)
   d. The Eudaimonic Society (Bhaskar)
   e. Dukkha; interrupting the flow of co-constructed experience
2. PD as a process-relational pattern language. Balancing and integrating the Patterns in collective conversation with other people. “To help us share more.”
   a. Tim’s interest in process philosophy as “the missing piece when trying to integrate subject/object”
   b. How is PD geared to assist in better conversations?
   c. David’s interest in the idea of process-relational philosophy (Bernard Loomer)
   d. Whitehead, James, and Russell and the living systems view - an integrated flux of dynamic energy patterns
   e. Steven Meyer on Experiential Togetherness
   f. Peirce’s firstness, secondness, thirdness (Tim’s paper on Planetary Civilization)
3. The embodied PD group movement practice, taking an equal and central ongoing role in PD practice.
   a. Practice groups to develop community; touching into Source together, with an overriding interest in the health of humanity
4. Emphasis on “Facilitative Shamanism” - “the capacity to sense the dynamic at play and how to tweak that energy”
   a. Tim’s podcast with Lauren Tenney: “We are the New Shaman”
b. Diane Hamilton using the “Big Mind” process; Taoist practice of Wu Wei

c. Using Source for Complex Problem Solving: Purpose, Inquiry, Spontaneity, Presence, Collapse of polarities into one field

d. Primary motivation, and what brings us together: realization of Source

e. Power as another dimension of Source

5. Conclusion – the unifying capacity of PatternDynamics

Figure: PatternDynamics Visual Summary

A version with live-links for each pattern is available at https://patterndynamics.net/patterns/
References


Transcripts

Part One Transcript

David: Greetings everyone, David here from the northwest corner of Washington State, in the United States. I'm in conversation today with Tim Winton, who's in New South Wales, Australia. We're going to be talking today about some of our shared interests, especially in relationship to PatternDynamics, which is the integral pattern language that Tim has developed. We'll have him introduce that in a bit, and its relation to this topic of integral post-metaphysical spirituality. One of the bigger questions we'll be attempting to address in this conversation is the question, what brings us together? Tim, can you briefly introduce yourself and tell us how you came to develop PatternDynamics?

Tim: Yeah. Thanks, David. It's great to be on this call with you. I developed PatternDynamics really out of my work in sustainability. Earlier in my life, I set up a sustainability education center with a focus on permaculture. At that time, I was training in Aikido and reading up on systems theory, complexity theory and integral theory. Over the course of the 10-year journey with that education center, I developed PatternDynamics (PD) as a way of communicating about the principles of sustainability, but more broadly, the principles that sustain or create wellbeing or health in any system and it sort of broadened out from that. By the time I created the chart of patterns that represent systems principles, a fair bit of time had gone by. I was involved in the integral community at that point and proceeded to publish some papers on the theory behind it, especially in relation to integral theory.

I've sort of slowly but surely been developing PatternDynamics as an educational discipline, or a practice for people who have more holistic orientations. We can recount some of that history. But today, we're talking about PD in conjunction with integral post-metaphysics and what PatternDynamics might have to offer post-metaphysical spiritual practice.

David: Right. Well, I'll just share a little bit about how I encountered you and PatternDynamics. I too was very much interested in sustainability issues. I was getting more and more involved as a community activist in sustainability type things. I initiated an energy resource scarcity task force supported by city and county authorities, and participated in that. I also was helping to establish a transition initiative in my community, and I was looking for tools to help me and our group achieve success in these areas. And, I was also fortunate enough to be working with this local friend named Alan Seid, whom I believe you know.

Tim: I do.

David: Alan reintroduced me to integral theory. I had at least one Ken Wilber book already on my shelf, but I hadn't really spent a whole lot of time with it. I started reading about integral theory through Alan's influence. Alan also had attended, with you, an integral sustainability workshop that Barrett Brown had led. He had a lot of information he was sharing with me about that. I was also around that time starting to look into permaculture. I ended up getting a permaculture design certificate. So I was looking at these two things.
In regards to sustainability issues, I was sensing that integral theory seemed a little bit weak in the lower right quadrant. At the same time, permaculture, which is also purporting to be somewhat of a holistic practice, addressed things that we would say would be in the left-hand quadrants, but it was not very strong there. So I thought it would be really interesting and perhaps very useful to combine these two disciplines. In fact, I created a blog called Integral Permaculture. And then I went online trying to see has anybody else got this idea? So I Googled integral and permaculture. Lo and behold, I came across your name and PatternDynamics. After getting over the initial hurdle about, "Oh gosh, I have to learn a language here. What's this about?" But after getting over that hurdle, I've been hooked ever since. It's been very interesting to me, to be involved with PatternDynamics, and learning a lot from things that you shared with me.

Tim: Oh, it's been great to have you as part of the community of practice. I said to you before we started the recording that I think in many ways you've really forged ahead with exploring some of the other theory and philosophy that relates to the general view of PatternDynamics. That's been really interesting for me, and I think for other people involved. It's been a great relationship so far.

David: Thank you. Maybe next, you can just go into a little bit more detail about PatternDynamics. You shared with me that you have some new ideas about how to frame it. Maybe you can introduce some of that new framing and in the process give our listeners a little bit better idea of what PatternDynamics is trying to do.

Tim: Okay. Well, that's interesting because anything that deals with systems thinking and complexity can become a very generalized form. That's how I put it. Systems thinking is a kind of thinking. You can apply it in nearly anything. At its heart, PatternDynamics is a language that helps people develop their systems thinking capacity and apply it for better communication and problem-solving, particularly in more complex circumstances--like the circumstances we're faced with today. We're on a rapidly shrinking planet with more and more complexity building in our society every day. As a generalized form, it was difficult to find a place to start with it. I started with it in sustainability because it really grew out of my work in sustainability as a sustainability educator helping people learn things like permaculture. As a practitioner, really, I had a very hands-on background and career in ecological design, forestry, organic agriculture. I learned most of the things that I developed into PatternDynamics as a pattern language from nature, from those deep interactions with nature.

And also, (I was experiencing) the kind of recursive dynamic between what I was observing while I was relating and perturbing and interrelating with these various systems, natural systems, and community dynamics at Permaforest Trust, which was the sustainability education center. And also, (learning about) the more theoretical approaches I was encountering in systems theory and complexity theory. Yeah. All three of those things combined to become PatternDynamics as a way of communicating, really, better about how systems work and what makes them sustainable and healthy.
David: I think that a real strength of PatternDynamics is how it brings together not only the influences that came to you through permaculture and other sustainability type initiatives, but you've really delved into how integral theory, systems theory, complexity theory all converge together into this discipline.

Tim: Interestingly also, and more and more now ... And we can talk about that later in this chat ... there's, to me, a relationship between spiritual practice, especially what we're referring to as post-metaphysical spiritual practice, where we can integrate the traditional, modern, and postmodern conceptions of what it might mean, what spirituality might mean. Especially in relation to that, we're trying to connect the dots and find the correlations and relationships between a kind of deeper systems thinking and traditional spiritual practice, especially as I'm encountering it in the Pointing Out Way, Dan Brown's work with essence traditions in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. We'll get to that, but I think we have a lot to talk about in the meantime.

That's the second thing that we did. By the time PatternDynamics evolved beyond a sustainability communication and design tool and into the integral theory world, I decided to try it out. I got kind of recruited into leadership and organizational consulting with this tool. Unbeknownst to me, systems thinking is valorized and a requirement for senior leaders and leaders in organizational life in general. There were people working as consultants and in organizational consulting and I was recruited in to do that piece. To be honest, it generally didn't work out that well. I know why now. Through that work, I learned a lot of hard lessons, got to do some really interesting work with some other members of the PatternDynamics community, got to try a few things, and learned a lot about what doesn't work, and over the course of that, found out why it doesn't work. And especially through my encounter with Lectica, who are ... they're really researchers and educational philosophers who've come to understand and develop a way of measuring what level of complexity we're working at and how to help people learn.

David: Tell us a little bit about why that doesn't work.

Tim: Well, the way I was pitching PatternDynamics was, I was pitching it at a fairly high level within the skill domain of systems thinking itself. Most people in organizational life have other problems to solve, and they have developed other skills. When someone comes along and starts performing at a high level, you can't really understand it (if you don't have that level of skill). If you're on the basketball court and it's Michael Jordan who's doing all kinds of tricks and things that you could never dream of, it's kind of meaningless to you and it doesn't really help you solve the problem of, say, learning to dribble down the court. So you get frustrated. I learned now that if I'm going to present PatternDynamics, I really need a way to present it and meet people where they're at with that particular skill. You can sort of translate PatternDynamics or use it as an underpinning skill for a number of other kinds of skills as a generalized form, as I mentioned.

But we're also learning to do that as a community and I'm learning to do that, and probably learnt some hard lessons in organizational life, to be honest, about what PatternDynamics is, what level and how to pitch it and frame it so that it's useful for people and it helps them
learn something that actually allows them to achieve an outcome they couldn't achieve before. There are lots of well-developed forms within PatternDynamics, like the one-day workshop on embodied movements themselves, the various learning materials at levels one, two, and three. All those are pretty tried and true. There's now (also) a kind of collaborative systems inquiry, which is a process where you can use the patterns and the systems thinking, employing them to collectively come up with better decision-making and problem-solving. We've associated with people at Lectica, who could help us measure some of the things that we're trying to achieve, like better decision-making.

There's been a lot of progress. There's a lot of well-developed stuff in PatternDynamics. There's a good community of people who've invested quite a lot in learning it and applying it and testing it. We swap notes. I've sort of been the central hub of that. A couple years ago, I took a bit of a break from what I call the second phase of PatternDynamics, (the one) in organizational and corporate life as a kind of consulting tool. I took a step back and went back to my traditional base of working in forestry and agriculture. I'm now ready, I think, to... having had many conversations with people in the PatternDynamics community about what its real essence is and how we might move forward with quite a different positioning. For me, that really is oriented around this idea that there's a relationship between systems thinking and becoming more holistically aware, where your view of reality and your consciousness is shaped more by these inter-relational dynamics and patterns, and that becomes more part of the lived view of your life, your experience.

And traditional spiritual practice, which we'll talk about today, where some of the core concepts in Buddhism, for instance, are about inter-relationality, really. There's a lot there. Joanna Macy's written a whole book on it. There are a number of people who focused on this, but it's a rich, rich field to explore. I think the essence of PatternDynamics has always been this thing we call Source, which is just the generative capacity of the universe to create flourishing systems. That seems to be its central property. There is a numinous and a sacred quality to that, that all religions and all spiritual practices have recognized. We live in a particularly technologically-oriented society where those views have been set aside, if you like, for some hundreds of years. We're in a particularly extreme technological and scientific materialist end of this trajectory. I'm wondering if there isn't going to be a big swing, which is one of the PatternDynamics patterns, you know. Once something has swung so far one way, it'll swing back the other way. You'll get a counter running or an Enantiadromia that shifts over to the other ...

David: That’s a Jungian term, is that where you got that term, Enantiadromia?

Tim: Yeah, I got it from William Irwin Thompson, I think, who got it from Jung, obviously. That was Jung identifying, I think, a kind of cultural-psyche, collective consciousness dynamic or psychological dynamic that he experienced in some of his patients. Enantiadromia, in Greek, means counter running. You get a counter running force when something shifts to an extreme.

David: Yeah. That also matches up with Jean Gebser’s ideas about coming to the end of the mental rational period and entering an integral type of mutation that is brought about by some
really tough things happening, and by a deep anxiety that then kind of brings about a mutation.

Tim: Yeah. I think Gebser's on the money. I really do. There are other people, of course, who've identified we're in the breakdown phase of late modernity, and that in these phase shifts in systems, you often get a chaotic breakdown before the new order emerges. It'd be easy to interpret that that's where we are, given the state of certainly politics and economics in the West, well, globally now, really. I think we need a more unitive shared view on a planetary basis, and that really ... This is where a guy like Jordan Peterson has something important to say. He said it’s mythology and sacredness that unified us, this view of something greater than ourselves has always been the overarching unifying force in human affairs. Because we've set aside the mythic and the religious to such an extent, we're missing that. We're enormously powerful, but aimless and destructive because of that.

David: That kind of touches in on one of the questions or one of our themes of, what brings us together? You seem to be pointing towards the need for that.

Tim: Yeah. I think having a nice pause in the development of PatternDynamics, or at least my participation in that, is that ... a new question comes to mind. I think at the heart of Source, the generative kind of underlying organizational capacity of the universe, there's an inquiry. That's a big part of what Source is. It’s the open question of, "What's happening? How do we flourish? How do we solve the problems that allow us to flourish?" The big inquiry I have now is something I actually heard Sam Harris say on one of his podcasts, interestingly. It is, “How do eight billion people collaborate to form a viable planetary system?” It's a great question. It's the question of our time, really. I think that's the question that I realize I've always been oriented around with PatternDynamics. It's always had that overarching planetary kind of view. How do we flourish? How do we thrive in complex circumstances? I think there needs to be many, many initiatives that work on that question. They all need to tie in together.

But I think one of the main themes or one of the main areas that needs to be worked on to answer that question is, how do we start focusing on what brings us together, rather than what pushes us apart? If you look at most of the dynamics in the breakdown phase, everyone's focusing on what is different about us and why we should fight with each other.

David: Right. All around us is that kind of energy and discussions. I'm seeing people on Facebook, friends of mine saying ... They're so upset about, say, something that Trump has done. They say, "If you disagree with me, unfriend me right now," rather than continuing to have dialogue with each other and trying to understand what's going on with somebody that has a different view.

Tim: Yeah. It's really ironic, that the more connected we become, at least in the early phase of being highly interconnected on a planetary basis, the more divisive it's made us.

David: Right. That was kind of the promise of the internet, that we would all be able to come together and collaborate. We're seeing just so much ... Again, with Facebook, it's so easy
to put ourselves into different silos and just be in some kind of echo chambers that reflect our own views.

Tim: Yeah. I think that's one of the unintended consequences of being highly interconnected. This is the challenge with all kinds of systemic interventions. You make a system more interconnected, and you think that's going to be a good thing, but the unintended consequence might be divisiveness. Look, in and of itself, being more highly networked—that's a pattern in PatternDynamics—may or may not be a good thing. It may need to be that the level of interconnectedness or networkedness needs to be adjusted for optimal health. It may need to be readjusted every week or every day. It may be the types and kinds of networking that are important to create a healthier whole system.

In PatternDynamics, we try and have a more nuanced or sophisticated view. Rather than saying all networking and the more networking we have, the better the system is going to be, the question is always, how much and what type? How do we balance and integrate to get the greatest health, rather than get ideologically aligned with one approach or another? You certainly see this in things like the crypto community, like more decentralization is always better. It tends to be reactionary against highly centralized forms. So there is a fight between the ideology of being centralized and the ideology of being decentralized.

 Whereas in PatternDynamics, we're trying to find what unifies us in those things. The unifying dynamic is that they're both organizational patterns, they're both important, but the type and balance of each one of those things in each particular circumstance is how we could talk about that in a way that unifies the value propositions that each perspective is bringing, and potentially integrate them so that you get a little bit more networking of the type you need over here, then a little more centralization of the type you need over there. You can change and adjust and balance those things and have a conversation about that unified and integrative approach, rather than fight about whose perspective is right.

David: Yeah. That's very important. I think that's a real key contribution of PatternDynamics. We can look at our charts or whatever of the various patterns and see not just who's right or what's my position that fits here, but always kind of looking to balance and integrate it. It's always about more than just one pattern. I think this concept of polarities, it really comes out strongly for me. Polarity is not either/or, right or wrong, this or that, make your choice, but it's about finding that appropriate balance between two sides of one thing.

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. It's a dynamic balance. It will change as the circumstances change.

David: Yeah, exactly. You don't find that perfect balance and then now you're set.

Tim: Yeah. In PatternDynamics, we're really shifting our view to be less linear, more about the interconnected systemic nature of what's going on, and less static and more dynamic, so the dynamic patterns that allow a system to be in that kind of flourishing harmony that actual systems can get into if you remove whatever's blocking them from that natural inclination.
David: For example, we see hierarchies in natural systems, but we also see holarchies or networks very strongly. It's not a matter of we just need to get rid of all hierarchies, for example.

Tim: Yeah. And that's-

David: We need to find the appropriate balance and the appropriate place and time.

Tim: That's what's so interesting about bringing this more integrative way of communicating into a conversation, it's often not welcome in a way. Many people really like to hold on to their ideological position in a fixed way. They have their hammer and every challenge is a nail that they can apply that tool to that problem. It's not always true. I think PatternDynamics works to unify the conversation, but you can't be overt with it. This is one of the things I learned in organizational consulting. Pulling the charts out and showing people the patterns and having a conversation at that level where you make explicit the tool and the language is really hard. You even mentioned at the beginning, "Oh my goodness, I've got to learn this pattern language. It looks so strange." For most people, that's the response I get.

There's a lot of people who are naturally integrative systems thinkers, but they don't really have a language to express what they're feeling. One or two in a hundred people will come up after I've done a talk or a presentation on PatternDynamics and will say, "Wow, that's how I think. I finally have a way to express what I've been thinking." That's sort of who makes up the PatternDynamics community. You've got to be a bit careful, I guess that's what I'm saying, about getting a result with this tool. It's a language tool in many ways. You can apply it to get a result. But I think this subtle art of shifting the conversation to the systems level is the first part of what allows us to explore what brings us together, what unifies us, because at the systems level, everyone's perspective is important. It has a role. It needs to be balanced and integrated in a dynamic way. You need to have a dynamic conversation about that.

I think it's like what Habermas is talking about with communicative action. I think there's something about communicative action, as he frames it, that allows the organizing process to come out of those everyday conversations about what we're doing and how we're doing it. Having a language can be a very powerful thing because it helps us talk about things that we couldn't refer to before because we didn't have the language before. It's that simple move of pointing out what's going on systemically using the principles behind the patterns. Don't whip the pattern out and show them, "This is the Swing pattern." You say it in a way that people can hear it: "I think we've gone over to this extreme, and now we're shifting back to that extreme. What do you think?" Often, you'll get an aha.

That's the kind of magic in PatternDynamics. That's the core value proposition, that pointing out move. Because in the West, especially in the modern West/postmodern West, we don't have great language if we're talking about holistic dynamics. In the studies of ecology and biology and now all the systems theories and complexity theories that are being applied to the various disciplines that we study and engage in—that's emerging. But, there's no sort of comprehensive language. Each systems theory and each complexity
theory has its own language and its own set of things it focuses on. Whereas PatternDynamics is trying to be a true language with a grammar and a set of things that you can put together to make meaning in richer ways. You can put Swing together with, say, some of the other patterns like Feedback. The stronger the Feedback gets, that's the time that it's likely that it's going to Swing back to the other side. So then you're putting two principles together, or two patterns together. But that first step where you're pointing out the systemic dynamic and you're naming it, you use the principle behind the pattern.

For people who haven't seen PatternDynamics, it's really a set of little diagrams, these little pattern drawings that represent a systemic dynamic, like Swing. The principle behind it is what tells you about the nature of that systemic dynamic. It can be Swing or it can be Emergence of a new thing that you couldn't predict from other things that make it up, like you would never predict water from hydrogen and oxygen, for instance. We get many different patterns and many different principles, and you can start putting them together. But it's that moment where you point out what's happening holistically or systemically in a way that people can hear it, without confusing them, that makes it pop. It's that subject-object move, I think, that we talk a lot about in integral circles, where if something was kind of nascent in your awareness and then there's a bit of language for it or someone points it out in a way that allows us all to discover it, it all of a sudden pops, becomes real.

David: Right. If you can name it, that's the first step towards being able to understand it. And then you start seeing it all over the place that you never maybe would've noticed before.

Tim: That's right. And then you have a good way of referring to that thing. When I look at a wall of green in the forest, it just looks like a wall of green, unless I have a name, like that tree is a Grevillea Robusta and has a particular leaf shape. Now that I've got a name for it, I can see it out of that background of green. It's the same with systemic dynamics. We just don't have great language for them. We don't really see them in the way that, say (the way) some cultures do—if you go to Ancient Chinese cultures with Taoist conceptions in philosophy and language, you see a much richer language for systemic dynamics. But I didn't encounter that in my world, growing up in the modern West. The value proposition of PatternDynamics is that you can point out systemic dynamics in a way that people can see them. Then you have some reference or language so that we can collectively communicate about them.

That's sort of the second step in using PatternDynamics. Once you've pointed it out and you get agreement about it, then you can start talking and communicating about how to balance and integrate it. And then you need to develop some skills around facilitation. But after that, you can get an agreement about how to adjust these various things. So you're in a business and there's a Swing coming along. You're moving from a CEO who really values centralized control to the new CEO who wants a more distributed networked kind of organization with flatter hierarchy. So you can talk about that in a more sophisticated way. There might be some parts of this organization that really do need to remain centralized, at least for some time longer, and there are other parts that are easily networked and where the hierarchy can be flattened out. You might need a particular type of network approach in this business, so you need to balance and integrate very carefully and have conversations
about that, rather than just coming in and going, "Bang. We're going to make this the flattest organization possible, because hierarchy is bad and we're going with network distributed organizational models," in a kind of blunt, ideological way. You see this a lot with different ... especially progressive organizational forms, where hierarchy is bad, and a third of the company leaves because they don't really understand this new model. It was implemented too quickly. There wasn't enough conversation about how to do it strategically in ways that work. So having that conversation is key, but you need a language to have a conversation. That's the second part.

David: One of the books that I've read, and it may come up again in this conversation, is a book called *Religion and Radical Empiricism* by Nancy Frankenberry. She says, "When we observe that often in achieving, for example, a more sophisticated vocabulary of the emotions, we acquire, also, a more sophisticated emotional life, not just an expanded power of description" (Frankenberry, p. 144). It's about really being able to come alive with learning something like this. As we learn a language about understanding systems theory, we can also achieve a more distinct and useful and enhanced experience as living members of our ecosystem.

Tim: Yeah. You could almost substitute the word system for emotion in Frankenberry's quote there. As you have a richer language for experiencing more systemic holistic nature of your reality, the more full and rich that gets. This brings us to the post-metaphysical spirituality dimension of PatternDynamics. What I've found as I've engaged with this, my world becomes a richer whole. It's kind of an unbounded wholeness of living process. So my view of reality is shifting fairly radically, not just through PatternDynamics, but also some meditation practices that we can talk about as well.

David: Maybe we should-

Tim: And there's a correlation ... Look, maybe before we move on, just I'll talk about the third piece in PatternDynamics.

David: Oh, okay.

Tim: It's really one, two, three every time you use it. And developing the skill of PatternDynamics is learning to use this in that kind of facilitative Shamanism, where you can sense the systemic dynamic. You can name it and get agreement. You can get a conversation happening about what needs to be done, or at least what hypothesis you're going to test first. You can build some trust along the way for the people who didn't get their view this time–they might get it next time.

Tim: The third part, if one is pointing out – two is have a generative conversation, three is decide on a solution to test, and make sure that you allow it to be dynamic. It's not fixed in stone. It's a continual process of reviewing and continually, dynamically balancing the system. If you listen to what Jordan Peterson actually teaches and what he's researched through what myth does in his pragmatist approach to the collective endeavor of problem-solving and getting order out of chaos, it's the same process. It's kind of like this deep, generative
dynamic pattern. That's at the heart of Source, it's that inquiry into how do we solve the problems around us in a collective system. Mythology is the great overarching unification of the greater power, the sacredness in the world and its embodiment in mythological language and imagery. It's enormously powerful in coordinating human societies. We need to bring it back in. I'm wondering if PatternDynamics can explore that same territory as a kind of emerging integrative mythology, if you like, or mytho-poetic practice. It has a very deep poetic dimension in many ways, as in autopoietic, as in self-generating.

David: Perhaps-

Tim: Sorry. I've gone off on a bit of a tangent there. But really, the first step is to-

David: Well-

Tim: ... get to the solution, you know? How do we solve our challenges? How do we flourish?

David: Perhaps in contrast with Jordan Peterson's approach, which seems to have a lot of value, but also seems to be divisive; you see a lot of people taking positions either for or against Jordan Peterson, or people using Jordan Peterson's work to further divide our conversations.

Tim: That's what's-

David: PatternDynamics hopefully, again, that emphasis on bringing us together, rather than what separates us.

Tim: Yeah. Look, making distinctions is important. Having distinct agentic entities that interrelate into systems is important. But what I find interesting about figures like, say, Sam Harris and Jordan Peterson and other figures in the intellectual dark web, so-called, is that they're moving beyond that kind of extreme postmodern form. It's a more interrogative thing. But in many ways, it's like how Wilber approached the contrast between a more integrative view and a postmodern view. It was to go to war with it, in many ways, and to point out its problems and fallacies, rather than the interrogative move, which to Wilber's credit, he also held.

David: He did.

Tim: Whereas some of these others, I'm not so sure. I think, say for instance, Peterson and Harris both understand the important dimensions to postmodernism, they just don't focus on them. They are, in their own ways, divisive. They're focusing more on the distinctions we need to make, and perhaps even the fights we need to have, than on what unites us about those conversations. Fair enough. There's a role for all of that, but that's not what we're interested in in the PatternDynamics' community. I don't think it's ever been the key, the core interest behind any kind of view of the sacred. Sacred, almost by definition, is what unifies us, the whole that we share, and less about our individuality and more about our interconnectedness and the holistic nature of our experience and our universe. So yeah,
with the sort of the one, two, three of PatternDynamics, the practice has its own kind of psycho-spiritual developmental force, I found. I think I've located that same force in some spiritual practices.

David: As we transition into a more spiritual discussion, how would you define integral post-metaphysical spirituality?

Tim: That's great question. That's what I was reading for the hour before this conversation, because it means so many things. Sometimes, it's easy to lose sight of what you want to talk about it. But there's been a lot of conversation through Bruce Alderman and conversations he's curated on the Ning site and the Facebook site about integral post-metaphysical spirituality, and some really great contributions by some people who are first-rate thinkers who've really invested in this stuff and had some really interesting conversations.

But essentially, I think for me, it's about moving beyond the myth of the given in many ways. Like Frankenberry says, there's a recursive aspect to reality that ... There's an interpretive dimension to it as well. You can't just say there's a subject and an object, and subject views an object, and that's it. The object is static, and the subject is viewing it. It's more like--sometimes it's called a double hermeneutic--that there's a subject viewing an object, but the object influences the subject. In fact, the subject's not just a subject, it's also an object. The object's not just an object, it's also a subject. So there's kind of like subject/objects interrelating and co-evolving and co-influencing each other, but on a much more complex level because there's billions and zillions of these interactions going on. It's more about the inter-relationality and the patterns of that than it is about what might be an object. What does that even mean?

David: Yes. I think that's key.

Tim: Yeah. I think it's a key theme because it is the unitive force. You could see individuals that look like objects, but really, they're highly interrelated into systems, which aren't things, they're patterns of relationships, energy flows. Maybe that's what the Buddha was pointing out, about this idea that there's no self, or that there's a kind of mutuality in the causality in the way that we perceive the world. We suffer because we think we're an independent entity. We're highly interrelated. That includes the interrelationship between your mind and the world ... Again, whatever that is ... but that we construct it. I guess this goes back to Kant, really. It's not just we have perceptions about a reality out there, it's that we're highly conditioned by our experience, and I guess in integral terms, there's a kind of a construction of reality. An enactive paradigm, I think, Sean Esbjörn-Hargens refers to it as.

In terms of integral post-metaphysical spirituality, it's about recognizing that. It's also about how you might integrate traditional modern, postmodern views on the sacred or religion or spirituality or all those things, you know, the numinous. And finding, what for me anyway, is what I call the overarching cosmological umbrella. How can a whole human family find a way to engage in what unifies us? That more systemic, more holistic, more sacred aspect to our reality.
David: Yeah. For myself, I don't carry around a strict definition of integral post-metaphysical spirituality, but I generally think it's the attitude you bring, and being able to integrate these different insights, as I think Bruce probably wrote as one of the descriptions on the Facebook page, how might insights from modernity, postmodernity, how might they inform and impact humanity's ancient wisdom traditions? It's like all of this stuff together, and how do we bring this together and allow it to be generative for us? Different people will emphasize different aspects. I think that's good.

Tim: Yeah. I think the more traditional view of the sacred is that there's a god, for instance, that organizes all this stuff. And it's “out there”. Whereas a post-metaphysical spirituality might orient more around the fact that we're co-creative of reality in an interpretive paradigm. It's a bit wordy. We're somehow preserving the sacredness and the holisticness of the traditional view, but we're applying the postmodern insight, that it's not just some reality out there. It's not an idealistic set of Platonic forms that creates this, or it's not just an object out there. It's co-creative. It's more systemic, in fact, more inter-relational. Influences run both ways. What does that mean, when you're in an interpretive paradigm, when you have a full postmodern insight around the enacted constructed nature of our subjective and inter-subjective realities, and the more traditional views of the sacred?

David: Yeah. You mentioned Kant earlier. Again, Nancy Frankenberry in talking about radical empiricism, which I think is very much aligned with all you've just been talking about in terms of interrelationships. She said, "For Kant, the world emerged from the subject. For radical empiricism, the subject emerges from the world" (Frankenberry, p. 173).

Tim: Oh, wow.

David: But really, it does go both ways. She says that in other places.

Tim: Yeah, that's interesting. When you start to conceive of the fact that what you think is out there is far more of a construction in your own mental stream, it's really, really interesting. I think the spiritual traditions have always been aware of that reality, but maybe not with, say, postmodern insights. This is where something like the Wilber-Combs Matrix can be really helpful, I think.

David: Yeah. Do you want to talk in that direction and embed in what you've learned from Dan Brown's Pointing Out Way practice? Is that a good place to go next?

Tim: Yeah, sure (we can talk about Pointing Out Way practice). We can talk around that. I'm not sure how qualified I am to talk about a lot of these practices. But in general generalities, for sure. There's lots of interesting connections to make there. But look, do you want to have a short break and come back and start part two?

David: We can do that.
Part Two Transcript

David: Okay, Tim, how about we transition here to talking a little bit more explicitly about PatternDynamics and its relationship to spiritual practice.

Tim: So I guess I'd just qualify that by saying it's all pretty nascent. I'm starting to find correlations and if you like, connect the dots. And finding the relationships between traditional spiritual practices and experiences that they generate, or help you gain, and what I've found with some of the deeper aspects of PatternDynamics, and where some of those similarities lie. Especially in the origins of that, and particularly in relation to Buddhist teachings and Buddhist practices, which have for some years now been the focus of my own spiritual practice and meditation practice.

David: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tim: So, I guess to set a bit of context about all that, might be a good place to start. I see PatternDynamics as a deeply relational systems thinking discipline, as a bridge really, between what we might call the relative world of everyday material existence, where we have all the preoccupations of making a living and bumping into things and that view, and the absolute reality which in spiritual traditions, or some spiritual traditions at least at some levels, will reference and have practices that will help you avail yourself of as experience. And often those two worlds are—they don't meet. There’s this kind of the idealist or idealism philosophically associated with that kind of metaphysics over here in the absolute world, and the more kind of material scientific hard-nosed relative reality view; sometimes those worlds are quite far apart. Currently, at least politically, on our planet it seems like those things are diverging. The scientific materialists who believe in rationality and a world out there you can observe and manipulate, and people who are engaged in spiritual realization where absolute reality is the focus. They leave relative reality behind, sitting on top of the mountain.

The tradition that I've been engaged in is a fully non-dual tradition, that is, conduct is important in a relative world. You can't just say I've had this absolute realization and I can do whatever, because of crazy wisdom, I'm enlightened now. There isn't a separation between the relative and the absolute in the same way, they're more integrated or more inter-related. That is, you can have realizations through the practices that are about sacred and the spiritual and the unitive, but they must be expressed through your conduct in the relative world, or they're meaningless.

David: I'm remembering in Ken Wilber's book, which one was it? [A Brief History of Everything] Where he talks about the Ascenders and the Descenders.

Tim: Yeah.

David: We tend to emphasize one or the other, but we really need both of them to really have a healthy system.
Tim: I think so. I think it's that integration where PatternDynamics is interesting. It's often a bridge for people with fully developed mental rational faculties. In the modern, sort of post-modern now, West, we have come from that. PatternDynamics is a bridge where you start to develop a more holistic systemic sensibility, and at first that's about what seems to be the outside world, you know the systems of the world.

David: Yeah.

Tim: And in its later phase, it becomes more about, you become more aware that reality is really just patterns of energy and that, that doesn't just apply to the outside world. That applies to the inside world, in fact there's not such a boundary between the inside and the outside world. Your mind is a flow of constructing the reality that you experience, but it might not be as solid as you think.

David: And it's really interesting to think of this word 'Energy,' which as you have pointed out in your 2013 paper for the Integral Theory conference – it's really kind of an elusive word, you can't ... Energy isn't anything you can feel or touch. So it's kind of already somewhat mysterious; we have this way of looking at it, through physics, that seems kind of straight forward. But, if you really think about energy, it's like subtle energy is not very different from physical energy, maybe it's just at a higher level of quality–there's different qualitative, there's definitely qualitative differences, but in my view anyway I'm seeing energy as energy.

Tim: Yeah, I think this is something that you and I share as a kind of foundation view, because of our, both of us understands the implications of Howard T. Odum’s work with energy quality.

David: Yes, yeah.

Tim: How that relates to sustainability, how that might relate to more subtle energies of the spiritual practice. I've always felt like we're very kindred spirits, you and I, we're kind of standard bearers, if you like, for that kind of ... really it's a kind of realist cosmology, but it's a spiritual realist cosmology.

David: Yeah.

Tim: And energy as a kind of ... you know it has an interesting ontological status; it's not a thing, right, and it's relational but it's not and it has a kind of motive causal force. We can get to this because causation and the concept of causation, especially in Buddhism, is foundational to how the Buddha conceived of the way the world was and what causes our suffering and the pathway out of it. I think that's where PatternDynamics has this bridge; there's a cosmology that I've developed out of PatternDynamics that's aligned with what we've just been speaking about with the way that energy expresses itself in higher and higher energy quality, as systemic complexity builds.
And that consciousness, certainly higher forms of consciousness emerge out of the higher energy quality, even though it's made of diminishing energy quantity, if you like.

David: Right.

Tim: So we're not contravening the second law of thermodynamics. It's just that the quantity's going down in the system and the quality's going up, and the consciousness, that's one way to reference the nature of higher energy quality such as exists with the human brain, and the symbolic abstract conceptual experiences and worlds that that creates. If people were interested, there's three papers, articles published in the Journal of Integral Theory and Practice, that lay out the foundations of PatternDynamics, this underpinning theory, within the integral purview. Its (PatternDynamics’s) cosmology is in the final paper; it's called 'The Meaning of Planetary Civilization; Integral Rational Spirituality and the Semiotic Universe.'

David: Right.

Tim: So when I wrote that, I was unaware that I was probably speaking to some of the same kind of views of reality that many spiritual traditions have—that is co-creative, that there's a relationality, there's a communicativeness, that co-creates our experience. So it's semiotic in nature, you know, it's interpretative, it's dynamic, it's alive, it's conversational, it's inter-relational, it's systemic, and the causation is not linear. It's much richer than that and more systemic. We'll get to that bit in a minute.

David: It seems like in that paper, in your 2013 paper on planetary civilization, one of the big influences was Charles Sanders Peirce and his ideas around pragmatism.

Tim: Absolutely. Yeah. So, you know, Dewey and James, as pragmatists, often get a run here; they often get referenced in relation to concepts like mutual causality or dependent origination or dependent co-origination, that we were talking about, as core conceptions in the Buddhist theology. But, it's actually Peirce, I think, who really brings alive as a major philosopher the notion that there's inter-relatedness in the way that reality is constructed. That there's always an interpretant, as he calls it.

David: Yeah.

Tim: It's not just subject viewing an object and the object's sending a signal and imprinting it on a subjective brain, like a seal on a wax tablet. It’s that there's an interpretive act that takes us back to Kant, I guess. The thing in itself is—who knows what that is, but you know what, the signal comes in, we interpret this, we construct a world in our mind stream and we project it out there. But, yeah I think Charles Sanders Peirce is a major figure and he really does feature in this cosmology, along with Edgar Morin as this kind of third meta-theorist in the integral world. I think he has a more integrative theory, or set of theories, than either of say Bhaskar or Wilber; he's very much of a systemic kind of Taoist view, you know, flow systems view.
David: Yeah.

Tim: And that, as far as I can interpret him, he lays out his views of the world and what we should do about our challenges (in this way). And there are other figures, like Odum and the tradition back through Lotka and Boltzmann that started to discover the nature of energy quality and how to measure it and what it is, and bringing it in as kind of a fourth law of thermodynamics. That's really interesting, that's kind of another part of this. I just to tried to lay out a cosmology that was systemic, included idealist spiritualist views, honored the material scientific views, and that could integrate them in a way that both scientific materialists and traditional spiritualists, would honor.

That is, they both can participate in this work, you know, at least tolerate this all encompassing cosmology that I think, can emerge out of PatternDynamics and its view. So cosmology is very much a view, as in a view of reality and a story about it. (In the West,) it comes out of that, the cosmological big bang and the energy that emerged from that, if that's what it was–that's a scientific kind of view of it.

And, how the extension of that energy and the fact that energy gradients exist and they can be degraded, or energy can be used to create systems with higher and higher energy quality and more and more consciousness, if you like, you know, that kind of integral view. The root of the cosmology is that, in one respect it's very much grounded in realist science and ecology and biology and what we know about systems and complexity; and, on the other hand, it honors the Descenders as well–(this belief) that there's an order, there's an ordering force to the Universe that is connected to that sacredness and our overall unity, that we experience sometimes, and can practice to experience.

David: And I resonate with just everything you said, and I found that paper to be quite fascinating. I remember when you said… coming across the section where you're writing about Odum's theory about energy quality and the fourth law of thermodynamics. I was especially excited because until that time I didn't know that we shared that level of interest in Howard Odum's work, so that was pretty cool.

Tim: Alright, okay, yeah he's the grandfather of this stuff, really.

David: Yeah, that was one section of the paper that I, I guess the section that maybe I had the most problems with, or had some things come up for me around. I'd be interested in your updating of your current understanding. You wrote that, you called it 'Integral ...

Tim: integral Semiotic Realism, iSR?

David: Right, 'integral Semiotic Realism,' as you named it there; you said, "It does not reject spirituality, spiritual realities are fully supported within it, but they are located in a way that recognizes at which levels of semiotic depth they're expressed. In integral Semiotic Realism, spirit and spirituality are only significant within the transpersonal, post-formal domains, the subtle energy fields, visions, luminosities and radiant ecstasies of the
theosphere, and the causal witnessing presence field of the cosmos-sphere.” Do you have an update on how you're thinking about that currently?

Tim: Yeah, that's a very deep rabbit hole, that one; maybe we won't dive down there, but to answer your question, yes and no. I still like to hold onto that idea or test the hypothesis more fully. I think there are problems with the signifier “spiritual” for trying to achieve, you know for the goal of an overarching cosmology, in that it has to refer to all of reality. I think that the main take aways from spiritual experience, you can put mostly in the theosphere, right? The subtle and causal, let's say. I like the term “Realization” for the more overarching non-dual integrative experience of reality that the higher teachings value—especially in the essence traditions of Buddhism. So I'm not sure that's going to be useful in a pragmatic sense, and for me, you know, the Source of what's generative has to be deeply pragmatic—you have to evaluate it on the effects you perceive it to have.

David: It seemed to imply for me that spirituality is kind of irrelevant at lower levels of development.

Tim: Hmm. Yeah perhaps, and maybe that's a problematic aspect of it, but certainly, you know, it's not at the fore. We have those experiences sometimes just spontaneously, you know, when we're only six. So it doesn't preclude those things, but they don't become the main experience of reality certainly in this view anyway, they’re propagating at the theosphere, but it’s the Cosmos-sphere, that is, the more fully Enlightened, view that is more interpretive. It's the middle path. It's heaven and earth, and we don't have to give away material reality for the spiritual, at some point they're so deeply integrated. So this is an attempt to bring together the traditional, modern, post-modern within an integral kind of cosmology, so you know, you have to trade off.

David: Update us with what you've learned since writing that paper and things you've studied since then in relation to a PatternDynamics and spiritual practice.

Tim: Okay, so PatternDynamics can be that bridge between the kind of mental, rational, material, scientific view that many of us carry and then we often just kind of take a rocket ship ride over to a spiritual experience and leave all that behind and reject it, and now it's all about that spiritual absolute. But it's ungrounded, it's untethered from your conduct in the everyday relative world. Whereas, PD is more of a gentle journey, more of an opportunity to learn and make small mistakes along the way, in a supportive way. This will segue us into the Pointing Out Way, because the pointing out style of teaching meditation, which this kind of practice certainly will help you avail yourself of, the experiences, the higher experiences that often get referenced in so called “spirituality,” you know, spirituality in inverted commas.

Tim: Yeah, the pointing out style is a supported learning journey through various meditative techniques and states, that's sequential and really is in line with good learning theory. We don't jump too far ahead, we don't make it boring or too simple so we lose our enthusiasm for it, but we move along just the right kind of pace through the journey from the mental,
rational, scientific material to more full blown experiences in the absolute, and we can keep, keep the tether if you like between the two; they remain integrated.

David: So it's more than just go and keep meditating and eventually you'll figure it out, kind of thing?

Tim: No, it's much more than that.

David: There's a lot more pointing out, that goes on in this practice.

Tim: Yeah, much more close attention to the learning journey you're on with meditation. I'll get to that in a minute in relation to the Pointing Out Way, and why I think it's such an important style for Westerners in terms of learning meditation. I'm going to jump out on a limb here. I like to be quite careful about how I talk about other people's theoretical work and their research. People like Kegan (for instance) or someone like Theo Dawson at Lectica, from whom I've learned a lot; or Dan, Dan Brown's very careful work in translating the Mahamudra and Dzogchen essence teachings. But I'm going to free-form a little bit here because if I'm too careful I will have to sit down and take six months to write a very carefully referenced paper. But we're being a bit loose here and I'm open to being criticized. This also relates to when we move on to talking about concepts like Paticca-samuppada, I'm not even sure that's how you say it, but you know the core to Buddhist theology.

These conversations have been going on for thousands of years by high scholars, and I'm a bit of a dilettante here to be honest, right. I'm just trying to pick up enough of this while I do my householder thing in the workaday world as a forester, and try to relate it to PatternDynamics. So I'm willing to be criticized here, I'm willing to be wrong, but I think there's enough value in trying to loosely put together some of the stuff so it can coalesce.

David: Sure.

Tim: Or not, right. Just try the hypothesis and it might be faulty, but I'm going to go forward on that basis and go out on a limb a bit.

David: Sounds good.

Tim: Yeah, I think it's useful to tell you that I'm uncomfortable about that. With Lectica, they can measure the complexity of performance, and this has to do with (in part) post-formal development, which is what we're talking about when you're moving beyond the mental rational. I see the post-formal stages as kind of where humanity's heading by and large; it's the kind of thinking and performances that we need to solve problems at this complex planetary level. We need a more systemic view, better application of systems thinking to various skill domains, such as decision making and problem solving and self-awareness and all kinds of other things. And that's how Lectica references the level of your performance. And like I said, they have psychometrics that can measure the level of various performances--of the ones I'm interested in like decision making, because it's directly related to problem solving, as a main interest. If you're interested in how we're
going to have a flourishing planetary society, especially (with regard to) collective problem solving, (then this is important).

David: Right.

Tim: So at Lectica they can measure a performance that’s in (demonstrating) early systems thinking, which starts to emerge in post-formal ways of solving problems and making decisions and seeing the world. You can grasp a few systems concepts and apply them to how you go about navigating the world and solving problems and developing skills. In late systems thinking, you've got a more robust set of kind of systems understandings that you can put together and you start to apply them, not just to the outside world but to fields like culture or organizational cultures. In fact you start to have the view of the overarching concern for the whole of humanity. They can also measure performances of what they call, early principle thinking, where you chunk all that systems thinking together into some very simple, but powerful ways of viewing the world and acting on it. I think I've heard Aftab Omar and Zak Stein refer to this as the second simplicity. You know, simplicity on the other side of complexity.

So there's the journey through complexity, I guess, in integral terms it's sort of a journey through teal and turquoise and by that time (of the second simplicity) you're at the end of turquoise in any skill domain. I'm being very sloppy here with how I apply these different constructs and I'm over-lapping them and someone's probably going to not be happy about it.

David: Well, I'll just insert a little plug here that you had a podcast conversation with Zak Stein, where you talked about complexity and the second simplicity, and so I would just recommend folks to check out that podcast as well on this discussion. [The Beautiful Mind of Dr. Zachary Stein, found at https://patterndynamics.net/the-beautiful-mind-of-dr-zachary-stein/]

Tim: Oh, thanks, yeah, I thought it was a great conversation. Zak's a supremely intelligent and caring dude, so I love that one. Yeah, so once you're getting into the principle thinking, you know, beyond systems thinking, the world looks different, there's a kind of luminosity and sacredness that comes into it, and you start to realize that the world out there isn't as concrete as you thought, that it's really kind of a projection of your own mental stream. So reality becomes different, how you act on reality becomes different, and really in any skill domain that you apply this kind of thinking or awareness to, you're going to have more capability in more complex circumstances.

In simpler circumstances you might just need a simpler kind of cognition but, I'm interested in very complex challenges and developing skills for that. To get back to the Pointing out Way in Dan Brown's work, this is Daniel P. Brown, so he's a lecturer at Harvard University amongst many other things; he's a translator and meditation teacher.

David: So, we'll make clear that this is not Dan Brown of the Da Vinci Code?
Tim: No, no. Daniel P Brown, Dr Daniel P. Brown, is also an author but he writes books on the essence traditions and the various meditation practices; he translates these texts from Sanskrit and also Tibetan. He's a highly accomplished meditator and meditation teacher, who has taken some of the most potent essence tradition practices, worked with lineage holders, gained their permission to translate these works and teach them to Westerners like me. I think they're profound practices and they're especially well suited to Westerners because it's a very close relational style between a student and a teacher, but it's not got any of the guru stuff going on, where you need to submit all your worldly possessions and et cetera, et cetera. Conduct is supremely important. Dan's own conduct is impeccable, and it’s the same with the other teachers, as far as I know.

I have deep respect for the integrity of these lineages and how Dan is presenting them and teaching them, and I think they're particularly potent. I have engaged in other meditation teachings in other spiritual traditions and styles (but not gotten the same effects). Within Buddhism, these, the Mahamudra in particular—I think this is more usually associated with the Kagyu Buddhist school—is a very precise set of instructions to full blown non-dual awareness that primes you for Awakening. And then, there's Dzogchen, which is more about once you can stabilize Awakening. The Dzogchen practices are the essence tradition that take you to Enlightenment, most usually associated with the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, but also alive and perhaps even older in Bön, the indigenous Tibetan spiritual practices and indigenous religion of Tibet. Dzogchen is more associated with that. But Dan's put those two together in his teachings and gained the approvals of lineage holders and teaches with these lineage holders, so you can get the transmission. So you make your way through this pathway where it's exquisite how precise these teachings are. If you just follow the instructions, you get the results as a meditator. I've never experienced anything like it in my attempts at various meditation practices or spiritual practices. So the pointing out style is very relational. I think it's very well suited to Westerners. It's based on very good pedagogical science. Dan's a Neuroscientist, so he understands what's going on in your brain; he's actually done neuro-imaging to discover what's going on in his meditators’ brains and published those papers.

David: Right.

Tim: Dan is a living example of how, if you train your mind through these meditation techniques, you can attain skills that make you appear frankly, superhuman. The amount of stuff that guy gets done is profound and almost unbelievable. But it's because, and he'll tell you, and he'll tell you how, he has trained his mind or mindstream through these practices to gain high levels of skill that allow him to achieve high levels of things that most of us find astounding. But it's possible and he can teach you how to do it, too, and he teaches other people. He does teach people like judges and other high officials how to train their minds in the same way to gain the same kinds of performances.

So, there's a lot going on with Pointing Out Way and with Dr. Daniel P Brown’s work, and all of the other teachers who are engaged in this work, and there's some great ones. Being a part of that, Dan's teachings and the community, the Pointing Out Way community, I'd
recommend it to anyone who's listening to this podcast, if you have an interest in spiritual practice and the kinds of things David and I are talking about here.

David: You started off talking about PatternDynamics as a bridge, this middle way, so how do you see what you're learning from Dan Brown that's applying to PatternDynamics?

Tim: Right. Okay, so again, this is pretty loose and I'm not sure how much of it's going to stand up; it's speculative at this stage. So when we do the PD one day workshop, and when we get it right, something kind of pops right with the Source experience. It's like there is this unitive, non-dual field that can emerge, sometimes not for everybody, but certainly for some. I know what kind of meditative experience that is now, and I think it's truly non-dual. But certainly in the essence traditions, non-dual awareness is really just a beginning. It's just a preparation for what can allow you to Awaken, and Awakening is not Enlightenment; that’s a long way away. But, Awakening is the first major step most people take, but experiencing the non-dual, you can do it with something like a PD workshop in one day, if you get it right.

Because in an embodied sense, we're experiencing our deep inter-relatedness and the energy flow and the conversation that's happening between us at that felt level that Frankenberry talks about.

David: Yeah.

Tim: And we start to give it signifiers and we develop a language around it, so we can talk about it and so that we can adjust the dynamics so that we have more of it and we can experience it more richly. I find it interesting, because I didn't know what was going on with the PatternDynamics workshop, and why. All of this came as a sort of a download and it was kind of high intuition for me. I couldn't unpack it. It's taken years. But now I'm a little more clear about what happens, I think, and it turns out – and again, there's been scholars who've been at this stuff for a couple thousand years and I'm just going to jump in as a dilettante, and talk about the core concept in Buddhism, this Paticca-samuppada that's the translation from the Pali.

It sounds slightly different when it's been translated from Sanskrit, when it's from the Sanskrit, but I'll go with the Pali because that's how it was originally written down. The Buddhist teachings apparently are originally written down in Pali. So Joanna Macy wrote a great book called, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, where she relates this core concept of Paticca-samuppada in the Buddha’s teachings to General Systems Theory. There's a lot of correlations (with systems theory), and she translated from the Pali and this is a work of serious scholarship. I found it particularly interesting when I first read it. I read it when I first read *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* in the late 90s, I guess, and I sort of put it away in a bookshelf and only found it because I moved my books, and we were going to have this conversation. I pulled it out and started looking at it going, holy cow. And I've got highlighter through it, and underlines and notes in the margin where, obviously it had a profound influence on me and it just went to the back of my mind and churned away.
David: Wow.

Tim: But I realize now, that the concept of Paticca-samuppada, which is sometimes translated as mutual causality, which is how Joanna Macy's referenced it in her title. But I asked a question of Dan in one of the meditation retreats, and I used the term 'mutual causality'. He said, no, ‘dependent origination’. Dan's a translator and he's very precise about the language that you need, and the concepts and the references.

David: Did he unpack that at all, as far as the distinctions go?

Tim: No, I was so intimidated, I just let him go on. But I appreciated the distinction. I went and looked it up and went back to Joanna’s book and then started reading about some of the things that you encouraged me to unpack with Abhidharma Philosophy and views on the Buddhist teachings. We'll get to that--dependent origination. I think you said that Frankenberry refers to it as, dependent co-origination.

David: Right, yeah.

Tim: Or conditioned co-arising. These are very systemic concepts and Joanna Macy points out that it's about feedback. It's about a double hermeneutic, about a conversation back and forth. Not just linear causation, A, bumps into B, right. It's also B bumps into A, and that happens on a multitude of levels and it's kind of like, what co-arises in your experiences is dependent on these conditions.

David: So, Frankenberry describes it as “a relational process which co-ordinates the momentary factors (dharmas), as they pulsate in and out of the causal process... And by perceiving causality as a multiple directional convergence, the Buddha discards the notion of a one directional movement of power from a prime substance to another independent substance.” She says, “It refers to the dynamics and momentary experiential process and has a close affinity with what Whitehead called, ‘causal efficacy’ and James’ ‘perceptual flux.’” She said, “The multi-faceted dependent or relational nature of ordinary experiential process” (Frankenberry, p. 166).

Tim: Yeah, you can see how rich the language has to become to support the interdependent dynamic co-coordinative flux that is at the foundation of experience at a certain point. In Joanna's book, she talks about Buddhaghosa, who was one of these pandits, I think, who was in the Abhidharma school. Buddhaghosa used the term to qualify the import of the causal doctrine as a whole. He defined Paticca-samuppada as the mode of causality according to which phenomena arise together in reciprocal dependence, or you could say interdependence. So I guess this is (what they call) Anamanda-aticca. Like I said, there's been some very deep scholarship over a very long time and many arguments that have sometimes gone centuries about the nature of these terms and what the Buddha really meant and what that means for practice.

But, Joanna Macy makes a very good argument for it, and I think if you go back through James and people like Dewey and Frankenberry, and there's a whole list of other people who have started to relate to the kind of more general systems view to training your mind.
in the way that the Buddha advocates. And these are the kind of practices you'll find in the essence traditions of Buddhism. And finding those relations is what I'm interested in and is there anything related to PD? Well, yeah. There's at least a loose relation in it, there's a systems thinking language and a pedagogy associated with it so you can develop the ways in which you can see the more systemic inter-related nature of reality out there and apply that to what goes on in here, how you construct reality and how that becomes more alive for you. I think so, I do. But I don't think PatternDynamics goes too much further than the non-dual. It will get you there, but if you want to step into Awakening and the practices that will take you to Enlightenment, you need something else, so I'm recommending the Pointing Out Way. It's by far the most powerful set of teachings I've encountered, that have the most integrity. That makes clear some of the distinctions about what I think PD can do and where it does act and it acts in that middle ground (between the mental-rational and the non-dual).

David: Well, that's a great endorsement of the Pointing Out Way Practice.

Tim: Oh, yeah, yeah it's fantastic. I mean if you're serious about gaining meditative skill and spiritual practice, I can't recommend it any more highly. Do we want to talk about this Abhidharma notion of the Dharmas?

David: Yeah, I think that's a good lead in. Yeah, the Dharmas. There's a lot of different ideas about Dharma theory and what this actually means. The Abhidharmists, I believe, came before the Mahayanists; they had these very richly developed and complex ideas around Dharmas. Frankenberry described them as a universal matrix of causation. So the Abhidharmists held that the Dharmas are like elemental conditions. And then when they came together they would cause the conditioned co-arising of existence, so this relates very much to this idea of dependent co-origination. And they really have to work together. This, as I understand it – understanding each helps you understand the other, I guess I'd say. But the Mahayanists came along, and they had some criticisms of the Abhidharmists. They thought they were kind of reifying Dharmas as things.

But there's at least some evidence that they didn't do that. But I think the correct way that I see it, is that if you view these Dharmas as part of this conditioned co-arising, they rise and they fall according to the dynamics and flux of experience. And then I read about how they saw Dharmas as a universal matrix. PatternDynamics is like a matrix, it’s one way of presenting it and I started seeing this connection. The way that Nancy Frankenberry describes Dharmas, she describes them as “felt qualities of experience.” Then she relates that to Whitehead's concept of categories of subjective form, and to me there does seem to be a lot of parallels here to how we can think of the patterns of PatternDynamics as Dharmas.

Tim: I found that really fascinating when you brought it up, when you alerted me to it, and it's interesting, isn't it? Because, you don't want to reify them, I mean certainly not in the Buddhist view. Not things, but they could be energy patterns. They're in the middle ground between something that's material and something that's an ideal form, aren't they?
David: Yeah, there's always a dynamic interplay between them, as our understanding is with the patterns in PatternDynamics. It's not like one pattern exists here and another pattern exists there. They're always in relationship, it's this idea of that inter-relationality of everything, and so that's why we focus on balancing and integrating.

Tim: That's a way, I guess, of seeing and sensing more fully, the interdependent co-origination as causation of what goes on in the world.

David: Yeah.

Tim: So it is that middle ground between the absolute idealist spiritual kind of view that some spiritualists have, that there's just 'Consciousness'—as the new age people like to call it. It sometimes makes me laugh. It's just like there's this absolute thing that pervades everything and that's what everything's made of. It's pure subjective idealist kind of consciousness. I'm okay with that, but I just don't think that, that's what Realization is about. Realization is about the fact that there's heaven and earth. There's consciousness and material stuff and there's energy patterns in flux. The isomorphism that runs between all of that is Paticca-samuppada. The same systemic inter-relational causation at work in the material world and cosmos is at work in the mental realm, where we exchange mental rational symbols. It's at work in the theosphere, where we exchange more subtle signifiers, and it's at work in the more causal and the more Enlightened fully Realized dimensions where all of that is integrated. But the Buddha's insight, we might say, is that, as a systems theorist would put it, the isomorphism, the self-similarity that runs through all those levels and all those domains of existence and ties them together into experience is, exactly that, Paticca-samuppada.

David: Nancy Frankenberry said that “The word to watch here is ‘quality.’ The other thing to keep an eye on is the way in which the dharmas are factors within and of the experiential process, and so they are not dominant or the primacy of that Paticca-samuppada. With this in mind, we can avoid the mistake of reification which the Mahayanists charged to the Abhidharmists. But we also need to avoid the mistake of foisting onto dharma-analysis the categories of British empiricism, in which the real objects in the world are reduced to simple particulars which ‘have’ qualities of one sort or another and stand in external relations to each other” (Frankenberry, p. 183). So she, kind of like you, talks about the middle view of this. The alternation is small but dramatic. So instead of as some people have described Dharmas as being adjectival, she says Dharmas are adverbial, not adjectival.

Tim: Wow, that brings us to Bruce Alderman's work, but go on.

David: She says, “as concrete facts they refer to qualitative events which cannot be described or analysed exhaustively in terms of universals” (Frankenberry, p. 183). So then she argues, that's why she sees Dharmas as felt qualities of experience.

Tim: Yeah.
David: She ties that to James and to Whitehead. Whitehead said, I think, that the flow of experience is really the meaning of all. I think it's something like that. [Actual quote is “...what is most real is the flow of experiencing.” (Frankenberry, p. 183)]

Tim: Yeah, that's what's so interesting. As a dimension of reality, certainly in the essence traditions, there's a lot of reference to space. You gain a capacity to become spaciousness or space. Space takes on a different meaning than in a three-dimensional view. We've got up, down, back and forth. Space becomes an extension of your experience or your mind. So it's like, when you get to this point, reality has another dimension that appears in it. It's that fullness, it's that depth, it's that kind of richness and it becomes kind of lucid and luminous and diaphanous. I think we're referencing the same sort of thing here and reality ceases to become a subject looking at a bunch of objects out there, and it becomes a rich mind-flow that you realize is highly constructed. And that what's actually out there, the things in themselves, well, you don't know what they are. Again, Peterson talks about this. He's on the cusp of this stuff and he's found an important dimension to this which is the (traditional) mytho-poetic structures that we left behind.

But that dimension comes to the fore for me in both Pointing Out practices and also to a point, you know up to the non-dual. The lucidness that comes in the non-dual, you can get through PD in a particular way. So there's correlations here, but I think in the same way that in the Renaissance we started to discover representations of the third dimension, of depth and perspectival drawing and painting. Maybe, what Gebser was calling the Diaphainon or that spacious luminousness that emerges as innateness, as part of the nature of reality or experience is the dimension that's now emerging in a world view that's going to be widely held. I don't know, but I speculate on that sometimes and it's certainly real for me.

David: So the Diaphainon that Gebser talks about is, describing that which shines through or that which makes transparent. So he's talking about rendering visible, I think, the incarnation of the whole at once. Shining through the whole.

Tim: Very hard to put language around this stuff. You almost have to use poetry to make any sense because language, our language is mostly about communicating about objects rather than experience. I remember the first time I had this kind of experience was when Genpo Roshi did Big Mind at one of the Integral seminars. That's the voice dialogue process he's developed in relation to some of his Zen teachings. In the Big Mind process, it's phenomenal, it just pops the lucid non-dual richness of space and its luminosity and diaphanousness just popped. That process, it's an amazing, effective process. It only takes about an hour, but it's not very stable. So I found Pointing Out Way is (also) a very stable set of steps. You get to one stable place and you move to the next stable place, so it's sort of more reliable in that respect, but Big Mind was a very powerful state experience for me.

David: Well, maybe at this point we should maybe think about wrapping up this section and summarizing how we can maybe bring it back to PatternDynamics a bit. And I came up with – as I mentioned to you a little while ago, it was after either reading something you said or listening to something you said in a podcast. Somehow four major points came
together for me and these points are not anything new that PatternDynamics as its community of practice and as it has been taught is not already doing, but for me it kind of seemed to represent things we can continue to emphasize and develop, and I'll just read off my four points if that's okay and then we can ...

Tim: Oh sure.

David: ... comment on them after that, if you will.

Tim: Okay.

David: So the first point is to understand this idea of, that we were just talking about, understanding patterns as Dharmas or felt qualities of experience as Frankenberry put it, always in flux, always in relationship to other patterns. So this is just the aspect of kind of learning the language of PatternDynamics, learning what the patterns are and seeing them as these felt qualities of experience, then maybe starting to have this richer life as a result of this vocabulary coming alive for us. And as you have put it, Tim, this part of the practice is to help us “see more”. We start to see more when we understand more about patterns.

And then the second step or the second part would be to help us “share more.” That would be PatternDynamics as a process-relational pattern language. So this is about balancing and integrating the patterns in our collective conversations with other people, rather than just for ourselves gaining understanding. We can share with others and we can communicate in some of these ways that we've talked about today. And the third point is, the idea you briefly mentioned, the embodied PatternDynamics group movement practice that we do in the one day workshop. I would like to see that practice, not just for a one day workshop, but maybe used more often in different PatternDynamics engagements and see how that can develop.

It's interesting to hear you talk about that today in terms of how that experience of that pop that happens when you feel that non-dual awareness come up, and you didn't know how exactly what was happening. It would be really interesting to further develop this practice. What I said about this, this activity helps connect us as a group in an ongoing, what I described as a kind of radical empiricist experience practice. Experiencing the pattern energies in our bodies and connecting to Source. So this helps us to live to deeper purpose when we do that. And then the fourth and last point I wrote down was an emphasis on what you've referred to in a podcast you did with Lauren Tenney, emphasizing what you called facilitative shamanism. You've talked about seeing others do this, especially Diane Hamilton, but I've seen you do it as well, at some of these PatternDynamics workshops where you start off with a very tightly organized structure how the workshop is going to proceed. Then as it develops you kind of become less tight with that structure, and morph into sensing into the energies of the moment and responding in the moment to what's coming up, and working with that.
So if we can develop a way to teach that practice, that capacity to be able to sense these
dynamics at play and how to tweak the energy in just the right way or as Gebser put it,
“knowing when to let happen and knowing when to make happen.”

Tim: Yeah.

David: And you had written that this is the ability to shift the conversation in a way that reveals
the deeper reality of our interdependence, and it is an example of what Lectica calls this
early principled thinking, or the second simplicity. So that we get beyond all the primary
and secondary patterns, which ultimately takes us to the pattern of Void, and then all
simplified into the fundamental pattern of Source.

Tim: Yeah.

David: So, that's the four step summary that I came up with, I'm curious how you might respond
to that.

Tim: I think that's great. I think, I'd like to talk about that. Perhaps we can do that for the third
segment.
Part Three Transcript

David: Okay, Tim, so we just reviewed these four points that I brought out; now let's dive a little deeper into them. I have a couple things I want to say about this first point. It's relatively straightforward except for the part about the new dimension of understanding the patterns as Dharmas, or felt qualities of experience.

Tim: Maybe it'd be good if you could say a bit about radical empiricism, felt qualities of experience. Just dive in a little there.

David: Yeah. So radical empiricism was the term that William James came up with, and another interesting perhaps convergence between us Tim, is that you found your way into pragmatism emphasizing Charles Sanders Peirce in his work. Independently, I ended up getting turned on to this book called Religion and Radical Empiricism, which we've mentioned a few times. It covers radical empiricism from James, Dewey and through some number of other people, linking it to Whitehead’s work and to the Buddhist kind of thinking that we've been talking about.

I think I want to read a little bit of a long paragraph that Frankenberry wrote, because there is a direct connection between pragmatism and radical empiricism, very much covering a lot of same territory with just maybe a little bit of different emphasis. Frankenberry writes, "For all three thinkers [Peirce, James and Dewey], each with different emphasis, radical empiricism is defined by the understanding that sense perception is neither the only nor the primary mode of experience, but is rather derived from a still more elemental and organic togetherness of the experiencing subject, and the experiencing environment. In the language of Dewey, experience designates ALL transactions between organism and environment both of which are co-constitutive of one another. On this view, before ever undertaking the comparatively high-level discriminations of the world by means of the senses or linguistic forms, the subject is aware of itself and others as causally efficacious powers mutually interacting with the world of qualitative values, where memories of the past and anticipations of the future are felt as given. Thus at every point, radical empiricism challenges the assumptions of classical, logical and linguistic empiricism” (Frankenberry, p. 84).

So one thing to understand here is that radical empiricism is not to be understood as an extension of Humean empiricism, but rather as a counter to it. Something quite different in its approach.

Tim: It's almost the opposite extreme of Hume. Didn't he indicate that there are no connections; that's just made up, there’s just (isolated) things. Radical empiricism seems to be saying more like there's just the felt relationality, there are no things. Is that how you view it?

David: Yes, yes, exactly. John McDermott, who wrote a book on William James, described it as participating in the very rhythm of the world at large with this process.
But there is a potential problem here in that we're bringing up aspects of things that are beyond linguistic expression. One of the radical empiricists, his name was Bernard Meland, he liked to say “we live more deeply than we can think.” I have a thread on radical empiricism on the Ning forum of integral post metaphysical spirituality, and I got an interesting reply from Layman Pascal. He caught on very quickly to the problem that presents itself with statements such as those that Bernard Meland said.

Layman wrote, "The problem is that our thinking cannot perfectly evaluate itself, it has no more right to assert its limitations than to assert its supremacy. A thinking being using language to express a thought is on very shaky ground when that thought is, that thought cannot encompass reality." (http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/xn/detail/5301756:Comment:58473)

So I think he was absolutely right to bring this up, and Nancy Frankenberry talks about that as well. Nancy Frankenberry is deep in the postmodern linguistic turn, very much an advocate of, in some ways, of those like Rorty and Davidson. She says, "If it is the case that 'we live more deeply than we can think,' then we are at a loss to describe any awareness which surpasses language or thought without employing language in the very process, and thus exhibiting the more as intra-linguistic after all" (Frankenberry, p. 137).

That's pretty interesting. So for me, I'm seeing PatternDynamics as a solution to this dilemma, because remember when we talked earlier about when we can name something, it gives it more concrete existence. We make the subject more object and then we can see it better. So this is about helping us to see more, right? So we develop a vocabulary and we can put names to something, and this is what helps us to express maybe what we couldn't previously put words to.

Tim: Well, yeah. There were a couple of things there I'd like to comment on.

David: Sure.

Tim: I guess one is Gödel, is that's how you say his name, the mathematician? The other is Charles Sanders Peirce. So I guess Gödel, he ended the notion that there was somewhere to stand—that you can have an axiomatic foundation that is solid and unchanging, and you can work from there. So I think Whitehead worked on Principia Mathematica, with the other major philosopher who wrote that with him…

David: Bertrand Russell.

Tim: Yes, they did this gigantic work on that basis. In the analytic tradition it was like an ultimate analytical philosophy work. I think Gödel comes along and just says, "No, everything's recursive. The axiom you started with changes because there's feedback essentially." Hofstadter has written about this extensively, so everything is recursive. Peirce pointed this out with what he called a sliding chain of signifiers. First there's the felt quality. Firstness he (Peirce) called it, then there's Secondness—we collide (with that felt quality).
This becomes a real thing, like the felt experience of touching a hot stove is that sensation before you can even name it, or it even hurts. It's just felt quality and then it slams into you, or you slam into it. It becomes pain but until you signify it, until you have the word “stove” or “hot,” it's not reified in the world–that is, the dependent origination of this (occurrence) has not been made concrete. It's effete still, that's how Peirce referred to it.

David: So there's a reifying that goes on, but at this point it's a healthy thing. It's bringing meaning.

Tim: Right. So meaning is at the heart of all this, meaning making is “methodology,” is the double hermeneutic. The meaning making about what is there is what reifies what's there. Sure, that occurrence can be linguistically mediated and therefore more concrete, but at the beginning of every cycle, if you like, of a pragmatic world discovery, or problem solving (event), is the sensation, is immediate sensation. In the human realm that's what we get, and then it slams into us–it's something and then we have to name it. It becomes more concrete, becomes object and so emerges from the deep subjective domain to the more concrete external thing that becomes real for us in our field of experience. Our mind stream has constructed it and we can share these constructions via our language of that.

What's important I think about what Frankenberry's on about is that it's recursive. So language helps you discover the world, but don't reify it. Don't stop there, don't ignore when you come back around to the sensation again because you're going to polish that reification. Something is going to change and you may discover aspects of reality that are outside of the current constructs that constitute your experience, if we're sensitive to these things. So yeah, you're right. I think that PD, PatternDynamics, has a role in using that very agile language that isn't very concrete, doesn't particularize things. It just really honors the notion that they're energy patterns that are continually transforming and transmuting and that we construct them and that with a more sophisticated, pragmatically oriented use of language, we can explore different terrain.

David: Yeah, and one of the ideas I had here – and this is why all three of these, or I mean all four of these points that I brought up all support one another – is we can learn the language of PatternDynamics and learn these patterns, but we also have to be careful about reifying them. One way we can do that is keep iterating and keep coming back to not just to the cognitive understanding, but touching in continually with embodied movement practices, or with the facilitative shamanism, and continuing to iterate between these different practices, and to have an intention of remaining fresh, remaining sensitive to the dynamics at play at all times. Then this vocabulary will increase in its richness, and our experience will increase in richness. Our understanding will increase hopefully ongoingly.

Tim: Yeah. I think for me, you're starting to flesh out some of the aspects of Source, the deeper aspects, and that it's inquiry related. A lot of spiritual practices have inquiry at their core, like the Diamond Approach for instance. So this is pragmatic inquiry all the time, hypothesizing, and a testing, and a learning, and going around again. That's sort of pragmatist nature of it. It's got subjects and objects that are integrated, it's got parts and wholes that are integrated, it's got past and present that's integrated. Presence, the present
moment and attending to the unfolding dynamics in your emerging awareness— that manifest in your field of awareness.

The flowing present moment and tweaking that rather than acting on objects, and thinking about the past and the future. So there's a whole bunch of stuff that probably needs to be made more object in relation to Source, and then let go and not made more object. Parts and wholes start to collapse, it's just systems and past and the present start to collapse as the present unfolding moment.

David: I'll share one more quote. This is from William James himself and this was from the conclusion of *Varieties of Religious Experience*, where I think he was just starting to gain some clarity about radical empiricism. I think he may have mentioned the term before completing Varieties, I can't be sure about that. But I think this statement to me, in my limited understanding of James... (I'm not a real scholar here, like your disclaimer earlier). This seems to me to be indicating what occupied a lot of James's thought which he attempts to further develop after this point.

[Clarifying note from David: The earliest reference I could find where James used the phrase “radical empiricism” was in the preface of *The Will To Believe*, which was published in 1897. What we know as *Varieties of Religious Experience* was first delivered as the Gifford Lectures in 1901. I’m not aware of the phrase “radical empiricism” coming up in this work, but I believe the quote below refers to it. James’ full development of the concept of radical empiricism came to the fore in his 1904-1905 writings, especially in the essays *Does Consciousness Exist*, and *A World of Pure Experience*, both published posthumously (1912) in the volume entitled *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.]

He wrote, "The world of our experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part. The conscious field plus its object as felt or thought of, plus an attitude towards the object, plus the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs ... It is a full fact even though it be an insignificant fact; it is of the kind to which all realities whatsoever must belong. The motor currents of the world run through the like of it; it is on the line connecting real events with real events” (James, pp. 428-429).

Tim: Wow.

David: I like that; it touches on a lot of points there and I feel like that's what he was continuing to try to develop from that point on [as he further developed his thinking about radical empiricism].

Tim: So yeah, how would you unpack or interpret what he said there? What does that mean to you?

David: Well, he understood that the world - he uses this phrase where he said the world is made of what he called “pure experience;” it is this idea of him trying to defend this notion of a full fact which includes not just parts, but the parts as they interrelate and the parts as wholes that they make up. Then the section about the motor currents of the world run
through the like of it, that's the flow I think that's happening. The flow of energy that he saw running through all events and then connecting real events with real events. Everything's on a moment-to-moment basis, and the past affects future and the future in a way affects the past even.

Tim: Yes. It's interesting, you could read out of that he's collapsing the parts and wholes that we normally associate with stuff into the systemic whole. He's collapsing the subject and the object into a non-dual pure experience. Pure experience is made up of the collapse or integration of the part and the whole, the subject and the object, and the past and the present, so there isn't any, there's just present changing, unfolding flux of subject-object part-wholes. Interestingly, those are the three core dimensions of Source in the PatternDynamics system. Interestingly Dan Brown, Daniel P. Brown's Ph.D. research centered around the main principles behind the efficacious spiritual teachings for high meditation attainment, let's call it.

One of them is called emptiness of time. One is called emptiness self, and the other one's emptiness of thoughts. So what that means is there's no independently existing self, there's no independent object. There's no independently existing thoughts, subject, or parts, or wholes. There's no independently existing time continuum, it's just a construct of unfolding change. Then you put all those three collapsed polarities, or integrated polarities together, and you get pure experience, which I think is pretty analogous to my sense of Source, when the non-dual aspect of it emerges. In that Source moment, when you're in that flow, you can sense really exquisitely what little parts of the dynamic system have tensions. You can sense where the conversation needs to go, what you need to point out, what needs to be talked about in terms of balancing that dynamic. Then how you might go about getting agreement to change that dynamic to adjust the well-being or the eudaimonia of the system. I think either we're telling ourselves a really interesting story here that's way off base, or there's a bit of truth in all these figurations, whether we're talking about PD (or these other things), we're referencing very similar, or at least overlapping terrain or experience.

David: What's this term eudaimonia?

Tim: Right. So I think it was an Aristotle, it's like well-being or flourishing. Its most often interpreted as, I guess Bhaskar uses it (in his idea of) the eudaimonic society. The free flourishing of each as a prerequisite for the free flourishing of all – that drive to freedom kind of thing is allowing the free flow of flux, or experience, or life, or systems. This will allow for flourishing. It's when we get in the way and there's blocks, and there's kinks, where there's a limitation of the expression of this.

David: That comes back to that term dukkha. In Buddhism that's often been interpreted as suffering, but as you've pointed out, and as I've also read it in other places, the better translation of that is “stuckness.”

Tim: Yeah, being stuck on the idea that there's a separate self and they're separate objects out there that you need to act on as independently existing objects. Everything that comes forth in our field of experiences is interdependently co-originating with the Dharmas. So, as the
Buddha looked at it, we suffer because we think there's a world out there that's causing us grief when it's just our own nature as the flow of co-constructed experience.

David: Right, or we get attached to some particular expression and rather than allowing that flow to continue to flow, we interrupt the flow and we get stuck. The flow of experiencing.

Tim: Yeah, and it's most easy to get ... That interruption happens because you get stuck on yourself, you get stuck in the past or the future when you're thinking about it. You get stuck in your thoughts. Then suffering goes away once you start to sense the emptiness, or the lack of independent existence of those things, and you start to explore into the lack of independent existence of those things. Then pure experience becomes more manifest. You can learn to train your mind, and rewire your neurology such that that your experience becomes the lived experience, the most prominent experience of your life. Similar to how (previously) everyday material reality and a viewing subject called you, used to perceive the world, but now you can shift into a more awakened state if you can keep the non-dual view stable enough. Then from there the essence traditions have quite a lot to say, as very well tried and true practices, for taking it to the end of the path (Enlightened Realization).

David: So maybe we can go to the second point of PatternDynamics as a process-relational pattern language, balancing and integrating the patterns in collective conversation with other people, to help us “share more.” So you've talked about… I call this the process-relational pattern language, and you've talked about it as a process philosophy. You mentioned to me once recently that process philosophy is the missing piece when trying to integrate subject-object.

Tim: Right, yeah.

David: Can you talk about that?

Tim: Yeah. Well, I haven't read a lot of Whitehead, but I understand the main concepts in some of his work. I understand the notion of process philosophy, especially – shout-out to Bonnitta Roy here for being a bit of a standard bearer for process philosophy within the integral world. So I guess another disclaimer, but seeing more yourself doesn't work after a while. Reality becomes more richly relational and so sharing, and interconnecting and realizing the interconnected organizing flow of nature, or reality, becomes more interesting. Developing skills for doing that becomes highly motivating, I think. As a purpose-driven collaborative form of systems thinking, PatternDynamics is well-suited to having those more relational conversations about the system itself, and about bringing all the perspectives into some coordinated flow.

PatternDynamics, I think, has pretty well developed ways of doing that. It has a language, it has an emergent grammar about how to use that language, about the nature of the system and it's free flourishing well-being. What (I think) Will Vary calls apithology, it's generative health. There are some tools like collaborative system's inquiry, and locating perspectives, and outlining structures, and coordinating perspectives, and designing decisions, and governing reflectively, keeping all of that grounded in your Source, or your
deeper purpose together and using that as a way to coordinate perspectives, and share perspectives, and ultimately you'll get to some hypothesis to test. Some result that might get you somewhere.

What I mean by get you somewhere is, makes things better, more flourishing. Not growth but flourishing, health, not development per se. Something like this generativity, well-being or flourishing becomes a primary motivating factor.

David: The reason I brought in this point number two, as the conversation, collective conversation with other people, is because I wanted to emphasize it's not just the individual practice of learning the cognitive level of the different patterns in PatternDynamics, but it really does come alive when we come into conversation. If we can use this with other people - and I enjoyed in our level two training in PatternDynamics, with working with a group of other people, and we would have these collective conversations.

(In the level two PD training), there's the collective of the people in the room or on the call, and we're also dealing with the collective of the different patterns. It's not patterns in isolation, it becomes really interesting when we start talking about how different patterns start to integrate with one another. Then it’s what is emerging from that and it can go very deep.

Tim: Well, I sensed amongst the two or three, four cohorts of level two where people were using the language, and sharing their experience of the world with each other explicitly using PatternDynamics system as the language of what was unfolding in their field of awareness, or the stream of their mind. My sense was, and my own experience of that was, it's really rich, as a natural system's thinker. It was really deep and meaningful for me, and really rewarding to be able to share my life with people and get their reflections back using the language in its depth. Combining the patterns and being able to hear stories, and reveal stories and gain insight. The insights I gained in some of those conversations are insights I could not have gained by myself, and could not have gained without that language, and people who could help me ... Thought partners who were thinking at this depth.

I think that's one way that PatternDynamics can be useful, where it sits within the community of practice, with people who have that level of skill to relate to each other and create that value. The other way is (the application of a somewhat) different skill where you need to translate what you're seeing in the system into the language that will allow people to hear it and resonate with it. I think that's the higher skill, I think that's what the PatternDynamics community is really all about, is learning that skill. We're like these... it's like we've got these invisible levers we can put into the systems. People can't really see them, but we can get huge leverage if we can just identify something to help people share a bit about what might need to be tweaked, get some agreement and try the change.

It's (a kind of) wizardry; this is where this facilitative shamanism comes in. You're working with a world of energy flux and flow. It's not magical power but it’s what Asimov (or was it Arthur C. Clarke) said about magic: it is just technology that you don't understand; it’s that cool, but it's not magic. It's just developing a skill, a facilitative skill to help tweak the
system and get agreement to help people see something, help people share about it and help people adjust. I think that's the value proposition of the subject-object move, we could point out what the systemic dynamic is. Then the skill based on that is this being able to facilitate at that level.

David: Well I used that term process-relational pattern language and I noticed when you're talking about it, you also used the word “relational” a few times. I wanted to make that part explicit here in that there was a fellow named Bernard Loomer, not very well known, but more well known was Charles Hartshorne as a Whitehead interpreter. Charles Hartshorne credited Bernard Loomer with coming up with the name process philosophy. Early on, he [Loomer] was influenced by some radical empiricism and it seemed to then shift to be more purely Whiteheadian. Then the last decade of his life, he shifted back towards a more of a radical empiricism emphasis, and he had an interesting thing to say.

He said, "In some place or other, Charles Hartshorne generously credits me with possibly having baptized this mode of thought with the name ‘process philosophy.’ ...As a shorthand form of designation, it is popular and convenient - and misleading. It suggests that the defining characteristic of this outlook consists in the ultimacy of becoming in contrast to the classical primacy of being; but the ultimacy of becoming is only half of the story. With equal appropriateness this metaphysical viewpoint may be characterized as a ‘relational’ mode of thought. Except for the cumbersome quality of the phrase, the more adequate name should be ‘process-relational philosophy’" (Frankenberry, p. 145). I think giving it that name brings a little bit more emphasis to the aspect of relationality that is inherent in what Whitehead was on about.

Tim: Yeah, and it brings us closer to a more full-blown systemic view where it's not just about relationships or interrelationships. It's not just about dynamism or process; it's about many things actually. Systems theory is rich with concepts within the different systems and complexity disciplines. There's a real richness there and I've tried to embody it in a very simple symbol, Source, whereas subject-object, part-whole, past-present–the present non-dual flow, but it's inquiry based. There is something about this sensing of the world, and testing hypotheses and learning.

David: Yeah, and that's part of the middle path, that's part of bringing in an empirical approach. Remain in inquiry, test hypotheses.

Tim: Yeah, very pragmatic system.

David: Whitehead acknowledged his indebtedness to James by the way, and can be very much be interpreted as a radical empiricist in many ways himself.

Tim: Interesting.

David: Some have said that when James was writing, I think his last work (Some Problems of Philosophy), he's talking about… trying to construct an arch, and he realized he was not going to be able to complete this arch, and he was hopeful that someone would come along
and do it. Some people, such as in a Steven Meyer presentation which I listened to a little while back. He said that it was Whitehead of all people that came along to complete that arch, which in some ways was rather surprising, because Whitehead had been associated with, as we mentioned earlier, Bertrand Russell, who was often in communication with James and they had very different views.

They (James and Russel) were very cordial and collegial but they had very different approaches; and Whitehead and Russell (also eventually) realized that their approaches differed quite a bit. In fact, there's another interesting quote, if I can find it, where Bertrand Russell said this about what Whitehead had said to him. He (Russell) said, "Whitehead said to me once, this is a fine riddle. You think the world is what it looks like in fine weather at noonday, I think it is what it seems like in the early morning when one first wakes from deep sleep." So there's Whitehead likening reality to this flux of everything being conjoined together, and it's very difficult to see where they separate out into their parts. It's an interesting way of looking at this inextricable togetherness that the world is.

Tim: Yeah. There's something unstoppable about holding that view. It pulls you along in your psychospiritual development, that the view, I mean that living systems view of integrated flux. It's not a bunch of things, it's a bunch of interrelated dynamic energy patterns. In fact in the Pointing Out Way there is the saying that the view is the meditation–that attaining a meditative skill is really about holding the view correctly. Yeah, so it may be that that living systems view that PatternDynamics promotes has its own motive force.

David: Patterns are emerging out of this… well, what James called the big blooming buzzing confusion that is, and then we articulate patterns and suddenly these things emerge.

Tim: Yeah, we learn the-

David: It helps us to see things more clearly so we can articulate, we can talk about.

Tim: Yeah, Peirce's thirdness.

David: The thirdness, yeah, back to that.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

David: Then the cycle continues and the Source pattern is sometimes called a lemniscate where it cycles back and forth.

Tim: Yeah, that's how it's represented by that infinity symbol, it's a toroidal integrative symbol, all systems have toroidal form whether it's conceptual, abstracted or whether physical like a tree, or even human body. It's not a bad symbol (for that).

David: So if any of our listeners are curious about this, I would say again check out Tim's paper on planetary civilization where he talks about Peirce's ideas around firstness, secondness and thirdness, and illustrates with the Source pattern how that works.
Tim: Yeah, and there's also an outline in there of a depth methodology (semiotic). Bhaskar has a depth ontology and Wilber has a depth epistemology, and this is depth methodology (in the form of a depth semiotic), if you want to check that out.

![Integral Semiotic Realism Diagram](https://www.academia.edu/5395136/The_Meaning_of_Planetary_Civilisation_Integral_Rational_Spirituality_and_the_Semiotic_Universe)

**Figure 1. Diagram representing the process of integral Semiotic Realism; reproduced from The Meaning of Planetary Civilisation: integral Rational Spirituality, Figure 7**

David: Let's move on to point number three, the embodied PatternDynamics movement practice. The idea of taking that to making it more central in ongoing PatternDynamics through practice, and bringing in some of these ideas that we're talking about that we might relate to radical empiricism more versus thirdness. What do you think about that?

Tim: Yeah, it feels right. I got the same notion myself that maybe the next evolutionary phase of PatternDynamics is that it's a regular group practice where we come together to co-create a non-dual field, and learn skills, and relate more deeply, and have richer experiences. I like the notion of facilitative shamanism, working with energy flows in the inter-relational, intersubjective field using your felt sense, and that very present awareness of interrelatedness. Lack of separateness of us, our systemic nature, and learning to tweak the dynamics to get a more full-blown field.

More people plugged into it, and people who are good at that to help people who are learning those things gain that capacity, whether they're using it invisibly just in their family, or community where they can do the one, two, three, of pointing out the dynamic,
bringing a conversation there, getting agreement about changing something for the better, or hopefully changing it for the better, or whether they're at that practice session and they're using the language with other people, who can use it at a deep level and getting more meaning in their own lives. I guess it's really a hypothesis to test, isn't it? I mean the one day workshop works well enough for what it does, it's an introduction and you can have a non-dual experience, but it was never much good at helping people work with PD beyond that or useful for them beyond that.

I think having more regular practice groups and things where the community practice comes together in real space, and developing community on that basis is... where you're really touching into Source together, and how our various... Most of the people who will show up will have that overriding interest in the health of humanity, supporting each other and our work that way, and that would be interesting. That's what PD is all about, I guess, in my own mind, but its expression is its own. That's like... I just try and pay attention to what the possibilities and intentions are, and just facilitating that conversation actually using the system on itself.

David: That brings us to point number four about putting an emphasis on facilitative shamanism. I saw you do that in the one-day workshop, but you didn't really talk about what you were doing or explain how to do it. I know you've had conversations with Lauren Tenney and Terra Soma, both Lauren and Terra are trained integral facilitators. You also have mentioned that ... some I think, some influence here from Lectica?

Tim: Yeah.

David: Well, there seems to be some real potential here on learning from these different sources including PatternDynamics, and bringing it together into something that can help us move further along.

Tim: Yeah, so interesting signifiers–both “facilitative” and “shamanism” are loaded terms. I guess anyone who's interested can go to the patterndynamics.net site and listen to the podcast with Lauren Tenney called, “We are the New Shaman” (https://patterndynamics.net/we-are-the-new-shaman/) where we unpacked what we mean when we're using this word Shaman, and talk about the challenges and problems of cultural appropriation. What the word actually means, are there actually Shaman – but to cut a long story short, what we're talking about is working with the more subtle energy domain of archetypes, and patterns, and energies and these become more real. And PatternDynamics is definitely a tool where these can become more alive and more reified interestingly but not reified as well, and where we can be more fluid and agile in that space.

The first time I encountered this was with Diane Hamilton, I just couldn't believe it. She was facilitating a large group, 100 people. Diane Hamilton, for those people who don't know her, is a well-known figure in the integral world and founder of Integral Facilitator, but also did the Big Mind process with Genpo Roshi. She was facilitating using the Big Mind process, and it got a little heated. Big room, really challenging conversation going on, and there was one moment where somebody said something. Before I even finished
registering what that person had said, Diane had sent it back, her hands moved and her body changed. I could see her catch the energy (in the statement) and send it back. It was the most incredible thing and it just boom, it just changed everything. She couldn't have thought about it, there's no way. So this is a really high level of spontaneousness, this is another thing about Source.

There's presence, there's inquiry, notice the collapse of those three polarities but there's spontaneity. Wu Wei, the Taoists talk about it as doing without doing. You're not thinking about it, it's just happening because you can ride the flux and sense the kinks in it, and just smooth them out. When a good facilitator does that, when they can work on the level of the intellect and the intuition, and the causal presence, it's pretty fascinating to watch and be a part of. So having seen Diane do that, and to experiment a bit with that myself and talk to people like Lauren Tenney, who are really accomplished facilitators who have learned from people like Diane. Yeah, I think it's possible that you can do it in a very seamless way. You don't necessarily need to reveal what you're doing.

If it's helpful reveal it, if it's not helpful don't reveal it, but it's really about getting into the flow, that's the Source state and getting stable in that, which I think you can learn by doing repeated PatternDynamics workshops. Just learning to get in the flow, the more you do it, the easier it'll come. Once you're there, then staying in that with your present sensing and inquiry, and spontaneity and just sense the energy (becomes easier). It'd be useful to use PD because you can name it where you need to name it even to yourself, or to the others and respond in a skilful way. If you need to neutralize something, balance something, or integrate it more fully, we can stoke it up. Whatever, you can play in that field and it's the non-dual field. It's very effective if you get it right; you can definitely achieve things you can't achieve just with your rational mind, or simple techniques or even good strategies.

If it's beyond that, you're plugged right into Source. You can think of it as tactics, strategies, purpose— in those three levels. Single, double, triple-loop learning, Torbert calls it, Bill Torbert. Tactics is single-loop. You try something, it doesn't work, you try something else until something works, but if you apply strategies, or high-level principles, you don't have to try every tactic. You just try the ones that are probably most likely to work, that's a higher level of thinking for complex problem-solving. Being plugged into Source is being plugged into purpose and when you can get to Source, you get in that non-dual state. Source is composed of purpose, inquiry, spontaneity, presence, the collapse of the three polarities all into one simple sensing of the field. The flow of field.

David: Purpose, inquiry, spontaneity-

Tim: Presence.

David: Presence, yeah.

Tim: Then what we call 1) part-wholeness, 2) inside-outness/subject-objectiveness and 3) past-presentness, which is presence, but we don't have a word for subject-objectiveness. Part
wholeness we usually call... refer to as a “system”. Subject-objectness, I guess you could call “non-dual,” but I think Source is composed of all those things and probably a couple of more major concepts. If you think about it that way, then you have an early principle. You have an integration into a chunk, a simpler form, that integrates all those systems of thought and practice before it into something that's simple. So having to be present and in an inquiry state, and non-dual and systemic, you can just chunk all those things together into Source, and the felt sense of the flowing field.

That Source, plugging into that, gives you a whole range of capabilities if you develop them in particular skills like facilitation, or decision-making, which I'm a great believer in. I think the applications are really strong in collaborative problem solving, complex problem solving. So those three go together: facilitation, good decision making by groups for meeting collective challenges (complex problem solving). (This is a) pretty good set of practices to learn together as community practice to develop these skills, and to do it from a place of depth. So I would call it a place of where our primary motivation is the realization of Source. So spiritual practice will be a part of it but I'm referring to those things as more (related to) the theosphere or the causal (realm). Realization is more full-blown. I know perhaps you're challenged by that interpretation and maybe it won't work. It might be a flaw, but I think Realization is really the thing that unifies us the most, to tie back to our theme from the beginning.

David: Yeah, what brings us together, what unifies us.

Tim: Yeah, and I think traditional religious and spiritual folk could understand that Enlightened Realization of the nature of reality; and the materialist modern types come at it because it's a realist view. It's based on energy and it's winding up throughout the universe, and its expression as consciousness. Postmodern should come at it because it's relational and semiotic enough; it satisfies their need to deconstruct those rigid static hierarchies of concentrated power, and to acknowledge the notion that our values and our interest in objective constructions are ultimately are about power.

Power is another dimension to Source, you could write that one down. It's a big one. It's just the reality of social life. It is so often not talked about. It's always the part that you get to by reading between the lines. Who wants what and why. Very rarely is it talked about explicitly. I think this one got me into trouble in organizational consulting because you just can't talk about that stuff sometimes. It's too raw.

David: Power is work rate per unit of time, right? It's about that flow.

Tim: Well it's about having control of the flow. Who has control, who dictates where resources flow? Power is where you deploy the work rate at the abstract level of human organization, and the symbols we use and the structures that we create around who has power, and who wields it, where they put resources and at what rate. That one is really interesting because frankly, I think we have really poorly developed ways of dealing with power, especially amongst our leadership elite. I think they're really struggling at the planetary level of
complexity, and retreating to just taking what they can get for themselves, and finding it a little too hard to coordinate the whole in a way that’s generative.

Tim: I think Globalization has been an attempt at a planetary level of organization and it's retreating, failed. We are getting more grounded in political realities again as we wrap this up, take it back to the real world. We are retreating back to more national chunks, that first foray into developing a more planetary level of organization. The EU is the probably the best expression of it, but now it's going backward at a fair old rate, just didn't get it right. Neoliberal globalization just didn't have enough problem-solving capacity at that level of complexity. That's my view, I don't know. It's an interesting place to start the next conversation maybe.

David: Yeah, and what are different interpretations of power? That's one of the patterns, the Power pattern. What is a generative version of that, Bernard Loomer wrote a great essay on two types of power (https://www.religion-online.org/article/two-conceptions-of-power/). So there's the power over that we're all familiar with, and there's another type of power that's a relational power.

Tim: Yeah. Well, you could say then there's both generative and pathological expressions of both those types of power. The PatternDynamics views is getting the balance right for a generative expression rather than a pathological expression in many ways. So there's types and then there's balance, these are all the things we can explore together in the PatternDynamics community practice.

David: Absolutely. Well, that I guess brings us full circle; I think we probably hit our agreed-upon time limit here for a long deep dive conversation. I really enjoyed this, Tim. Thank you so much for having this conversation!

Tim: Yeah, thanks, Dave.

Tim: I'd just like to wrap it up by saying that I hope in this conversation, for people made it all the way to the end, I hope we have articulated well enough the unifying capacity of PatternDynamics, how to learn it, and how to use it as a unifying force. We went through a lot of theory and philosophy, and took some deep dives and down some rabbit holes, and explored a lot of territory, really. I’d like people to leave with the idea that here's a discipline that can help us find what unifies us.

Tim: Thanks again for organizing this.

David: Thank you, Tim. We shall remain in touch.

Tim: Okay.
Romancing the Ning

Layman Pascal¹ and Bruce Alderman²

The Ning Forum for *Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality* was characterized by a mixture of courageous high-level intellectual discourse, ethical irreverence, transhumanist aesthetics, socio-economic critique, playful fraternity, and a deep willingness to push all integral concepts toward their own points of rupture or inversion. It was, above all, very freeing and very stimulating and a lot of fun.

The souls involved in this scene were willing to roll the dice and make the effort to find out what kinds of vision-logic insights and philosophical consensus might emerge from an integral community guided by the desire to feel beyond the limiting power of attractive metaphors, simplified formulations, and conventional integralism.

What happens if you treat “integral” as conventional and then try to push your own understanding toward a post-conventional integralism? What do you find if you seek the clearing where divergent metatheorists converge, where the theory of practice replaces the theory of knowledge, where subtle energies and subtle beings are radically reconsidered? Where our most intuitively trusted interpretations of developmental psychology and the wise future of humanity

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¹ Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him -- this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress -- He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.
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are challenged in order to tease apart their essential principles from those which are naïvely treated as essential or taken as received integral wisdom?

The Ning version of the forum still exists even though it is now mostly serving as an archive, with much of the activity having migrated to the parallel Facebook group. Here are a few places on the Ning forum to start with if you want to explore beyond the discussions and essays presented in this issue:

1. Postmetaphysical Visions and Visionaries
2. Object-Oriented Ontology
3. ITC Paper Review
4. Spheres
5. Real and False Reason
6. Definitions of Postmetaphysics
7. Desire
8. Holarchy
9. The Christmas Wiki
10. Close Encounters
11. Horror in the Integral Suburbs
12. Structural Transformation
13. States vs Stages

1. **Postmetaphysical Visions and Visionaries.** This subforum was a place to consider the works and significance of thinkers who either offered their own variant of integral-level metatheory or seemed to add a much needed vitamin to the overall discussion. Many of the posts begin with, “Well, I don’t know if this person is actually postmetaphysical but...” and lead to as much controversy as consensus. Exactly what you would expect from a lively analytic community. Here you will find people like Bruno Latour, Otto Scharmer, Peter Sloterdijk, Mark Edwards, Raimon Panikkar, Slavoj Žižek, Gilles Deleuze, William James, and more. Anyone from Jean Gebser to Lady Gaga might be the inspiration for one’s own detection of an emerging structure of postmetaphysical spiritual philosophy in an integral context.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/categories/postmetaphysical-visions-and/listForCategory

2. **Object-Oriented Ontology** (OOO) was a frequent topic of investigation. Not only for its own virtues but as a symbol of a variety of doctrines which try to take the dignity of objects seriously and think beyond the naïve correlation between subject and object. The principle suggested by the Quadrants – of taking both interiors and exteriors seriously – is pushed further by trying to simultaneously affirm the pan-interiorist presence of subjectivity at all scales, while also giving objects a full being of their own whose presence never depends upon or is limited to what gets experienced by observers.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/object-oriented-ontology
3. ITC Paper Review. Following the 2013 and 2015 Integral Theory Conferences, Bruce Alderman, Neelish Marik, and several other members of the Ning IPS forum offered reviews and hosted discussions of the stand-out or award-winning papers. Included among the discussions were reviews of papers by editors and contributors to this special issue of Integral Review: Tom Murray, Bruce Alderman, Layman Pascal, and Tim Winton.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/categories/itc-paper-review/listForCategory

4. Spheres. The interest in novel, higher-order theorizing, religion-as-exercise, and the playful vitalism and profound critique of thought found in Nietzsche and the classical philosophers are among many reasons that Bruce’s fondness for Sloterdijk became a major area of collective contemplation...

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/spheres

5. The Real and False Reason thread explored the challenges George Lakoff's model of embodied cognition poses to popular developmental theories, particularly Michael Commons' model of hierarchical complexity. Lakoff considers Enlightenment reason to be false in that it is fully conscious, literal, disembodied, and fits the world directly. Real reason, according to Lakoff, is embodied, inseparable from emotion, and rooted in image schema and metaphor. This calls into question at least some of the premises upon which developmental models are built. This engaging and lengthy (31-page!) thread is primarily a one-person inquiry, as theurj (aka Edward Berge) followed out the implications of Lakoff's critique over many months of reflection. Included are a number of comments and responses from Michael Commons, Sara Ross, and Tom Murray from the Yahoo Adult Development forum.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/real-and-false-reason

6. Definitions of Postmetaphysics. The attempt to clarify and refine – and thereby to further – the postmetaphysical inquiry led many forum participants to produce questions or plausible answers toward the definition of “integral postmetaphysical spirituality.” Many different concerns, tones, and ideas provide alternative pathways into the same basic investigation. Here are a few of them:

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/what-is-postmetaphysical

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/ejaculation-broccoli-an-integral-definition-of-metaphysics

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/what-is-post-metaphysical

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/an-integral-postmetaphysical

7. Desire. The IPS approach was critical-affirmative and embraced the integrative wholeness model in which all the various natural energies of life are included. The overt metaphysics of vitalism and the covert metaphysics of an “empty universe” may profitably hold each other in
check as we try to understand our reality, and ourselves, as intrinsically motivated, active, creative, and participatory beings. A refined and summary notion of desire in the full, multidimensional spectrum of its manifestations not only helps to re-situate advanced philosophy in real-world biology and ecology, but it also helps us understand the drives that politics and economics must be patterned to satisfy. In a world that is partially liberated from the superstitions of faith, science, and language, we need an energetic axis around which to organize ourselves – an axis that is resonant with our understanding of a dynamically enactive and scientifically holy universe.


8. Holarchy. A penchant for encouraging and exploring alternative and mutating variants of integral theory definitely characterized the forum. Kevin Bowman’s fascinating work on Holarchical Field Theory, and especially its pertinence to economics, is one example.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/application-of-holarchical-field-theory-kevin-bowman

9. The Christmas Wiki. Long before the current online integral glossaries existed, Layman Pascal put together a resource to combine his own concepts, his jocular articulations of integral concepts, and the various neologisms emerging from the Ning forum. This thread links to his “Christmas Wiki” and follows a discussion that spread in many threads about terminology, new concepts, and the hyperpersonal clarification of emergent vision-logic ideas.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/space-time-the-christmas-wiki

10. Close Encounters. An attempt to explore, dissect, and re-validate subtle energies, subtle entities, visions, shamanism, and aliens form a shifting current across many Ning threads – working to first divest ourselves of the most obvious foolishness and metaphysical thinking, and then redefine the remaining valid experiences in ways that do not depend up the blunt, reified, and magical categories that still remain present even within modern and postmodern discourse. Many of us take seriously our own encounters with “entities” and are hyper-attuned to all experiments in which people are deepening, expanding, and revising their own interpretations of these phenomena. One such thread opens with a report by Bruce Alderman (Balder) on his intriguing Contact Expedition experiences with Dr. Steven Greer in the UK, and another invites critical reflection on Ken Wilber’s Kosmic Addressing system for mystical experiences, as proposed in Integral Spirituality.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/report-from-the-field-close-encounters

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/kosmic-addressing-of-mystical

11. Horror in the Integral Suburbs. Many of the contributors found some personal resonance between “inhumanist” or “transhumanist” aesthetics and the attempt to push deeper into postformal reasoning and the metatheoretical frontier of evolutionary spirituality beyond first-tier conceptualizations. From Lady Gaga to H.P. Lovecraft, the integration of darkness and every kind of reversal of values provided a creative counterbalance to the perceived ‘shiny corporate positive
futurism’ of many public integral projects. IPS strove to embrace the Satanic as much as the Saintly, the Ragged as much as the Smooth, the Obscene as much as the Empathic, the Ambiguous as much as the Clear, the Socialist as much as the Conscious Capitalist, the Pop Cultural as much as the Spiritual, and Sacred Materialism as much as the Transcendental Ascent – finding Nonduality diaphanously radiant in all directions.

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/horror-spirituality-and-the

12. Structural Transformation. Freeing ourselves from as many metaphysical limitations as we can (which, of course, also means accepting the places where we cannot) goes beyond just the naive modern liberation from “populist group dogma.” The IPS forum was a place to grow beyond the metaphysical assumptions of grammar, perception, visionary experience and even self-experience. There is a profound hermeneutic strain of inquiry in this community and it not only calls basic experience into question but seeks the patterns that underlie those experiences. Just as we are not merely Capitalists because we understand the value of free markets neither are we Marxists because we understand the idea that “false consciousness” is generated in us by virtue of the external system (LR) in which we are embedded. The whole notion of ideology is a pertinent aspect of metaphysics for the thinker to investigate. And it is not merely Marx’s critique of socio-economics. It is also McLuhan’s critique of the forms of media. And Rifkin’s critique of the forms of thermodynamic energy production. All these (and more) habits which organize the material structure of society tend to create patterns of ideation that must be teased apart from the individual’s sense of self and the group’s feelings of belief in order to get at the authentic possibilities of human life. This is a recurrent concern of many prominent participants in the IPS forums and one example can be found in the discussion of integral energy:

http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/integral-energy-uniting-multiperspectives-on-our

13. States vs Stages. This question – both in terms of how we understand Wilber’s evolving positions and how we attempt to move beyond (or beside) them – moved like the wind through countless discussions. One of the most intellectually intensive was the following:

Deep Dialogue in Social Media Spaces: A Brief Experiment

A section in Integral Review’s
Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality
January 2019

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A Brief Experiment in Deep Dialogue in Social Media Spaces:
Orientation and Overview

Tom Murray

The Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality (IPS) forum(s) included a number of experiments with facilitation modalities, and some participating in IPS forums were also active in hosting or mediating other online spaces. Within integrally-informed theory and practice communities there is an, at least implicit, invitation to enact one's theory, by either "practicing what one preaches" so to speak, or by using the theory to reflect upon the writing, reading, or dialogue process itself. IPS was thus, in a way, a forerunner in the area of hosting technology-mediated forums that were not only about spirituality, consciousness, and philosophy, but self-aware about the ethical and performative questions of being and acting spiritually or ethically aware or conscious within the knowledge building process.

In light of this, we set out to gather a group of experts in the area of supporting "deep dialogue" in online spaces such as discussion forums and videoconferences. The hope was that doing so would generate some insights that were valuable in general. Below we also describe the goals, conceptual framing and process structure of the dialogues in case that is useful to others wanting to do something similar.

About a dozen experts agreed to participate in this project: Bonnitta Roy, Andrew Venezia, Hilary Bradbury, Layman Pascal, Marco Morelli, Heather Fester, Daniel Thorson, Penelope Whitworth, Geoff Fitch, Daniel Görtz, and Tom Murray (participant-facilitator). Bios for the participants are at the end of this document.
Participants were separated into two groups of about six, for two 2-hour Zoom video conference calls for each group (for a total of 4 calls). We also created an online discussion forum, hosted at Marco Morelli's Infinite Conversations website, for participants to reflect on the online discussions in between sessions. These discussions, and links to the recorded conversations, are available at www.infiniteconversations.com/c/commons/integralreview. In addition Andrew Venezia and Layman Pascal have penned reflections on their experiences, below in this article.

We invite readers of this journal to add their own thoughts about the process and related topics by going to www.infiniteconversations.com/c/integralreview. The idea here is to replicate a "fish bowl" face-to-face conversation structure, wherein a small group engages in conversation (in this case the "experts") which is first silently witnessed by a larger community, followed by opportunities for the larger community to be in dialogue about the experience.

Why dialogue? The following quotes describe the purpose and format of the experience, taken from text that Murray emailed to participants or potential participants, or from the Orientation page in the discussion forum. The goal was to gather a "small group of experts together" from within the broad community of the "integral diaspora" to "reflect on the emerging state of the art in ... facilitating or hosting online interviews or discussions forums."

The general theme is this: in these modern times of online video-conferences and hyper-text/social-media forums, how can such tools (existing or to-be-invented) be used in novel ways to support deep inquiry, collaborative meaning making, “knowledge building,” and “action inquiry” – with an integral/second tier/meta-modern sensibility? Also: how do we structure online interactions so that we support the "levels of consciousness" we like to talk about– how can we "walk the talk" as we talk?

You do not have to bring 'answers' to these questions – we are all trying to figure out how to host online conversations with radical depth and expansiveness. You are invited to bring questions, experiences (including abject failures, forehead-slapping epiphanies, slogs through the doldrums, etc.) to our conversations.

The orienting questions that we will allow to unfold and speak through us are:

1. What is "deep dialogue" to you? – i.e. What does it look and feel like to participate verbally in ways that source deeper or transpersonal layers of the self and the collective?
2. What are the possible results or benefits of this type of participation?
3. How might we support this type of dialogue in virtual spaces?

We can each hold appropriate expectations about what is possible in the very limited context of one or two calls–while still wondering "What is possible?" I will consider the dialogue a success if the majority of participants have even a single tiny new insight or realization (about anything). Or perhaps you will fall in love a little bit with one person you did not know. I also like how Bonnie Roy has framed a higher bar for some of her F2F groups: to generate insights emerging from the leading edge of human thought – that have never been spoken by anyone (regardless of how modest or trivial they may seem). Also, I won't
consider it a success unless there is some laughter among us. So I invite all to relax, sink in, lighten up, and do some serious play.

**Deep dialogue?** Because all of the participants have experience with both contemplative practices and contemplatively oriented dialogue processes, I did not try to pre-define what was meant by "deep dialogue," but left its meaning open to emerge within the conversation – but I did constrain the topic as follows.

We are focusing on open dialogue, which can be contrasted with things like debate, decision making, and interviews. We are focused a particular kind of dialog we could call deep dialog, that is informed by contemplative practice and possibly also by adult developmental theories and psychotherapeutic, transpersonal, and shadow-work models. We are here to ponder what is possible when people bracket out the normal functions of the ego and its social games and try to sense into something deeper, and do that as a collective, and see what emerges from that collective.

I trust that the "transpersonal" will manifest in its own way an advanced group like this. We will begin by talking about supporting deep dialogue and increasingly try to reflect on and embody the ideas we raise. My own meaning of "transpersonal" includes a tender vulnerability and willingness to participate openly, which hopefully ameliorates the spiritual bypass and cultism that can be associated with the term. But I also want to say: don't try to be "transpersonal" in the dialogue :-)!

**Process Details**

The facilitator's posted *Process Guidelines* for the discussions were:

- The usual considerations about being respectful to each other go without saying for group like this.
- Share the road. If you consider yourself someone who takes up a lot of space in discussions then consider scaling it back a bit; and if you consider yourself a quiet or shy person then assert yourself a bit more.
- Pretty much anything goes – feel free to take risks. I consider this a profanity friendly space in case you’re wondering.
- Silence is golden here, and I’ll facilitate a structure that allows for more silence in the middle phase.
- Tom will be trying to balance the roles of being a facilitator and participant. But I ask that we all take responsibility to co-facilitate here in terms of monitoring the energy the flow of things.

The first dialogue (for both groups) was lightly facilitated using a "U" structure, a process metaphor adopted from Otto Scharmer's "U Theory" (*Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges. The Social Technology of Presencing*, 2007). A full description of each of the possible steps is below, though these steps were guided with few words, and participants were not asked to keep track of the formal process or what phase they were in.
1. **Downloading** – intellectual discussion on what is known (mostly 3rd person, "single loop").
2. **Open mind** – including: suspending judgment of others in favor of curiosity; reflections on *us and our* discussion so far (2nd person, "double loop").
3. **Open heart** – including: reflection on one's own state, feelings, needs, and being (1st person, approaching "triple loop"); tuning in to experiences of rationality with individuals and the whole; allowing the emotional, perceptual, and imagistic/magical functions of the self to speak.
4. **Open Will** – a "bottom of the U" space of silence to allow for a "letting go" and "still point" of silent awareness and presence; supporting the "letting be" of releasing and allowing for a possible "letting come" of insights or images from the creative unconscious.
5. **Emerging** – moving gently from the silence into a possibly more "transpersonal" dialogue; gently brining in insights or images generated from the silence; while intending a "remaining in the moment" and "speaking from the heart" of conversational spaciousness.
6. **Energizing** – Allowing the conversation to become more intellectually active and reflective again; reflection and recap of what was learned in the entire experience, and how it affected one.
7. **Prototyping** – conclusions, decisions, and/or concrete steps or plans for moving forward, and how and when to evaluate success. This step is included for completeness RE Scharmer's model, but we did not plan to include it.

So much for planning. In the actual dialogues (dialogue #1 for both groups) I as facilitator was reluctant to squelch what seemed to be very engaged interactions, and the first three steps took up the bulk of the time. Because the participants were familiar with such group states, I was trying to allow for a natural and increasing infusion of spaciousness into the conversation, though in the end I did include a short period of formal silence followed by "emerging" reflection.

In all of the dialogues the 2 hours went by very quickly. The second dialogues were even less structured. Participants seemed to appreciate the invitation into the more spacious and relational modes in Dialogue #1, but also there was a general sense that they wanted to chew on the ideas more, so the second conversation (for both groups) was more free-form.

It was indeed a great honor and pleasure to be hosting such a wonderful group of individuals in coming together. We are in the process of considering whether to organize future dialogues with the same participants, or new configurations of participants.

**Reflections and Themes**

Andrew Venezia and Layman Pascal have penned essays in this Issue reflecting on their experiences in the dialogue groups. Below I will comment from a facilitator's perspective on some additional themes.

Overall my sense is that participants were engaged and enjoyed the conversation, and enjoyed engaging in a "generative space" with others, some of whom they were meeting for the first time. However, it also that case that there was little in the way of closure or feed-forward outcomes from the engagements (this is reflected in both Andrew's and Layman's contributions).
Readers are encouraged to listen to the dialogues (link above). Topics discussed included:

- Social grounding and immediate trust,
- Performance and performativity in social media,
- The progression of relational action logics,
- Transformative knowledge creation,
- Contagious yawning and being embodied while virtual,
- Allowing for dream-level content to emerge,
- Immersiveness and the end of "digital dualism,"
- Spontaneous unfolding of relational mystery,
- Relationally vs. insight,
- Technology and distopia,
- Endings, catastrophes, and grief.

**Theme #1: Facilitating facilitators.** It can be challenging to facilitate a group of "experts" on the topic of facilitation itself. One of my goals was to balance inviting in the exceptional expertise of the participants while avoiding an overly intellectualized or opinion-driven discussion. In embodying or practicing "what we preach" I wanted the participants to be on the edge of their knowing, dipping freely into the emergent co-created present. I specifically invited participants who had experience with "contemplative" and "deep" orientations to dialogue, so though I planned to occasionally nudge them toward such directions, but did not want to micro-manage or "lecture" on things they knew well. I also wanted to honor the significant process skills of participants and give them opportunities to sense into the flow of ideas and energy and co-participate in steering the boat. In the end I think I erred on the side of allowing for emergence, and some participants would have appreciated more structured discussion topics and a sense of concrete progress.

**Theme #2. Immediate Trust.** Before the conversations even began there was a lively text dialogue about trust and vulnerability in newly formed groups. One participant noted that "... it takes many hours to build the social capital and shared meaning before productive dialogue can happen..." While another posted "Maybe a starting question is How do you IMMEDIATELY enter into a trust situation? – without social bonding, territory claiming, attachment to identity...belonging needs, etc. Maybe that could be the meta-text/meta-cognitive awareness we all aspire to from the get go?"

**Theme #3. Rationality vs. insight.** A theme in text conversations following the first dialogue was the pros and cons of facilitating more spacious and relation modes of conversation, vs. allowing for more content-based dialogue and insight-generation. For some, slowing down a conversation to allow for more spaciousness, "presence," and emotional intimacy felt a bit awkward to contrived. For others, the type of deep dialogue we were advocating is not possible without taking the time to build relationships. This relates to the above theme RE whether a transpersonal type of "immediate trust" is possible in the right contexts-- i.e. a bypassing of the usual social relationship forming that allows for an efficient move into collective insight generation. My own judgment is that this particular group was able to skip some of those steps and enter quickly into a trusting space allowing for a degree of authenticity and vulnerable sharing.
As one participant pointed out, the stakes were not very high however. Our engagement did not include the types of difficult truth-telling or conflict resolution that (1) challenge groups who need to get real things done, and (2) can lead to deeper intimacy beyond the "fire" of shared dissonance and discomfort.

**Theme #4. Endings, catastrophes, and grief.** One thing that was striking to me was that, without any prompting and without having (yet) heard the other group's recording, in call #2 both groups veered into conversations about the dire straights of humanity. There were flavors of "here we are talking about abstract ideas but the world is in real trouble, what are the concrete, realistic things that people can do?"; and "will this technology we are talking about just take us into a dystopian hell of disembodied being and tech-materialistic narcissism?" I don't know what was in the air or in the news that week, but the discussion was thick with stark and serious questions the future. It allowed for rich dialogue about opening to grief and humility in the face of it all; and wondering whether the whole project of modern technology was, in the end, in service to humankind.

**Additional resources on deep dialogue.** Olen Gunnlaugson and others (including Andrew Venezia who appears in this Issue) organized a large on-line conference in 2017 called "The We-Space Summit" with over 150 contributors-- see https://www.thewespace.com. The online dialogues include many on themes related to "deep dialogue." Participants in our discussion were among them, and additional interviews featuring those participants can be found at:

- Bonnitta Roy's interviewed by Venezia on generative dialogue: https://www.dropbox.com/s/vaqgsufacntmd2a/we-space%20Bonnie.mp4?dl=0
- Andrew Venezia interviewed by Bonnitta Roy on We-space: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wqJ2ZOSOyM
- Andrew interviewed by Thomas McConkie McConkie on "(We)-Dreaming:" https://youtu.be/swcfECDEiEw
- Tom Murray interviewed by Venezia on Contemplative Dialogue Theories and Practices: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1nqV_B1rgmExMnsHdQU5FfgR9j1FF38q
- Bonnitta Roy, Mushin Schilling, Anne Caspari, and Tom Murray, interviewed by Andrew Venezia, on a panel discussion on Collective Insight Practices: https://drive.google.com/open?id=18lY6F0Vg4i9pYgs16P8t1S6leyJFcozR

In 2016 Gunnlaugson published a book titled *Cohering the Integral We Space: Engaging Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups* (available on Amazon.com). It includes chapters by Geoff Fitch and Tom Murray.

- Fitch's: "In, As, and Toward the Cosmic We," available at www.pacificintegral.com.

Papers on the topic by other of our dialogue participants include:

- Roy's "Open Group Practice: Eight Social Selves" at https://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/open-group-practice-eight-social-selves/
Reflection #1: More is Possible

Andrew Venezia

More is possible.

I find myself left with this feeling on this side of participating in these dialogues, after listening to the two I was not directly in, and after thinking about them and how to approach their central inquiry about communication and communities online, and their place in supporting deep dialogue and vice versa. Indulge me please: I will calm down and return to this.

More is possible: it is fitting that I’m writing these words, that they are abstracted from a sense of what I might actually mean as an articulating body, and as a heart-center of intelligence. Stripped of as much context as possible, and without narrowing down what it is I intend, I mean all possible meanings simultaneously, or at least quite a few.

I was happy to hear the work of Jean Gebser brought into the stream I did not participate in, as his sense of what Integral Consciousness is and entails invites this kind of transparency, which may start with a disorienting palimpsest of separate shifting contexts and meanings opening into each other and closing each other off, but which opens into a kind of simultaneity of consciousness beyond particularized or localized meaning. Gebser is a Virgil in this post-metaphysical comedy.

The fit of my writing these words then is ironic, and I am hoping that this irony relaxes into paradox, that this paradox might itself open into a polarity, and that this polarity might erupt from its tensions, a movement out that is at once an irruption, a ‘breaking-in’ of consciousness. Define, linear meaning, directed but only alive in your reading. The explicit as the beat of a boundless, knowing silence. Purpose without objective. Or, more to the point for the inquiry at hand, a transparency that does not balance surface with depth, or place them into relationship so much as it liquidates and electrifies. I’d like to offer that any notion of deep must include this transparency of a simultaneous but not amorphous depth-and-surface as the display of consciousness.

I commend Tom in his guidance of this inquiry, in allowing these tensions to live without trying to finally define what it is that we mean by ‘deep,’ giving us the opportunity to explore the question in a way that is not merely additive or combatative, and allowing us to practice even a resistance to our habitual ways of weaving voices and ideas in dialogue: novelty beyond mere combination or even exponential emergence. Calling back to the paradoxes we are untangling ourselves from in this sort of discussion, I mean a guidance that allows each moment to be a guide, each voice and pause and accident and glitch, each step and trip the utterly whole and incomplete voice of life, leading-itself: leading-(from to as for with by in among beyond below & all other relationships of possibility)-itself: leading-itself.
I can of course write an actual sentence, and as promised I will calm down and stop being so obtuse. I will try and unpack my agitation here more linearly, explicitly: Integral Consciousness, in Gebser’s sense, entails a radial break from its predecessor, which Gebser calls the Deficient Mental. We are living in this potential transition; we are emerging from—and so in a sense, invisibly bound by—what it is to be Mental. As Mental beings, we conceptualize this as a movement forward. A reaching-to-grasp, an overcoming. This kind of orientation can be seen in many of our acts of self-construction and presentation. We ‘do-to,’ and are formed and shaped in reaction to this doing-to even in the attempt not to. As discussed in the dialogue, (1st call, group 2), we’ve hacked the biological representative of this, our dopaminergic pathways, so powerfully as to be able to give us a little hit basically whenever we’d like. My five-year-old daughter knows the excitement of hearing the mailman come. We can make the mailman come just by looking at our phone.

We communicate this way as well—the postal metaphor is no accident. For many of us in this cultural milieu, dialogue means a kind of considered back-and-forth, the sharing of views, the receiving and listening to an-other, the possibility of an empathic alteration in our views, or at the least a coming-to-appreciation of the other’s being and meaning, and the exciting possibility of something genuinely emergent—something that could not be without dialogue. This understanding, this being-understood, this resonance and participatory emergence are also deeply wired into our biology and—particularly from our earliest, formative relationships—our identities and ways of being. All of this, at least as we currently conceptualize it, is predicated on a kind of exchange, a back-and-forth (or co-participation in a group) in which separate beings come together to transfer something, whether information, opinions, or energy, a process that has spatial and temporal metaphorical elements in its conceptualization. Integral Consciousness does not entail a rejection of any of this, but it is also not a result of this activity, nor is it bound by the same spatial and temporal constructions. It’s not an outcome of an exchange or process. Or: it is not possible to express this communicatively, symbolically. It cannot come from the outside-in. Clearly there is some purpose to explicating, to communicating, to attempt to understand and be understood, otherwise anything I wrote would simply be drivel—I am, after all, trying to express, understand, and articulate something here myself. (It’s drivel, sure, but hopefully not simply so.) My sense—what I am trying to articulate here—is that to the extent that we inevitably, and over-and-over again, fall into the kind of self-organizational mechanisms that Gebser describes as Mental, is the extent to which our rich, nourishing, fascinating and enlivening dialogues, present a kind of distraction. I do mean ‘inevitable,’ so this is not really a critique: the practice of these dialogues at a sophisticated level seems to me to involve the continual discovery of our own unacknowledged ways of shaping our identities and activities, and releasing them (which can be affirming them) in favor of something else subtle and intuited and nonetheless real.

As an example of what I am saying, I will try and lay out one of these from my own experience of the dialogue. In the second discussion I participated in between Tom, Bonnitta Roy, and myself (Hilary had not yet joined though would later,) we began to talk about the recent and discouraging climate report. As we did, with Bonnie’s helpful poking, I became aware that the powerful anxiety that I entered the call with was reflective of my own reasons for participating in the dialogue in the first place: I have experienced a qualitatively different kind of being-human in certain intersubjective practices and experiences, and feel like if we are to find ourselves with any semblance of civilization surviving our moment of crises, we will have done so through and in the
kinds of consciousness these practices have initiated in my experience. I want Integral Consciousness to save the world. “I” want that – my own sense of egoic identity is constructed in parallel with that projected outcome, and the anxiety of its not happening, with all the projected consequences of that – the massive suffering that would entail globally and locally: I have a five-year-old daughter, and I do not want to see her die of starvation, or perhaps worse to endure protracted years of crisis that end in misery. To the extent that I am attached to that desire and its attendant fears, to the extent that what “I” am is comported in relationship to that desire – precisely to that extent will I be inflexible and ineffective in my response to this moment. I can release the attachment in recognizing it, or at the least notice it, and find a kind of freedom and liberation. This liberation is a kind of release, even if a micro-release of a certain kind of tension, a freedom of life giving itself in response to the moment, and without attachment to a kind of outcome that is still hoped-for. The world is not in need of saving, and I will still participate in this life as wholeheartedly as I can.

What does this have to do with the particular inquiry around Deep Dialogue and online communities? In a certain sense, not much. My assumption here, from listening to the discussions, is that Deep Dialogue for most of us participating, involves a sense of mutual understanding, of being able to effectively express our own and receive others’ expressions, while in a reflective inquiry about how we are participating that allows for surprise and emergence – to engage from a place that allows for the simultaneous possibility of waking and dreaming consciousness, and the consciousness of self-reflexive awareness. We do this, as anything and as mentioned, for reasons that we are sometimes aware of and sometimes unaware. I orient to this current piece of writing not as a way of responding to the initial inquiry, but as a way of looking at the whole process, including how it is that we responded to that initial inquiry. I should note that it didn’t seem that we were often responding to the question directly. I’m not even sure at this point what that inquiry was, even though I asked Tom and heard it from him several times. It never quite stuck. Rather than that being a problem, I think it’s again a reflection of skillfulness – the point of this, as I take it at least, was not to generate an answer to a specific question, but to foster a kind of dialogue that allowed us to bring something forth that was not present before: to allow that ambiguity and unclarity to call forth surprise.

This written cap of the whole endeavor is in some ways the least dialogical element of them all: I am writing as an individual, and these are my interpretations and takes – I do not pretend to be accurately summarizing or representing anyone else’s position here. In another sense, as it takes the entirety of the process as its starting point, and comes as a response from listening and considering all of the words spoken and written through the whole process, it comes as a response to everything said and unsaid – if you participated in the dialogue and do not hear at least an echo of some of your words and intentions, I’ve probably not done my job very well. I am trying most to honor the sense of animation and engagement in these discussions – whatever it is that is important here, something matters; something brings us to the edge again and again. This something, this animating force, this willingness to state clearly what is most dearly true – and to be ever and sometimes painfully incomplete and even wrong, this I hope to do justice to.

So, given the above, here are a few of the core generative tensions as I picked up on them that we seemed to be navigating in the dialogue, along with my sense of how these tensions might animate an Integral Consciousness.
Deep & Surface

What might we find in the depths? ‘Deep’ is one of the foundational myths and metaphors of our modernity, our egoity, our individuality. One of Western Civilization’s oldest surviving myths, The Epic of Gilgamesh, describes in part the quest for immortality, sought for as a plant that grows only at the bottom of the deepest lake. That constantly striving, constantly diving, that move to get, justify, capture, validate – it shares the same architecture as the need to be (individually) understood, to find one’s place in community as one’s own self, whether that be in relationship, or society– or life itself, reflected in what is deathless. Not a refusal of depths in a return to the surface, nor a weaving or connecting or communicating the depths with the surface, my sense of what we’re bringing forward as a relinquishment of the striving for depth is the possibility that depth is an action, depth is the striving, and on the other side of that striving (note: not the achievement or fulfillment of the striving) is a simultaneous inexpressibly obvious depth-in-surface.

The drive towards an experience & The open-ended exploration of experiencing.

This is, I think properly, a subset of the above, or at least simply a change of clothes for the above, the paradox perhaps best expressed as: we are all participating in this dialogue driven by a strong desire, one which shows up in a diversity of expressions in each participant and which animates each of our lives, and yet for this desire to find satisfaction and fulfillment, we must be willing to radically let go of, not the drive itself, but our attachment to it. The experiences are crucial, just as in personal meditation, but our attachment to them makes us blind to that which is inexperienceable. We will always and ever have our ways of bringing the past to the present, and the future. We can always let go of them with one hand and lean into everything that is not.

Form and Openness

But even creating a kind of form around the above (say, ‘giving the instruction to “lean into the deep yearning of the moment and release its expressions”’)) will end up stale without a relinquishment into an ungraspable openness that cannot be formalized. Neither can we simply resist form: it’s woven into everything we do, and we fall simply into our conditioning and habits by saying ‘no form.’ We can tear habits up this way, drastically see through them, but we can also be trapped by the deepest and darkest habits we bring to life. By this point you may be expecting what I am going to say: the way is not to balance form and openness merely, or be aware of them, though this is a crucial start: the way is to relinquish their distinction as being anything other than a creative, skillful, conceptual activity. Content & Context, or Content & Process I fold in here as well.

Action & Consideration

“We have to be doing this while we write a Constitution,” Geoff Fitch (non-verbatim) expressed at one point, which may have been the conceptual highlight of these dialogues for me. I was hesitating participating in a second round because I have been drawn to these practices in recent years where they are most explicitly tied to some kind of action in the world, some kind of human organizational capacity – as noted, I (have) want(ed) Integral Consciousness to save the world. Again, the key here would be the articulated realization of the inseparability of infinite possibility
and definitive action. Love by any name pliable enough to appear through us as full-throated red-blooded dry abstraction.

I connect this also with ‘explicit verbal communication & other modes of performance, such as drama.’ It is impossible to abstract the articulation of verbal communication from the articulations of the bodily being. We have perhaps been trained to stifle the movement of our bodies and souls and hone them into the forms of our particular cultures, but if the torrent of life has been loosed without negating this ability to rationalize, would its result look all that different to an alien anthropologist than a quiet, engaged, joyful conversation? Something in which particular meanings are used as paint brush strokes on a canvas of consciousness which is itself obvious meaningless/meaning-full shining through each gesture?

**Trust, familiarity, vulnerability & Habit, formality, conditioning**

Our email exchanges in the group that would be participating in the dialogues revolved around this initially, a theme that in the fleshiest level seems to me to be a reflection of the more abstract Depth and Surface polarity, which is accidentally why I’m using them to bracket this section. In trust I may be myself – which may include a very non-vulnerable relaxation into what is most familiar and comfortable, but which may also include the safety to explore in a vulnerable way. In habit I and we have lived as a success so far, but the complexes of habits I call myself may well present as a wall disallowing a liberated-coming-into-being. Who am I and how do I fit? How do I honor the support and challenge of my otherness in society, and the support and challenge of my own, onliness, uniqueness? Speak without overpowering, listen without becoming absorbed? Perhaps no question has more surreptitiously animated our past few centuries, and perhaps no dilemma must more urgently blossom into a still only intuited way-of-being-as-the-world-together. A walking talking interbeing of love, fully free in service. A conscious obviousness that we are not only selves sharing in experience of this moment, but this moment experiencing as our self?

I have tried to articulate these polarities not as oppositional to each other – I don’t think they are (Depth vs. Surface, e.g.) Rather, they are complementary – each polarity emerges from our ways of conceptualizing and so shaping experience. Each of these polar complements are in some sense a ‘child’ of our tendency to dualize experience conceptually. That dualization is the hallmark of Mental Consciousness in Gebser, and I have structured this short paper around his work, and my interpretation of it, because as noted I think he is our Virgil for this moment of crisis and comedy.

I can not abstract myself fully from this being which I am as anything other than a loving play. I am not possible without this discussion, without this intention imprinted conscious electricity that allows form and meaning to synchronize across the globe, without the fibres of the optics. I am spontaneous and edited – I am myself and a woven collection of voices, distant in time and space but here. My mind lives in Ghent in Belgium, even as it is revealed to be non-local and a-temporal in a recorded and virtual discussion. I write in New Jersey, I wrote in Belgium, I spoke in Ghent and spoke in Amsterdam, and was heard in various places in the New World and wherever you are now. I speak from nowhere because I am heard everywhere. This voice on the imagination of paper, where is it now, where could it be but the source of your very being?
We notice with less effort, having created this artifact of our consciousness as a global network of communication, what has always been possible. This all exists simultaneously, the electronic and digitalized nature of our infrastructure, brought about through our ingenious perfect rational translatability of information, allows a coordination and communication which is not merely linear or abstract. Too often perhaps (and for me!) this nonlinearity breaks down into a kind of pre-linearity – an everything-all-over-the-place. It can also foster – I think it is fostering – a kind of radical post-linearity, the kind wherein that phrase ‘post-linearity’ is not ironic.

Reflection #2: Every Procedure is Creative

Layman Pascal

Every procedure is creative.

That’s where we start but how far can we go? Gathering together in our flesh or online is a procedure that evokes a particular set of potentials. We cannot perfectly determine how much we are boxed in by electronic communication tools or how much we are set free by the assumed naturalness of shared body space. Nevertheless, we are intuitively certain that some kind of amazing phenomenon can emerge from clusters that share information and energy with each other – just as lightning bursts forth from charged particles gathering in the dark clouds. Powerful. Sublime. Emergent.

Yet lightning is deeply ambiguous. It is as likely to be harmful or useless as it is full of glowing electrical promises. Lacking clear goals, sufficient forms and a resilient apparatus for receiving, storing and utilizing this power we have, at best, only a brief and beautiful disruption of ordinary consciousness.

I love these delicious flashes but I suffer from the fact that more is possible.

Many of my own favorite & most profound “peak experiences” have occurred in powerful interpersonal spaces of unpredictable intimacy. At times I have played the role of conductor and initiator for such orchestral triumphs but their lasting impact and the mechanisms which distinguish the exalted group moments from the merely decent events are still a mystery. Nonetheless, I think these are very important experiences. There is an obvious sense of emerging significance and transcendent possibilities implicit in both the highest and most modest of such shared encounters. Beyond that it even feels as we are collectively on the cusp of very practical insights that can be glimpsed only through the kaleidoscopic prism of the multidimensional, transpersonal supra-heart. It feels like there are tools at hand for the illumination of self, the awakening of love & the cultivation of a planetary wisdom-civilization by methods that incorporate but are not limited to the linear or technological mind. Great. I’m down with that shit.

However I remain deeply concerned about the most appropriate structures necessary to receive, utilize and transmit the curious wisdom of such “events”. While I privately rejoice in these moods, I cannot help suspect that even a wonderfully open context shared by sensitive, intelligent and well-meaning individuals might create only a fascinating and admirable puddle. And I don’t mean to disparage admirable puddles! The fragrant ethos of uniquely golden liquid and rose-scented
breezes that flow from the background of one engaged participant to another and another and all around and between into the generative dance of the anti-gravitational hive is pure and clean water for a thirst heart. MY thirst heart!

*I'm down with that shit.*

But still ... suppose we are trying to give birth?

The newborn creature we wish to unfold from our collective vagina may be construed, on the one hand, as a potential answer to a real-world conundrum or else as an emerging, rising or descending transpersonal intelligence that enfolds us into a deep intimation of shared meaningfulness. Is it a boy or a girl? Is it human or animal? Either is wonderful. In any case, however, we wish to birth a fully vibrant and functional organism – not merely a sac of mortal organs in a muddled heap.

We absolutely require a good skeletal structure. An intricate, robust and mobile skeletal structure specifically adapted to allow this particular creature to thrive in a very particular environment beset by all kinds of chaos and surprises. Without an adequately hard structure the soft miracles may perish after a few moments of glorious breathing and vanish from the world. So let us not mistake a miscarriage for a successful birth merely because of their many common features!

Despite the experiential success and learning opportunities provided by the dialogues I think we must consider them to have been, somehow, insufficient in terms of structure...

Our group events were certainly a neat experiment. Most of us have tried other similar experiments and many of us enjoy social-improvisational practices of shared sensing, creative languaging and full-spectrum mutual affirmation. In a way it is precisely because we have a lot of this experience that we should be able to loosely predict both the possibilities and limitations likely to occur in even very high-level, depth-oriented group exchanges. The question of how to build upon the success and bypass the limitations is a wisdom we might hope for the experience itself to provide but it’s ability to provide that intelligence may be limited by the same factors. We are left with guesses and intuitions...

Two of the most common guesses found in the self-reflective discussions seem to revolve around the notion that we are initially inhibited by a combination of egoic social anxiety & instrumental reason. Our hope is get beyond these by a combination of brave sharing, progressive familiarity and availability to subtle, nonlinear prompts from various aspects of our whole being. Sounds good. Is the premise reliable? I fear it may not be.

We have an almost erotic fascination with self-organizing complexity – a force which we wish to collectively disinhibit by folding our subtle mutual experience of each other back into common discussion through synchronized presencing, prompted sharing and the playful articulation of half-reasonable images that emerge within us from the circumstances of the exchanges. This plausible strategy is undermined to some extent by the possibility that very similar procedures might lead to our own terribly clever version of “mob mentality”. What I mean to say is that we have no reason
to suppose that we are not accessing the lowest or least relevant form of our collective wisdom potential through our tactical attempts to elude anxiety and linear thought.

It seems to me that the problem is not that the context of instrumental, technical and goal-oriented reason leads toward a foreclosing of unplanned emergence but rather that the quasi-romantic attempt to disinhibit the unspecified panoply of inner functions moves us away from the realistic problem of accessing the correct parts that should be contributing spontaneously and the correct structures which can recognize, receive and utilize whatever is produced by the sharing of the proper subcomponents of ourselves. Even the idea of “just exploring” and “learning whatever is there to be learned” and “feeling it out” are actually particular goals which must be indexed to guesses about the particular methods of sharing likely to produce that kind of satisfying mutual field outcome – rather than some other kind of satisfying mutual field outcome. Spontaneously availability among reasonable competent and interesting participants is not an alternative to instrumental methods but rather a specific case which suffers from not being specified. How are we to know whether our desire to find deepen and more elaborate dimensions of the experience is not being stymied by our strategic open-endedness?

This is a cautionary note. It should not imply there was no success. As Hilary observed, following the first session of Group 1, there is a “relational action logic” movement through the event which migrates toward increased humor and multidimensionality. Something changes and grows. This occurs over the course of one session and, to some degree, is picked up in subsequent discussions. We just don’t know what ... or how much ... or how to do it better.

So here we are collectively before the problem of transformative knowledge creation in groups. The first thing that knowledge must do is to draw a distinction between its own possibilities. Are we elaborating a particular knowledge or the production of a shared transpersonal identity? In integral terms are we working primarily in the Lower Left or Lower Right quadrants of this affair?

We can see the negotiation between these two zones occurring within the discussion groups. And we can speculate as to whether or not this indicates that a “transpersonal whatever” is addressing itself to this very question – the question of how transpersonal methodology applies similarly and differently to shared experience and to shared production of solutions, effects, etc.

Although both groups demonstrate the arising of this whole consideration, we can also see a kind of division of labour in which Group 1 leans toward the LL and Group 2 leans into the LR. The distinction is slight but noticeable. Over the course of their sessions the first group remains, arguably, more attentive to the methodology of emotional engagement, open-endedness, folding in unplanned subtle prompts from their own interiors, engaging in very open feeling responses to each other, etc. And the second group, while being convivial and open, attended a great deal more to the problems and potentials of the procedures and technology being used. Thus the mutuality & the media together formed an inquiry both within in each group and spread across the two groups. And it can be construed as resonating with the first major distinction that integrative metatheories need to make about collective action – the intersubjective/interbehavioral distinction.

In my observation (possibly privileged as I was a member of both groups in different sessions) the first group seems to have paid a lot of attention to a shift from anxiety, instrumental logic and
mental storytelling toward mutual ease, sensing and a more nebulous, spontaneous mood. This strikes me as a process necessary primarily for the production of a common feeling or identity and not so much for understanding how a group, situated within a given techno-cultural environment can be turned to addressing particular questions. Instead there was a great deal of focus on authenticity, on surprise and upon the willingness to learn. An attentiveness to novel arisings and interpersonal commentary. A sense of play. The element of performance is strong here – both in terms of pretense and in terms of playful enactment. Bonnie referred to this aptly as a transparent performance of people being relational-aware-reflexive.

While this may seem initially like a very general and open place for a group to start, it can be seen in hindsight as a particular approach leading toward a particular set of creative outcomes. There is an interest about what must be shared in order to deepen and how our emotion enables or disables that – and a favoring, in some respects, of those who are willing to share the most or affirm the complex sensitivity of others with the most clarity. It was as if an eye were looking, looking, looking for pathways by which more diverse energies could be folded into the richness of the mutual touching field.

Conversely, the second group seems to have operated in a more objective fashion. That is not praise or blame but rather an observation about where the combined intelligence of the event, however well evoked or not, seemed to be characteristically moving – as if to pose itself a question in that domain. There is less gushing and laughing in this group and more concern about how we are showing up to each other through the digital medium, the historical moment and the cultural and practical dynamics in which each person is embedded. Questions start to arise about the limits and potentials of the medium by which the interaction is occurring. Ideas of ritual and medicine appear. Attention moves toward structure and suggests possible routes toward a schematic context in which the right kind of attention can be brought forward.

Interestingly, the second group ends up, by the end of its second session, in a very pessimistic place. Not depressive – but collectively embracing the tragedy of the world, history and technology. The first group is, especially in the first session, bolstered into a sort of optimism by the degree of personal sharing and emergent interest into how to feel together.

I don’t know that answers were produced. However, I am extending my own experience of the collective pool by reinscribing my own critiques as if they were the very heart of the event. This movement duplicates the style of self-reflective, transparent enfolding that feeds the transpersonal event/entity by turning our responses about the vortex... back into fuel for the vortex. Thus, my initial sense that we have inadequately distinguished between LL and LR procedures (and treated very specific methods as if they were very general methods of discourse) now occurs in this present writing as the suggestion that the “vortex” itself is expressing itself in the form of inquiring into this very question. As, perhaps, the preliminary movement of evolving itself into being as an integral-level transpersonal we-space. It remains the case that there is some crucial difference between, say, a musical jam session and the kind of profoundly effective group diagnostic procedures that used to feature so prominently on episodes of House, MD.

That means the difference between the internal experience of mutual flow as the marker for success in terms of group emergence AND the external fact of getting a verifiable result even if
that means keeping the participants agitated, conflict-ridden and more autonomous. Not that it is necessary that negative experience produces objective results but that it does require an approach to the method of evoking collective intelligence that is indexed to efficacy in a particular context rather than the depth and wholeness of the experience of the participants.

Our hope for collective practices is that we can combine analysis and intuition in such a way that we can produce enough mutually valuable shared feeling and connectivity while also learning keys to the procedural dynamics by which particular forms of knowledge can be generated appropriate to various questions and contexts anywhere in the cosmos. We hope that part of the answer enters with ourselves and another part of the answer flows back out, toward us, from a familiar but alien presence that may be our shared soul. These dialogues were a series of probes into electronically mediated, integral-level embodied collectivity. One possible interpretation is that “we” and “each of us” conspired to enact a version of an inquiry whose resolution may stand at the beginning of a higher and deeper understanding of how to engender and utilize such spaces. It wasn’t a failure but more is definitely possible. And I’m down with that shit.

Participant Bios

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Lead person in convening the global Action Research Community for those interested in action oriented, transformations research. She leads the AR+ Foundation, is editor in chief of Action Research Journal & Jubilee Professor at Chalmers U. She's asking how can our inquiry/science be more helpful to communities as we confront our sustainability crises (and how to deal with our inherited power structures that stymie people's contributions)?! Link to online bio: [https://actionresearchplus.com/meet-co-lab-stewards/](https://actionresearchplus.com/meet-co-lab-stewards/)

**Heather Fester**

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Heather teaches creative writing and composition courses in the First-Year Rhetoric and Writing program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. She holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing from Bowling Green State University and an MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics from Naropa University in Boulder, and she has taught and administered in college composition programs in some capacity for more than 15 years. Before UCCS and Naropa, Heather directed the Center for Writing and Scholarship at the California Institute of Integral Studies in the Bay Area. Also a certified coach, Heather assists others with their writing and facilitates a process for overcoming obstacles and fulfilling their unique visions. She is currently an event organizer for the 48th annual Jean Gebser Society conference. She has also facilitated an online forum for a reading group linked to the Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality Facebook page.

**Geoff Fitch**

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Geoff Fitch is a coach, trainer, and facilitator of growth in individuals and organizations, and a creator of transformative learning programs. He is a founder of Pacific Integral, where was instrumental in the development of the Generating Transformative Change program, which has been delivered on three continents and in its 29th cohort. Through these programs, he has researched and developed novel approaches to individual and collective growth, and has designed and
facilitated dozens of residential learning retreats. He has been exploring diverse approaches to cultivating higher human potentials for over 25 years, including somatic and transpersonal psychology, mindfulness, innovation and creativity, leadership, integral theory, and collective intelligence. Geoff also has over 30 years experience in leadership in business. He holds a master’s degree in Transpersonal Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and B.S. in Computer Science, magna cum laude, from Boston University, and has additional studies jazz music, philosophy, and management.

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Layman Pascal
Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him – this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress – He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.

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Penelope is an integral and transpersonal psychotherapist who has
been practicing for 22 years. In addition to being a psychotherapist,
she is also a neurofeedback practitioner and certified holistic/
functional health coach. She works with a wide variety of issues,
from the more "normal" (trauma, eating disorders, addictions,
depression, anxiety, relationship issues) to the more
unusual (spiritual emergence/emergency and complex/
chronic illness). She has been facilitating online discussion groups
(a couple dozen of them) in the areas of spirituality, holistic health,
and Integral Theory, for the last 10 years, including The Integral
Group on Facebook.
Section on Jordan Peterson's Treatment of Spirituality, Religion, Archetypes, and Metaphysics

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Introduction to the Peterson Section, by Tom Murray

Jordan Peterson, a recently prominent public intellectual, is known for his writings, recorded lectures, and social media commentaries on a wide variety of topics. He is most cited for his libertarian-leaning views on hot-button social and political issues related to political correctness and identity politics. Less discussed is his body of work on archetypes and the depth psychology of religion, which is mainly focused on Christianity. This is the area that we focus on in this special issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality, inviting contemplation and dialogue away from the steaming swamp-areas of Petersonian controversy, and into a, hopefully, more measured and nuanced and less ideologically cast territory.

It is in this territory that Peterson draws from an interesting mix of traditional narratives, while maintaining a modern scientific perspective, and in addition being acutely aware of the limitations of rational thought, reductive theorizing, and language itself, that post-modern scholars uncovered. His expertise in archetypal modes of cognition allows for a respectful treatment of, not only "spiritual," but centrally "religious" metaphysical themes, while still allowing for a post-metaphysical attitude.

A charismatic lecturer loved by his students but also known as an aggressive debater, Peterson's main public face before 2017 consisted of his little-known 1999 book Maps of Meaning, which synthesized his background in clinical and theoretical psychology, his study of Jungian archetypes and human meaning-making, and his studies of the conditions leading ordinary individuals to participate in atrocities such as state-sponsored genocide.

For the reader who has not heard of Peterson, there is not space here to summarize his scholarship, opinions, or recent notoriety, but an internet search will yield a bounty of positive and negative perspectives on him (and see the links below). We can summarize the context by saying that Jordan Peterson is both a person – a clinical psychologist and Professor of Psychology at Toronto University, and a phenomena – a personality that has gone viral on social media, stirring up controversy equally in every corner of the socio-political landscape. He has over a million social media followers, and possibly as many detractors, and has attracted a tsunami of attention from cultural commentators, pundits, and everyday social media trolls that is possibly unprecedented for a public intellectual.
What is fascinating, more than his ascendency in the public eye, is how he manages to alternately delight and infuriate segments of both the right and the left. He has become a lightning rod for the fissures and ambiguities in the contemporary "culture wars," with his popularity shedding light on the contemporary reshuffling of social and political categories. He is also said to be among the most misjudged and misappropriated public figures, with some on the left casting him as alt-right, and some on the right casting him as a left-sympathizing radical.

We chose to invite commentaries on the Peterson in this special issue because, as we said, he is a currently prominent public intellectual who has interesting opinions on religion and spirituality from an arguably post-metaphysical position, but also largely because he has also been a controversial figure within the larger "integral diaspora." Though, over recent decades, various figures and topics have been the source of robust diversity of opinion among the integrally-informed, the Peterson phenomena seems to be unique in 2018 as a topic which split us between those who love him and hate him. Thus, the Peterson phenomenon serves as an interesting point of departure for clarifying our own views on key topics. Various alternative opinions on this topic can be found through a Google search of "Jordan Peterson integral developmental," and include podcasts and essays by David Fuller, Jeff Salzman, Jonathan Rowson, Hanzi Freinacht, Ken Wilber, Corey Devos, and David Long, and discussions on the IPS Facebook site. That being said, in this Issue we eschew the usual areas of controversy and public reaction here and focus on his work on religious archetypes.

This Special Issue of Integral Review contains three essays/commentaries on the Jordan Peterson phenomena as it related to postmetaphysical spirituality: by Brendan LaChance, Andrew Venezia, and Layman Pascal.

In keeping with the tone of the IPS forum, our goal for the section of this Issue on Jordan Peterson was include a dialogic element, in which each of the authors had an opportunity to comment on the essays of the others. Those comments are included.

Note also that the next (mid-2019) issue of Integral Review will include an essay by Jonathan Rowson titled "Twelve Perspectives on Jordan Peterson: An Antidote to Allergies and Infatuations" (which deals with topics other than archetypes and metaphysics).

For those interested in Peterson, information can be found at https://jordanbpeterson.com. Suggested video lecture and podcast interviews include:

- Debate between Peterson and Ronald de Sousa: "Can we Live Without the Sacred?"  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zCP9mW0GH4 (51 min)
- Sam Harris & Jordan Peterson in Vancouver 2018 (Bret Weinstein moderating):  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1oaSt60b0o (2 hr 6 min)
- Clip from Rubin Report "Jordan Peterson Discuss Sam Harris' View On Religion:"  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYQ48t4C8U (14 min)
- Jordan Peterson vs Susan Blackmore "Do we need God to make sense of life?"  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syP-OtdClho (47 min)
- Peterson's "The Bible, Symbol and Identity, Part I":  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFt8mc1KG34 (1 hr 02 min)
Emptiness and the Metaphysics of Jordan Peterson, by Andrew Venezia

*There are no things, nor are there processes.*
Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche

Before the excitement of the last years, a friend of mine sent me a video of a wiry, agitated, energetic Canadian psychology professor talking about how the dictates of survival shape our biological interfaces with our environment – how we physiologically and chemically construct perception and experience. Dr. Jordan Peterson would, of course, become an exemplar of our polarized political climate, someone few people had no opinion on. It was not at this point obvious that this was going to happen.

When I sat down to begin writing this paper, I had the notion that this polarization was a reaction – positive and negative – to a kind of inflexibility in Peterson’s metaphysics, a valorization of the individual, though as you will see, my argument began to take a different shape. Peterson is in any case an interesting illustration of the tension between the stances we affirm and believe to be real, and that which we do and cannot recognize as being a stance, a position. I will illustrate this by looking at Peterson’s metaphysics in the light of emptiness, and the possibilities of a post-metaphysical orientation.

Peterson’s metaphysics

The following paragraphs represent my interpretation of Peterson from watching and listening to the entirety of his Maps of Meaning lectures, his series on the Bible, and other odd bits of media both about and published by him, critical, neutral, and positive. I am simplifying for brevity, but I do not intend to distort or comment on these metaphysics here. As I see them, the key starting points in Peterson’s metaphysics of individual and society are: 1) one is born into society, and 2) life entails suffering. Humans are social, and are born inescapably into a culture and society. Life entails suffering – it is our existential condition – and so 1) no society is (or could be) perfect; 2) societies (at any scope) will tend to decay and become corrupt; and 3) each individual will be confronted with this suffering and the brokenness of their society.

Our condition – suffering – is inescapable. *Accepting* our condition, contending with it, is voluntary, and shapes the process of maturation. It lies with each individual to embrace the condition of our being and to make a meaningful life despite it. Meaning must always be snatched from the jaws of suffering – life can and *must* be redeemed. This is *voluntary*, meaning one can simply acquiesce to suffering and the social status quo, and it *comes at great potential risk*. This risk is due both to unavoidable conflict with existing power structures defending themselves, and because one’s identity is always carved out of this suffering; to undertake the task is to invite psychological and social crucifixion. It also comes with vast potential reward. Those who are able to overcome the social order and their own selves to return to their ‘rightful place’ create the new social order – they earn power.

Having won power, one may by definition do with it as one pleases. A just ‘king’ uses his power – that is, molds the social order – in the service of his society’s wellbeing. An unjust king uses
power to defend his own position, and accrue greater wealth and power. Power itself is a-moral. One can assume power from within the more or less corrupt social structure. If one has earned it justly, however, power can also be used justly. No matter how just any one king is, the task of reckoning absolutely with life’s suffering is near impossible, and becomes harder and no longer worth the risk when one’s (and awareness of one’s subjects’) suffering is assuaged with the comforts of being in power. And so, even a just society will decay, become decadent and corrupt, and the cycle begins anew.

In short: it is the individual’s duty and responsibility to regenerate the just social order, and this regeneration is the process of individuation. That this is possible even though difficult makes this vision hopeful.

The Buddha, and emptiness

You might argue that the story of the Buddha fits or could be fit into this account quite seamlessly. The Buddha is born into an all-but-perfect environment, the son of a king who ensures that he is exposed to none of life’s sufferings early on. He accidentally encounters this suffering, inducing a crisis of Being, leading him to renounce his kingdom, take up the path of asceticism, and eventually renounce even this as ultimately useless. Soon after he attains liberation, upon which point he takes his rightful place as the ‘awakened one’ and regenerates society through his teaching.

This is the mythical story of the Buddha – but it’s not what the Buddha actually accomplished, and neither is Peterson’s account of becoming an individual what the Buddha taught. The Buddha accomplished and taught emptiness, which has an entirely different relationship to suffering (and metaphysics) than Peterson’s existential approach. For this paper, I’ll consider the doctrines of emptiness, ‘no self,’ and interdependent arising as interrelated enough to be exchangeable, and will be using conceptual emptiness, a kind of emptiness, as a metonymy for all three, though there are of course important nuances distinguishing them.

In short, conceptual emptiness means that no object has any essential substance – no thing is ‘real-as-such.’ No objects have any final, locatable, or essential reality, in and of themselves, but are rather products of the mental process of conceptualization. Objects means here both ‘abstract thought’ notions such as ‘Justice’ or ‘Winnebago,’ and also objects in the sense of physical, material reality, like, 'this apple,' or ‘that Winnebago, parked there.’ It further includes more complex interrelated objects such as ‘Capitalism’ or ‘The Russian Navy,’ and experiences, such as ‘this feeling of bliss/pain.’ There is no humanity without dirt and trees and sunlight; there is no thing that will or even can endure through time and space. Time and space themselves are conceptual activities, and so empty. This emptiness extends to and is really most crucially about what most people never consider to be a conceptual activity: their very own self, their identity.

This is not as total a negation as most people fear, nor as relativistic. You exist – as the irreducible entirety of reality, which is awake, and empty. Every ‘thing’ else (including this ‘irreducible entirety’) is like a character in a play, a self-aware photon on the screen of the magically displaying movie that is life. A figment of a dream, momentary and elusive. An illusion. Not ‘unreal,’ just ‘real as a dream is.’
Within Buddhism there exist mountains of discourse on this. There is no single definable emptiness or accounting for it. Nonetheless, there is a strong tradition of acting skillfully in the world from the realization of emptiness; in some lineages ‘evincing the realization of emptiness’ and ‘acting skillfully’ are identical. This is to say the apparent paradox in the bodhisattva vow – to liberate all sentient beings while recognizing that there are no sentient beings – is a limit of conceptualization, a result of the mind’s work. Emptiness is neither nihilism nor moral relativism.

**Implicit and explicit metaphysics**

One could view emptiness as a kind of metaphysical truth. And yet, emptiness is not a positive metaphysics, not best thought of as a metaphysical truth about some reality. It is realization about how our body-mind functions in generating and responding to conceptual reality – and liberation from this activity. It is a ‘negative’ metaphysic, the possibility of a post-metaphysics.

Metaphysics, as I’m using it, has both an explicit sense, in what we acknowledge to be so, and an implicit sense, that which forms the basis of one’s way of being, which must be the case for beliefs and actions to be coherent, but which are necessarily not avowed consciously. A way of acting and doing that one cannot yet name. Without a clearly grounded sense of emptiness, one will always be ‘porting’ unacknowledged metaphysics into one’s account of reality – or simply, what matters, what is important to do and pay attention to.

Becoming aware of some prior implicit metaphysical liberates possibilities of being, whether in a structural, historical way, or in a specific situation. We see how whatever it was that we were holding onto was constraining our possibilities for action, our very being and engagement with the world. We also – becoming aware of more and more implicit metaphysics – see that any articulation or position of metaphysical truth could never be final – in fact, must be provisional, situational, creative, relational/communicative, and skillful, at least in attempt (I will use skillful as a metonymy for this list for the rest of this paper to avoid repeating it ad nauseum.) This mode is inquiry, and itself provides a sort of direction. In inquiry, we are continually discovering that which we believe in order to assay its skillfulness, and this direction orients towards greater and greater emptiness and creative skillfulness.

Metaphysics are not bad; they constrain. Articulating a metaphysic allows us to engage it, or not. Making one’s metaphysics explicit reveals underlying attachments: metaphysical commitments to what is conceptually real, as performed in a kind of defense of something that is never real-as-such. The question then becomes, what kind of skillfulness is expressed through the metaphysic that one avows? What do one’s metaphysics allow for?

**Meaning and the metaphysics of suffering**

The contrast between Peterson’s and Buddhism’s orientations to an explicitly shared metaphysic, i.e. that ‘life is suffering,’ provides a useful exploration of this. For Peterson, since suffering is humanity’s existential condition, suffering increases the more aware we become. Moving from ignorance of our condition, say, at birth, to an awareness of it, as a mature ego, we become more and more aware of that which underlies our suffering: our individuality, and so our final separateness from Being, our finitude, our mortality. To remain in ignorance is, however,
insufferable: we will suffer anyway, but without our increasing individuality, autonomy, and taking responsibility for suffering we have no chance of redeeming this suffering as anything meaningful. Meaningful suffering is preferable to meaningless suffering. In a crucial way this is opposite to the realization of emptiness and the teaching of the Buddha, where greater awareness – emptiness brought to more and more conceptual realities – results in the liberation from suffering. Since the liberation from suffering is possible in Buddhism, suffering as a metaphysic is revealed as being a skillful metaphysic, of a lesser order than emptiness, the negative metaphysic.

Peterson explicitly avows a kind of participatory metaphysics: the relationship between society and individual is not given; it is a kind of activity, a process. I think he would affirm that our individuality is a construction, biologically, psychologically, and culturally. He does not seem open to the radical notion that precisely because of this there are other possibilities for human individuality and society. Individuality is not a ‘thing.’ It is what I am calling a skillful metaphysic. Any articulation of what individuality is and means that doesn’t recognize this is resting its account on an implicit reification. This is relevant because our metaphysics and our suffering mirror each other, each sprouting from implicit conceptual metaphysics. This is why emptiness is both the end of suffering, and the dissolution of reified concepts. How we hold and communicate our suffering and our story of reality will largely determine the possibilities of our individual and social liberation. All beings suffer; all humans suffer. This understanding can form the basis of compassion and compassionate action. In practice, our attachment to our own suffering, our own self-construction, and our own implicit metaphysics, creates barriers of resentment, disgust, and horror between our selves and between our communities.

Peterson’s account of the process that creates individuality and thus re-creates society displays this kind of attachment, even if it’s not quite as simple as a preference for the individual over society. The ‘becoming aware’ of our metaphysical assumptions provides a contrasting trajectory to Peterson’s growth of individual awareness and richness of meaning. Emptiness does not provide meaning: it is meaning-less. Or, if you prefer, it allows for a kind of obvious and immanent meaning-full-ness, a meaning-full-ness that is not conditional, nor the result of the process of individuation.

**Peterson in light of emptiness**

There’s one final wrinkle here: since any affirmed metaphysics must be provisional, it is always possible that Peterson’s stance is deliberate – a purposeful, skillful articulation as a response to a particular cultural moment. He is, after all, an educator. As a Facebook friend once proposed: Peterson is a 5th order consciousness explaining 4th order to 3rd order college students, in Kegan’s terms. Certainly he’s evincing a kind of participatory approach to reality and development that is typical of 5th order consciousness, and one could assume that he’d understand that whatever he needed to communicate would have to be tailored developmentally to an audience. Is his entire persona a deliberate pedagogical choice?

For this to be the case, Peterson would have to 1) have a mature enough realization of emptiness to recognize the limits of any metaphysics, and 2) be deliberately holding that back to proffer a different view of enlightenment, which he has said is something like recognizing the individual’s infinite capacity for evil. Tellingly, he describes enlightenment as a “state,” which is precisely
what it is not – it is closer to liberation from state-dependent identity. I do not think this is a
deliberate choice. I could, of course, be wrong about that, and this is to a certain degree parsing
tea leaves. Surely he is acting deliberately; it would be infantilizing simply to say he’s not, but as
a different commenter on Facebook said: “If Peterson had a taste of emptiness, he wouldn’t shut
up about it.” That is, with all of the words on record from this figure, many of them directly related
to the concepts we’ve been wandering through in this paper, it would be astonishing if he both had
experienced emptiness, and was not more forward about it.

There are other reasons for thinking this might not be a choice on his part. Although Peterson
speaks of taking responsibility for one’s own suffering, his account is still porting a subtle othering
of suffering. Suffering for Peterson is caused by the condition one is born into – it is that condition.
One may accept this and create meaning despite this, but this act redeems suffering, it does not
eliminate it. I am proposing rather that it is the very performance of this kind of conceptual
individuality that generates suffering – not ‘the human condition’ as such, or one’s awareness of
it. Recognizing this performative nature of suffering comes along with the possibility of liberation
provided by the view, practice, and realization of emptiness, though it need not be formalized in
precisely this way. This is not to say that suffering isn’t also a condition of human being, or that
the emphasis for liberation rests solely with an individual’s recognition of emptiness. Setting its
universal nature as contradictorily opposed to its performative nature is itself the kind of implicit
metaphysics that I’m pointing to. That opposition can only be conceptual, though it will certainly
be acted out.

By very subtly othering suffering in this way, Peterson displays this kind of conceptual
commitment. It is not a commitment as simple as ‘individual good, society bad,’ or ‘chaos and
death real, order and life fragile,’ but any arrangement of these as being separate entities – not fully
and completely constructed conceptually out of the other – no matter how complex, betrays an
implicit metaphysics where the line between the terms is not empty.

Mental objects are not merely abstractions, they are enacted evolutionarily, culturally, socially
(meaning, through the processes and systems of exchange, including in the Marxist sense of ‘the
means of production,’) physically, physiologically, etc. – and none of these factors are ‘finally
real’ – they are all in themselves conceptually empty. While Peterson makes an argument for
recognizing that gender, say, is biologically as well as sociologically and culturally constructed,
the fact that he makes biology overly determinative without articulating these categories’ mutual
emptiness is for me strong evidence for an implicitly naïve relationship to metaphysics where he
is committed to some conceptual activity that he is not aware of.

A very different track to arrive at the same place would be to affirm Peterson’s sense that
divinity (or reality) shows up as individual striving ... and as everything else. Order is divine; chaos
is divine. This gives a slightly different light to the above, since the myths Peterson is speaking
and interpreting are the myths of the individual ego’s appearance, of the Mental world’s coming
into being, in Jean Gebser’s terminology. If these are his source material, it is not only that he is
reading into them, which is inevitable, but that these very stories are artifacts that articulate and
delineate the rise and coming into being of individual consciousness in the evolution of humanity
– of this very particular orientation of human suffering and individuality that we call the ego. It is,
I think, precisely this kind of attachment that Peterson is an avatar of. An accomplishment, to be sure. It is by no means the peak of human possibility – nor even the only conceivable mountain.

I will take the time here to return to a step-by-step account of this argument for clarity’s sake. Peterson’s account of what is real, what matters, his account of metaphysical truth, meaning and morality, begins with two givens: 1) every human is born into a society, and develops within it, and 2) life entails suffering. The process of individuation, of moral and intellectual growth, entails accepting this, and taking responsibility for one’s suffering, and one’s society, in redeeming one’s suffering in the creation of meaning. Buddhism offers a different kind of ‘negative metaphysics’ in emptiness, which allows for the liberation from suffering, and reveals the final inadequacy of any metaphysics which are not what I am calling skillful: that is, provisional, situational, creative, relational/communicative, and skillful. While Peterson avows a kind of participatory metaphysics, where the relationship between ‘individual’ and ‘society’ is active, is an activity, the categories ‘individual’ and ‘society’ are themselves fixed and over-determine the possible shapes ‘individuality’ and ‘society’ can take in relationship, like jigsaw puzzle piece that must actively be put together, but which have only one possible fit. This implicit metaphysical foundation for his thought is an example of a particular kind of human suffering: that of being an ego. I think Peterson is right, actually – but his account is necessarily partial. I don’t think he sees its partiality, and that contributes to the polarity associated with him. Those who reject him reject what is partial. Those for whom he has become a prophetic voice affirm what is partial as whole. So what?

Conclusion

I’d originally started writing that Peterson understood that society was empty, but did not understand that the individual was empty. I still think underlying the complexity of Peterson’s account one would find some kind of commitment like this, but realized in the course of writing that this argument would make little sense without the prior argument that any (reified) arrangement of these objects (individual and society, here) – no matter how complex – betrays an implicit metaphysics where neither are empty, where the conceptual line between them is an implicit metaphysic. So explicitly, Peterson is avowing a kind of participatory metaphysics, but he’s not articulating a post-metaphysics, in my opinion.

Why did I find this valuable to write about? Why spend the time on an obscure argument that doesn’t even touch what is most polarizing about this figure? We must find a way of accounting for and communicating suffering that allows for individual and social redemption and liberation. Without emptiness, any such account will be porting in a dualizing metaphysics. Peterson provides a complex relationship between individual and society, but the fixation of these terms against or in relationship to each other as a metaphysic creates an inflexibility that constricts possibility. As such, he is also a kind of exemplar of this way of thinking and presenting metaphysics, between a non-reflexive, naive account, and a more fully post-metaphysical one, where this line of incoherence between what is avowed and what is enacted becomes important to parse.

We need something else, and something else is possible. There is a different possibility of human being, one that allows for a skillful fluidity of individuation and mass action, where it is perfectly obvious that there are neither individuals nor societies, and so both are possible articulations of liberation. It is possible to claim one’s individuality, to take decisive and
meaningful action in this life, without fueling that action by rejecting half of the world. We need an approach that allows for the differentiation of skilled action, that dualizes through action, without dualizing in concept – or demonizing what is very human. Peterson is not its avatar.

This does not mean that he’s not useful, helpful, or even skillful (though not in the Buddhist sense). His articulation of individuation is half the story. Yes, society is corrupt. That is inevitable – but whether you take responsibility for your own life and suffering is not inevitable. As Peterson notes, you have the choice to blame your suffering on something external to you, or to accept life’s suffering and create meaning from it. Many – men and women – have discovered within themselves a sense of agency and responsibility in their lives listening to Peterson’s account of the process of individuation, even as many have felt attacked by his arguments. Surely we can articulate a metaphysics that encourages individuals to assume their own powers in a single, socially emancipative gesture.
As if it was easy: Jordan Peterson and the Postmetaphysical Quest, by Brendan LaChance

Reporter in trench-coat: Do you believe in God?
Valley girl philosopher: Like, as if!

When asked whether he believes in God, Youtube sensation celebrity professor Jordan Peterson said, “I act as if God exists.”

I suspect that those of us trying to calibrate our ears for the possibility of a so-called “integral postmetaphysical spirituality” perk up at such thoughtful expressions as this. We are cautious about unscrupulous claims made by dogmatists of any type. We don’t like assumptions that are left unexamined. Is Peterson’s little “act as if” (thinking that the act may be as important as the as if in his answer) his Boy Scout badge signaling that he belongs to our little postmetaphysical club?

Let’s slow down and carve out some working definitions.

Did someone say Medicinal Physics?

To see whether this concept “postmetaphysics” has meaningful shoulders for carrying things, it is first necessary to solidly grasp what is meant by metaphysics. My old grandpa Google says that metaphysics is that branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things. Metaphysics are the founding assumptions which undergird a philosophical framework. But grandpa G also says that metaphysics is “abstract theory with no basis in reality”.

That second definition sounds to me like the one which we aspiring postmetaphysicians are most concerned with. We don’t like assumptions and unquestioned principles which we suspect are abstract in a way which seems out of sync with “reality” (in quotes because it may itself be one of these abstract assumptions).

That first definition is a harder bear to wrestle with. If we are looking for the possibility that we might go beyond or do away with metaphysics, does this mean we are in search of a philosophy with no first principles? A conceptual framework which makes no assumptions? Is such a thing even possible? How could a philosophy with no first principles and no assumptions have anything at all to say?

Another perspective wants to be heard. Metaphysics is philosophy that deals with the first principles of things. What is meant by this idea of things? Are we dealing with tangible, material objects? Not necessarily. “Things” is a colloquial term which here means is-ness. Metaphysics, and by extension postmetaphysics, is definable as a theory of is-ness. When such a theory of isness makes dogmatic assumptions about the nature of being, then we say, with just a hint of disdain, that such a view is metaphysical. When such a theory is self-critical towards its own assumptions, we honor it with that prefix: post. Thus, postmetaphysics is any attempt to understand is-ness in such a way that is robustly critical of its own assumptions.
Ah, now we step into the heat of the postmetaphysical jungle! (Or are heat and deep and jungle bad words in a postmetaphysical mouth?) I think there are many possible visions of what postmetaphysics could mean, and I think it is okay if we fracture off somewhat along different paths in this jungle. In the meantime, hop on this tiger with me, and we’ll see if we can’t hunt down Jordan Peterson in some quicksand or thicket.

Post-metal tickets?

Another definition of postmetaphysics is philosophy which is experimental towards first principles. Experimental in several senses. First, in the scientific sense. We should try to test our assumptions, examine them, and jettison once they appear unsound. But even when an assumption seems relatively stable in a rational sense, we should experiment with different assumptions to see whether they can’t do more or better. Are we seeking one set of assumptions which provides coherent uniformity or are we after multiple competing sets of assumptions which allow a kind of irrational or trans-rational vitality via their very competition?

It is worthwhile to pause a moment and ask, who cares about such matters? The answer on the one hand is simple. We who care for is-ness are the ones who care about such things. While this answer may sound obvious, I think it is important to notice that we ask such questions because we care! This puts the matter in a different light. We want a robust postmetaphysical take on is-ness because we care about what is. Now, exactly what it means to care and whether the manner of our care is healthy, “complete”, or “integral” is precisely the meat of this kind of discussion. When we encounter a thinker who seems to care, before we decide whether their manner of caring is up to our standards, we should keep in mind that no matter how foolish or dazzlingly brilliant what they say seems to us, it is their caring attempt. With this recognition, we are ready to look at Jordan Peterson.

Enter Mr. Peterson in his gentleman’s attire

Jordan B. Peterson (let’s hope that “B” stands for benign?) is a thinker who is very much concerned with the psychological development of important concepts like God, rationality, truthfulness, and justice. He wants a society that is capable of navigating the complicated balance between what he sees as a need for both order and chaos. Order is needed to provide stability, actionable consistency, and predictable coherence for human life. Chaos is needed to shake up order where it has become stale and tyrannical and to provide freedom, freshness of resources, etc. In his investigation of the history of Western civilization and psychology, he sees these elements, chaos and order, adjusting to and competing with one another. For him, the ideal situation for a society or an individual is a balanced arrangement between these factors. Is this what he means by God?

In his discussion with Sam Harris he says: “Part of the concept of God that underlies the Western ethos is the notion that whatever God is, is expressed in the truthful speech that rectifies pathological hierarchies, that isn't all it does, it also confronts the chaos of being itself and generates habitable order, that's the metaphysical proposition, and that's best conceptualized as at least one element of God; and so I would think about it as a transcendent reality that's only observable across the longest of time-frames.”
Certain aspects of this response should jump out to a postmetaphysical ear. He is quite careful about making assertions about what God absolutely is, instead he describes aspects of what it means to him as a concept, he points out that much of his description is indeed metaphysical, and he says that is how he would think about it as opposed to asserting something he simply believes, not to mention the developmental perspective hinted at in the close.

We are confronted with someone who is at the very least quite cautious about making metaphysical claims in terms of belief. He is aware of the fact that the claims he is making are based on certain assumptions and he gives himself some wiggle-space in doing so. Is that wiggle space postmetaphysical?

**Postmetaphysical Spirituality means doing the jitterbug around the idea of God?**

On the one hand, metaphysical claims are most frequently criticized for being unreflectively assumed to be authoritatively true. Dogmatism hurts our ears because it takes its ideas as being unquestionable, as absolute. So on this point, Peterson does seem to meet some postmetaphysical requirement. That is, his founding assumptions are placed out in the open, available for critical examination.

Is postmetaphysics that simple? So long as we can state our first principles and say they are up for discussion, are we in the free and clear? Yes!

Unless that is not enough for you of course…

From another perspective, to call this postmetaphysical sort of seems like cheating. It sounds like it might just be a clever way to disarm skeptics.

Is Peterson just pulling a fast one on us when he answers, “I act as if there is a God”? Is he just saying this because he knows how sensitive we are to anything which carries a vague scent of metaphysics? He’s stuffing God in a Trojan Horse named As If? Maybe.

**The unconscious lodging house of metaphysics**

Before I examine those questions further, let’s really think about the fact that in answer to the question “Do you believe in God?,” Peterson refrains from saying anything in terms of belief. Rather he says that his action presupposed a God. On Twitter he says, “God is the mode of being you value the most as demonstrated or manifested in your presumption, perception and action.” He is calling something very important to our attention.

If we think about philosophy as a collection of conscious, verbal articulation of our views, then frankly, postmetaphysics should be easy! All we need to do is find those statements and positions which we think qualify as postmetaphysical and consistently state our adherence to them ad nauseum. What do you believe? Well, just ask yourself! I believe in God. I believe in no-God. I believe in rationality. Etc. But our verbal claims about what we think we believe are frequently quite out of sync with our action, and even when we are very careful about the way we make
conscious assertions, our unconscious assumptions abound. Peterson reminds us that the assumptions which undergird our action and perception very often have little to do with what we say about our own positions.

In his discussions with Sam Harris, he frequently raises this point. In Peterson’s opinion, the things that Harris claims to be of high value, things like truthfulness or the idea that we should seek to bring about the greatest possible good, are values which grew out of the Christian tradition. Thus, if Harris really acts according to those values, it is implied that he believes in many aspects of God. Obviously, he is quite careful about the way that he phrases this, but he raises an interesting point. Assuming we are sincere in our desire for postmetaphysics, are we not also unconsciously presuming the value of metaphysics? Especially if we return to that first definition of metaphysics, it may be the case that to say anything at all is already metaphysical in that it must make a first assumption. More on that later.

The fox

Clever Peterson! Setting all these traps to make us think we’re still chained to the old traditions! Sam Harris expresses this concern in using a phrase coined by Eric Weinstein. He says that Peterson, intentionally or otherwise, sometimes engages in something called “Jesus smuggling”. This is the idea that Peterson is putting on a rational-seeming front to his argument in order to smuggle Jesus into the discussion. Whereas Peterson would argue that he is trying to examine the roots of our psychological concepts in order that we may get a strong understanding of their developmental trajectory and allow them to continue to grow and evolve, Harris would counter that Peterson is simply trying to make outdated, dangerous, archaic concepts palatable to the contemporary mind. He’s just trying to dress Jesus up in a laboratory coat and goggles so that the atheistic scientific community can be brought back into the claws of traditional religion.

First of all, Jesus smuggling is a delightful phrase. I think we should tinker with it for use within the Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality discourse space. Terms along the lines of “nihilism smuggling”, “capitalist smuggling”, “tribal smuggling”, or “relativist smuggling” might prove useful in interesting ways.

I am not in a position, nor am I particularly concerned to decide whether Peterson is after all just doing “a lil bitta Jeebus smugglin’!” Insofar as postmetaphysics does involve experimentally trying out and investigating archaic assumptions and insofar as integral requires exploring development as it pertains to previous phases, there is a constant danger of what I call “accidental atavism”. That is, when we try to keep an open-mind while investigating and trying out older modes of thought, there is the risk that an unconscious part of ourselves will wake up and get addicted to that coffee. That is, I went back to study the Bible in order to learn what it had to teach me about the evolution of the notion of truth, and I ended up scrawling a list of inviolable commandments on an old piece of cardboard I found! I state this risk somewhat jokingly because it seems to me that people interested in this project called postmetaphysics are not highly fragile in terms of accidentally becoming dogmatic Christians again. Nevertheless, I think accidental atavism is real, and colors certain aspects of our emotional system, if not our thought itself, when we come into contact with powerful ancient ideas which take us by surprise. Reminding ourselves that we’re involved in such questions because we care about is-ness suggests that atavism is
essentially caring in an outdated fashion. Thinking in this way helps explain why we are all so susceptible to flairs of regression. When I slip back and view the world in dogmatic terms, I still care! We instinctively care and like to feel that we are caring, and this is what can be deceptively tempting when you dive back into archaic mythologies. It is tempting because it seems obvious that these ancestors very much cared, but we can thereby lose sight of the fact that their manner of caring may nevertheless be quite maladapted to our current state of being.

The hook

Back to the matter at hand. Should we let Peterson off the hook? Many aspects of his theory seem to share concerns with a project that wants to be integral. That is, he is highlighting the development of psychology as an important field of investigation. He’s implying a nobility back into archaic and traditional narratives which is in line with Wilberian critiques of modern and postmodern “flatland”. Not only that, but he is quite careful in laying out his metaphysical assumptions and builds wiggle room into them using “as if”. Before answering whether to interpret views such as his as allowable in a postmetaphysical sense, we should ask whether a postmetaphysical effort is even able to make use of hooks! We assume that it is best to have few or no assumptions, but from whence do we derive this right to assume? The assumption that metaphysics is wrong for making assumptions is perhaps just metaphysics all over again.

Perhaps you are already reminding me that “post”metaphysics does not mean no metaphysics. But in that case what does it mean? I think it means we are on guard against any version of metaphysics which disallows competing versions of metaphysics on dogmatic grounds. Any version of metaphysics which does not leave itself open for discussion is in bad taste. The other characteristic of metaphysics which I think we try to move beyond is the sense that we are in need of a system of ideas which is constantly consistent unto itself across time. Postmetaphysics should experiment with the possibility that certain forms of inconsistency are more potent than rigid uniformity. We don’t shut our eyes when we see something new just because we don’t have a system for it yet. Postmetaphysics implies an attitude towards metaphysics which is adaptable, flexible, and persuadable. We can be talked out of it, and we don’t expect that it will be easily viable at every moment of our lives. Where other metaphysical systems struggle to subdue and similarize the enigmatic, we are patient and allow it its distance. We do these things because, on the one hand, we know we care, but on the other hand, we’re not sure we know how to care. To experiment here means to try to care in different ways. We avoid the dogmatic assertion that our attempt at caring is the only way to care and that all other thinkers are essentially heartless.

That a shadow may fall

Peterson’s apparatus may be postmetaphysical-lite, but I don’t think that a more postmetaphysical view feels him to be in our strong opposition. I also think that due to the experimental quality of theorizing is-ness, we should consider the possibility that the best conditions for growing postmetaphysical spiritual concepts is when a great diversity of metaphysical systems are encouraged to compete alongside one another. We want paganism because it gives a surface upon which the shadow of Christianity can fall. A strong atheist metaphysical assertion may amplify our understanding of Hinduism.
Here, it is interesting to note that a hybrid community has been born in response to Peterson’s lectures. Apparently there are now many people who are describing themselves as Christian Atheists. That is, they are interested in studying Christian teaching and history and perhaps even sharing many of its values and yet they maintain a conscious disavowal of the belief in God. There is something potentially postmetaphysical about an outlook such as theirs.

One more thing to care about

While I don’t want to decide whether Peterson counts as either integral or postmetaphysical, there is at least one more important phenomenon associated with him and his rise to public attention which I think is important for us aspiring postmetaphysical integral thinkers to wrestle with.

Peterson has been teaching and publishing videos online since at least 2013, but his popularity didn’t balloon until the sparks of controversy a-lit. He did not shy away from stating his positions in bold terms and was willing to get into antagonistic disputes with protesters and television commentators. Furthermore, he frequently participates in lively debates with atheists like Sam Harris and others. Part of what he revives in his discussions of the Old Testament is contact with a fierce, antagonistic image of Jehovah. I might also add that he often describes his relationship with his own ideas in antagonistic terms. He tries to dissect his assumptions, look at them from all sides, and attack them until, to him, they prove too strong to be abandoned.

This idea of an integral postmetaphysical spirituality appears to have largely grown out of a group of people who were initially interested in the Wilberian integral model, even as many of them have of course moved away from taking Wilber to be the heart of the movement (is it a movement?). Integral thinkers tend to remain in warm relation with values like inclusion and spiritual development. But if we are sincere in our desire for philosophies which are more postmetaphysical, I think it is important that we stop and ask whether we are wishing and hoping that a postmetaphysical image of “God” will be gentle, tolerant, peaceful, and inclusive. None of these values are inherently inconsistent with a postmetaphysical framework, in my opinion. However, if we are dependent on these values in a metaphysical way, are we perhaps blinding ourselves to the possibility that an integral postmetaphysical spirituality might also generate concepts of God or gods which are violent, tempermental, inconsistent, and antagonistic? If qualities such as these are forbidden from our consideration, it is likely we’ve slipped back into some dogmatic habits. There is something energetic about combativeness, tension, and aggression which may have their place within the vanguard of inclusion. In other words, care is not only gentle, nice, and kind. Does postmetaphysical care imply a certain metal quality of care? Alice Cooper given a sacred heart transplant?

Heed the struggle

Development of any kind seems to presuppose some version of struggle. Should we expect integral postmetaphysical theories to be an exception to this? What are the metaphysics of assuming struggle as a first concept? With a view like this you can certainly interpret Jordan Peterson in an interesting way.
I’m raising this point because I think it can be quite difficult to discern when something passes the integral or postmetaphysical test. Are we making these sorts of judgments based off of blazingly clear conceptual categories? Are our emotional discernments up to date with our cognitive strategies? Are we assuming a God which is nice, bright, and shiny and does this assumption make us blind to the possibility that a postmetaphysical God is sometimes dark or dreadful?

*I know you care, but may you ask ten-thousand times: what is this care?*

*As if it was easy...*
The Religion of Jordan Peterson, by Layman Pascal

I have plenty in common with Jordan Peterson. Not just the trivial details that we are both Canadian thinkers fond of St. Nietzsche and critical of political correctness – we also both have a problem with Christianity.

The kernel of our shared conundrum is that we read our own depth into the holy texts. The moral dream narratives of our ancestors appear before us with the intensity of personal insight. Thus, when we argue for God & myth, we are working from our own complex metaphorical understanding of human development and not from the average reader’s relationship to literalist orthodoxy.

Actually it takes me a long, slow and clumsy effort to understand the complaints of people who were (for example) “raised Catholic” since they are sensing something vastly different from my own personal default assumptions about the rich potential of catholicity and the nourishing power of the vision-logic structures that are revealed from the text into my own heart. It’s tough. In the physical sciences, we retroactively apply new levels of insight across the whole past of the universe. We newly discover atoms and then consider them to have existed even for people who had no notion of atoms. It is less clear what to do about psychological and philosophical discoveries. When I uncover an archetype in the Bible, I don’t know if I have found a formerly hidden truth that was implicit in even the most dogmatic and primitive reading or whether I have encountered a new truth co-created by myself – true ONLY for people who likewise have grown into the same depth of perception?

I am undecided about whether the higher universal “sub-structure” of wisdom is implicit in the ancient traditions or whether it is a flower that blossoms only individually. Nonetheless, I do agree that there IS such a matrix which utilizes archetype to empower humans relative to a complex cosmos that cannot be comprehended with naive and linear models. Religion evolves when a group of people can artfully combine their cultural successes with this universal matrix of encoded limitations. Successful cultural coherence goes hand in hand with some kind of “dharma set” (i.e. insights and practices) that can be more or less presented in any given geography, era or language. While I agree with Jordan on this point, I have serious doubts about the role of books and orthodoxy...

Your granny’s burger recipe is a great and endearing strategy for making “good” burgers in a stable fashion. However we can only get better and healthier burgers by experimenting. We need to take risks and be intelligently indifferent to the tradition – if we hope to educate our instincts and learn to make better spontaneous guesses than our ancestors made. Or even to make new guesses that confront our current environment with the same degree of intelligence exhibited by our ancestors. Our job is to do what they did again and not just to appreciate that they brought forth wisdom in their time and place.

Tradition is not merely a repository of heuristics for surviving in a nonlinear universe but it is equally a limitation on our ability to thrive in the unfolding nonlinear universe. Inherited instincts and complex “wisdom suggestions” found in old texts may be able to energize us to deal with situations that we share with cavemen and lobsters but they also may be inadequate to changing
situations, modern situations and to re-generating the kind of wisdom that is coded in these texts. My opinion is that we need *shamanic skills* much more than we need to heed the recorded stories of ancient shamans.

Likewise, the whole idea of “book” is a double-edged sword. For most of the history of Christianity the people of Christendom could not read. Texts are of minimal relevance to religious traditions. Yes, of course, a book can concentrate many of the sayings and images of ancient colloquial wisdom but, at the same time, it inevitably edits out the richest ambiguities, leaves aside many of the sayings and uses bureaucratic validation to enforce one set of holy insights at the expense of the rest of the living dharma. Overarching narratives can even kill the trans-rational nutrient that is contained in holy exemplars and mythic symbolism. Holy books tend to empower nominal priests at the expense of the actual cultural shamans and, in the process, turn religion into a legalistic business of “belief statements” rather than an organic, multidimensional success strategy for activating the unknowable wisdom beyond the conscious mind.

Holy books *are* classics. And classics have a resonance that suggests a pragmatic and evolutionarily tested utility beyond what can be codified in the left hemisphere of the brain. However it seems to me that Peterson over-emphasizes them at the expense of all other cultural classics. Not only do I think that Batman and “haste makes waste” are as good as the Vedas or the New Testament, I also more radically suspect that *new classics* are more nourishing than old classics – which are merely the codified remains of former new classics. Fresh food is more enlivening than dried meat and old wheat. The metaphors that have survived in the traditional holy books were not perpetuated by popular embrace and heuristic utility by rather by a biased, anti-evolutionary mechanism of cognitive ease, legislative exploitation and institutional prejudice. Orthodox religious texts are, for me, NOT a privileged class of access routes to the absolutely necessary unconscious wisdom of the species that must be personally assimilated by our own efforts in our own worldspace.
Contributor Comments/Dialogue on Jordan Peterson Essays

Comments on AV

Comments on AV by BL

I wish that we could sit in the back of a Winnebago and discuss your article in depth. I used to call them Bago-Eggo's as a child. Since I'm a little time pressed to respond to what you've shared with us, forgive me if I fly past the best of what you have offered.

Besides your referencing of Winnebago's, my favorite point in what you wrote was to think that suffering generates a metaphysics. I also particularly liked the phrase, "Metaphysics is not bad; it's constraining." It is enjoyable the way that sentence relieves metaphysics and constraint in one breath.

If we were sitting in the back of that Bago-Eggo, I'd probably hurl question after question about what you mean by emptiness! I know you've defined it in your article and I'm even more confident that you hold a definition in your heart, but that is one of those words that I seem to fall into like a hole and forget where I was over and over again. I'm not sure whether to think "Andrew's argument is obviously valid" or "Andrew is wrong, Jordan Peterson definitely understands more about emptiness than that! He's taken DMT for God's sakes!"

One thing I do know is that I like voices like Andrew's. Your writing is sober and critical in a very good sense of each word. One thing that bothered me watching some of the Peterson debates on Youtube is that they decided to skip over the question and answer segment. The audience is intelligent, let us hear from them as well! What if they'd let someone like Andrew ask a question about society or emptiness? This does actually make me a little more suspicious of Peterson in his banker's pinstripe suit. One of the dangers of emphasizing the individual at the expense of discussing society is that this often means the "moneyed" individual. But is money and individual? Now I'm digressing and drifting too far from the topic at hand. Perhaps we can discuss such things further in the online Winnebago as it moves on down the road.

Comments on AV by LP

“Suffering appears with self-consciousness and the solution to suffering is not less consciousness but more...” – Jordan Peterson (discussing the Biblical Genesis).

Andrew’s angle, I think, is a very good way to probe Peterson’s metaphysics. The comparison to a conventional Buddhist negative metaphysics reveals similarities and differences. Up to a certain ambiguous point there seems to be great deal of similarity between the two visions which point out the suffering nature of existence, the need for skillful, adaptive and even spiritual action in the world. What are the differences?

We might think of Peterson as being more of a God-and-Souls philosopher in contrast to the atheistic an-atman of the East. However (as my own years in a Buddhist sangha revealed) that distinction is murky. It is not exactly clear that Buddhism has no God or individual Souls. Rather
it has some kind of superlative nexus of dharmic principles embodied in a human-divine realizer whose teachings are for evolving individuals. Yet it merely stipulates that these things are inherently interdependent, relative & non-binding to the liberated consciousness. The soul is no more true or essential than the body.

There has been a good deal of IPS interest in OOO and other doctrines which might suggest a return of the “thing-in-itself” to the good conscience of philosophers. Does Peterson entrust himself via action to the presumption of a soul despite his fairly clear statements about the ways that personality is embedded in body, brain and society through a phantasmal or always partial lenses of motivated interpretation which precedes the cognitive perception of “what things are”? This is an open question. As is the question of how far this might be from a classical Emptiness doctrine.

Both Buddhism and Peterson have a sense of a matrix-cosmos permeated by suffering. All is dukkha. That is a big claim. The legendary Siddhartha made such a claim based on insight and introspection while Peterson seems to base it on the state of the art in neuropsychology – that motivation precedes knowledge and the valence of fear and frustration is the primal encounter with the misperceived and partial world. We do not learn negativity as a result of experiences which deviate from the normal but rather our brains actively work to convert stressful reality into a normalized insignificance against which we carry out our limited karmic struggle to avoid pain and reach heaven.

Peterson makes an existential bid to accept this dukkha (frustration, suffering, the grinding of the axle in the wheel) as primary and seek the skillful conditions of action which allow brains – and perhaps souls – to reorient themselves toward the unlimited potential of meaningfulness. Buddhism, on the other hand, makes the classical mystical assertion that there is a pre-suffering substrate of Being that can be reached by accessing part of ourselves that exists prior to individuated intentional experience. If this is a true interpretation then it bypasses or seeks to bypass the level to which Peterson usually addresses himself. The great mystic hope is that we are trapped in an unnecessary degree of individuation or self-contraction that forces identification with the motivated structure that must encounter the cosmos as suffering. As Andrew notes this is NOT the claim that Peterson is generally making.

With a certain generosity of spirit we can take either set of metaphysics as postmetaphysical and integral-friendly while noticing their uncanny similarities and their one big difference.

I think from the IPS POV (sic) the most relevant metaphysical issue lies in the comprehension of essences. The emptiness doctrine asserts that all things are inherently free of self-essence, inherently interdependent, temporalized, relational, contextually dependent for their identity. Peterson definitely treats things as contextual and interdependent in their meanings but he lays the stress not upon the objective absence of essences (and he may well believe in a withdrawn metaphysics of essences, souls, beings) but upon the subjective indirectness of knowledge. In his work, the cognition of motivated know-how precedes the relatively new and relatively superficial cognition of identities. Identities are unlocked because they are secondary to behavior in an opaque universe. Conversely the sects which originated the emptiness doctrine appear to have leveraged their beliefs in accurate human knowledge toward a place at which the objective world is described
as free of identifying essences. Again, either one might provide or imply a postmetaphysical realm for spiritual practice.

The metaphysics of Peterson and Buddhism are very close in certain respects. Yet a very subtle difference remains. Whereas Peterson has said, “there is no limit to the possibilities of consciousness and truth,” a Buddhist might say – the truth of consciousness is limitless.

A dynamic nondualist would assert that the latter unconditionality is implicit in the former conditional injunction but Peterson does not bear many of the marks we might assume follow from more complete realizations in postmetaphysical space...

Response/Rejoinder by AV

Brendan: Thank you!

I’ll respond quickly to two things. I won’t restate how I’m using Emptiness in the above, but I would like to take the opportunity to distinguish between two ‘kinds,’ or uses of it, which I think may help supplement the above. Reams and reams of virtual paper can and are spent on all of this, so it probably couldn’t hurt.

So, in my article I’m using ‘conceptual emptiness’ as a kind of stand in for emptiness, which I think is a more encompassing… reality? Negative metaphysic? Let’s call what’s left over from the more encompassing emptiness when we distinguish conceptual emptiness ‘substantial emptiness.’ Emptiness, as a recognition, can come all at once, but I think conceptual emptiness is enfolded in substantial emptiness. (Though as I write this I am mulling it out, so the following is quite provisional.)

Conceptual emptiness is primarily about the virtual nature of the mind. That in our daily, and momentary, apprehension of what is happening around us, we are organized around a kind of imagined, conceptual reality that is largely transparent to us, baked into our being-in-the-world. When I see someone post an insult to the New York Mets on Instagram, the I that is offended is a kind of fiction, an activity that is latent but nevertheless efficacious (it affects and mediates my response to the world.) The vast majority of us are focused entirely on this virtual reality – when we look at a tree or focus on our breath in meditation, at least for a while in learning how to meditate, we aren’t with our perception of the tree or feeling our breath, we’re interacting with a kind of concept of tree, of breath. It’s not entirely imaginal, like a dream, it’s more like a heads-up-display. It is hard to separate this activity from anything else, and even harder to do so in verbal communication, since to do so we are still necessarily using concepts through language. Additionally, there’s no hard line between what is physiological and what is psychological. Nevertheless, there is an additional aspect to the fuller experience of emptiness which is more about how our perceptions are contingent, emergent, and non-dual, and that no object has any endurance through time and space – everything is a momentary and fleeting, flickering manifestation of empty awareness.

That’s how I try to communicate or conceptualize it, at least.
I… have no Winnebago 😊 I look forward to future conversations, wherever housed 😊 I also love the point that “Individual” almost inevitably means a Western individual of means, but as you gesture that’s a conversation that would take way too much time and space to be done justice here.

Layman: Reading your bit was like reading Cliff’s Notes for my article – I feel like you’ve condensed what I was attempting to say and gotten it across in a much more concentrated manner.

And I appreciate the bit about the distinction between the God-and-Souls philosopher and the an-atman, and that an IP-MS has room for both. I think this is actually the most important underlying point, I’m sort of building a justification for that philosophically later argument. If we take emptiness seriously, (or have a well grounded and mature living-out of emptiness) I think it’s pretty clear that both are necessary living orientations for a full approach to an Integral spirituality. My argument is essentially that they are, in fact, reflections of each other.

Comments on BL

Comments on BL by AV

I find it really interesting that our essays both circle around the question of ‘is Peterson’s approach a post-metaphysical one?’ essentially using Peterson as a way of qualifying just what it is that we mean by ‘post-metaphysical’ in the first place, trying to suss out the nuances of what a post-metaphysical approach is and looks like, and providing our own readings of his work and the core aspects (or a core aspect) of what a post-metaphysical approach may be. We both come to a similar conclusion as well, something like ‘Peterson evinces certain aspects of a post-metaphysical approach, while falling short in a few ways.’

I also appreciate that we both explicitly address the question of ‘why,’ or ‘who cares?’ (As I say it, ‘so what?’) Why do we care about that? It’s an open question – i.e., I’m not taking either your response to that or my own as being definitive in any sense.

We ask such questions because we care, and our actions display what it is that we care about. Our words, as a special kind of action, also display our care. Then, which I find fascinating, and which is the territory we’re both in some sense swimming in: parsing out the never 1:1, never metaphysical, relationship of words and actions – this illuminates an even deeper sort of care, a care that might be animating both our actions and words.

We all care about something. So I take your inquiry as something like, “What does a post-metaphysical kind of care look like, and why would we value and qualify care in such a way?” Without being too obtuse, perhaps this is not so different from asking why we care about care in the first place?

This is one of those questions that seems like an absurd abstraction, the least important of our daily concerns, a silly language game, etc. etc. We value care because that’s what valuing is. I suspect something deeper at work, and perhaps something which sheds light on the value of a post-metaphysical approach, that sheds light on what is different in a metaphysical approach to care
(`care is care,`) and an approach which doesn’t presume the value of care, and so is able to assert this value more robustly.

If we do that, what does a post-metaphysical care look like? A care greater than contradiction? One that includes a naïve notion of care, simple and absolutely necessary, and that might include notions of its opposite – that might not be definable through our enactions of ‘caring?’

We are close to the kind of a-perspectival madness I think Peterson is reacting to. No! I can hear a voice saying. You can’t twist this all out of proportion. Care is care. The (ugly) history of our species is littered with these kinds of lies, of horrible actions taken ‘for the benefit’ of the victim of some cruelty, for the salvation of the soul of the savage! With [‘this hurts me more than it hurts you, boy’]s.

Can we really include all of these notions of care? Can care be brutal?

Might there be room for dogmatism in our notions of post-metaphysical care? For what comes unexamined?

I think – my assumption is – that we sense in this thinker a more nuanced way of approaching these questions that we feel as urgent than we tend to see in the world. Someone acting as if a God might allow for a care which is both simple and obvious and must form the basis of our caring, and who might allow for cruelty not as a contradiction of care, but inextricably wrapped up in it – and that there’s not only nothing wrong or unfortunate about this – but that this provides a basis for a meaningful life.

What do you care about?

For what God are you acting as if that God exists?

Comments on BL by LP

If (postmetaphysical) metaphysics are the implications of actions then Peterson is in that camp. If reality itself is implication then “beliefs” are an insufficient explanatory principle for action. From a postmetaphysical angle – and in the proper mood – we criticize someone for saying that God is Real. But the kernel of disquiet is not that isness is inapplicable. Isness denotes a certain unconfined intensity & precision that is necessary to make both consciousness and logic operate properly. That’s fine. The problem with the person who claims God is real is not the “is” but the claiming. Or, more indirectly, the tendency to assume that a belief claim is indicated by the content of the verbal statement. If we shift to the action, then we immediately discover that we have no knowledge about the person’s beliefs about God but clear knowledge that they believe in saying that God is Real. They believe in saying that just as they believe the Earth will support them when they take a step. Their metaphysical architecture is revealed as the implication of their actions and only secondarily, often delusively, indicated by their belief claims. And the funny thing about metaphysical architecture is that it includes “is” and “isn’t” and “real” and “substance” and “thing” and “number,” etc – the most basic requirements for any perception, cognition or universe. At some vanishing point we find that the most solid and reliable aspects of reality are precisely ...
implications. And if our new path is the Universal Illuminated Church of Dynamic Implication then Peterson is... a local priest? A bishop? Someone who expresses our theology within a particular set of concerns. Is this what St. Brendan is saying...?

Response/Rejoinder by BL

First of all, I’d like to say that I found this exercise in reviewing Peterson stimulating and fun. If more such focused inquiries are in store in the future, they have my support.

I hope that my essay means some of what Layman is saying! His words push a point in a way I hadn’t exactly considered, however. I’ve been around enough integral ideas to be cautious about accepting someone’s statements as an accurate way of getting what they’re about. I took Peterson’s cautious addition of “as if” to his statement about a belief in God as a kind of healthy sign. But as I could have warmly predicted Layman pushes at this point. He reminds that the issue is statements vs. action in general and cautious statements are nonetheless still statements. A good boost in favor of paying attention to action.

Andrew’s response to me kicks in here in an interesting way. He opens up a line of pondering about the meaning of care. Curiously, before writing the Peterson essay, Layman had just recommended Heidegger to me and I’ve been engaging some of his work. He makes strong arguments for care or concern being at the heart of, well, being.

Care is something that I think can be a useful litmus test for whether I’m considering an action or a statement. Words about care can sometimes be sort of empty, something which touches on arguments Andrew made in his article. But an act of care, whether it is something someone does towards themselves or towards others is, as Peterson might say, pretty bloody well obvious.

So, what do Peterson’s acts say about his cares and concerns? Well, he cares about engaging with large amounts of people. What is he doing? He’s going around the world on lecture tours and calling into whatever hip podcasts will have him on. He does this dressed up in very keen suits on a diet, apparently, of only red meat! He keeps a serious face most times though his laughter is not infrequent and sounds “human” to my ears. But what are all these actions about? Does he care about fame? Does he care about helping people get their feet more firmly planted on the ground? Is he trying to sell books?

It looks like I need to think more about how to understand what it is an action says...

Comments on LP

Comments on PL by AV

Here’s how I’m reading your essay, Layman – let me know if I’m missing something, reading too much in, or simply twisting you out of recognition:

Culture passes knowledge – whether knowledge of a more superficial kind, like burger recipes, or knowledge of the deeper structures of psychology and reality – by codifying it. In a sense, it’s
what culture is. Successful culture, culture that helps its people live and navigate life/reality and pass its knowledge along in a coherent way, is abstract-able, more or less (part of what it is to codify) and can re-emerge and be embodied in different cultures, languages, times, etc. ‘Classical’ texts represent only one element of that codification, and Peterson places too much of an emphasis on them, disregarding that texts may over-determine us towards two related kinds of conservativism: the over-valuation of ‘old knowledge’ not necessarily useful for today’s problems, and the reverence of a privileged (literate) authority. He sees The Bible as a more valid vehicle of cultural knowledge because it is ‘tried-and-true,’ across time and culture, and as such essentially represents the pith of what is most valuable to know in our (Western) culture – it is very knowledge-dense. Peterson sees these as our/Being’s otherwise incommunicable depths communicating to our more-than-rational depth of interiority. Classical texts are useful, you’re saying, but they are useful only because we will be reading into them, not because they necessarily represent some higher or stored notion of useful cultural knowledge – at least, not any more than a cliché or folk aphorism, and not anymore than more modern and current classics – such as Batman. We (each) need to live out our cultural knowledge in the time and environment that we uniquely find ourselves in, and there’s no shortcut to that.

I’ll say what I’d like based on this understanding, though I may not be hearing you, of course.

The first thing about this is… I think Peterson agrees with you. I’m not sure he’d agree with your equation of the Vedas and ‘haste makes waste,’ and I do think he places a singular and unique value on the Bible, but for one of your main points that a tradition must make itself anew each generation – that’s central in his account of individuation. I also think he is pretty explicit about his being an interpretation of the Bible, though (I think this goes without saying!) he’ll argue vociferously for his interpretation.

In his account, we are all Horus, exiled, we are all Joseph, and to come into our heritage we must bring our lives to bear on our entirely unique situation. One of the core aspects of his talks is the necessity of this living-out of the human heritage. The injunctions contained within may well be limiting in the sense you’re using it, as something that keeps us from responding (perhaps even seeing) the nature of our challenges, or they may be limiting in the nature of any injunction, as a way of organizing one’s living energies. But whether those are two different kinds of limitations can only be found out by accepting the task of bringing what is contained within self/tradition into the newness of one’s own life in this moment.

Certainly, as a scientist, Peterson has a commitment to an endeavor whose very method necessitates the ‘doing it for ourselves,’ the creation of new cultural knowledge which may and quite often does find the wealth of our accumulated knowledge to be plain wrong. Not only that, he speaks often about ‘new classics,’ such as the Disney version of Pinocchio, and has a fondness for using other ‘new’ classics of the 19th and 20th century to illustrate his points.

Perhaps, even while using ‘modern classics,’ he is still using them to illustrate principles that he finds inherent in the world – i.e. that he’s something of a neo-perennialist (what a wonderful phrase given the context of this response!) where our engagement is only necessary to climb a ladder that is already there – our ‘engagement’ with life is necessary, but only to move along a pre-determined track. I think you could make an argument that this is the case, at least implicitly,
and to be sure I’m making something of a similar argument in my piece, that he’s ‘proto-
participatory,’ without taking into account the full implications of what this kind of creative
enaction of the world means for what Being is.

But surely there’s a counter-argument there as well. Yes, he may well over-emphasize how
determinative the function of particular neurotransmitters in lobsters are for any and all species
that appear later evolutionarily speaking, and just how limiting earlier evolutionary choices are for
future generations, but I think he does recognize that these are choices in some real way, not
inevitable moves along a destined track. There’s nothing inherent about serotonin; it’s a happy
accident.

Even the choice to speak on the Judeo-Christian tradition I think belies an orientation that
recognizes how radically emergent individuality is, how un-necessary. It would be fascinating to
hear his take on the role of Jesus given the talks he’s already given on the Old Testament, but I
think he’d be saying something to the effect that Jesus is the individual that is able to embody the
whole of his tradition, which is what gives him the authority to so completely and radically re-
write it – that’s what makes him the son of God. Would Peterson talk about the fulfillment of a
divine plan? The inevitability of Jesus? I don’t think so. It might be a subtle difference, but I have
a feeling that he’d find in the wholeness of the Bible a trajectory towards this kind of total
reckoning with suffering and one’s heritage, that the Old Testament represents a record of the
emergence of individual human consciousness out of the deeper mythic pre-history of humanity,
and its reckoning with Being, something which makes a Jesus possible, but doesn’t make him
inevitable.

To be sure, a lot of this is implicit and not taken directly from his speech. As Brendan says in
his response to me, it would be wonderful to have someone with a rich Integral background
interviewing/debating him to tease some of these things out, otherwise we’re simply parsing tea
leaves. Without that conversation to ask some of these questions directly, we’ll never know. I think
there is a chance at least Peterson is making an essentially Wilberian argument: that these ‘choices’
are ‘real,’ because they’ve worked, that their ‘working’ reveals something about the nature of
Being as such, and that there are more and less fundamental aspects of Being revealed by less and
more superficial habits. Kosmic habits, at this point well engrained. But really, at any scope, those
habits may become as disabling as they’ve been enabling, since there are no final, metaphysically
locatable truths.

And perhaps you’re saying this, and you’re simply saying he’s not emphasizing just how radical
the possibility of newness, of emergence and creativity, really is. My parsing here (of both you
and Peterson!) may simply be reading way too much into everything. Bizarrely – I literally just
remembered this writing that previous sentence – I had a dream three nights ago where I got this
‘corrective nugget’ from you, arriving almost as a subtle-energy bullet, with the clear message
‘you are reading too much into this.’ A little bit of communicative gnosis, where and however it
arrived. Clearly I have ignored it to this point.

And now that I find myself coming to my final point – what has interested me the most in this
and what the above was a prelude to, I realize I may have misread something crucial. You’re saying
that we can only get healthier, tastier burgers through experimentation. I took that to mean that the
inevitable outcome of experimentation is healthier, tastier burgers, rather than that the only way to
get healthier, tastier burgers is through experimentation.

So that’s going to change quite a bit the conclusion here, which is about the relationship between
passing cultural knowledge on and the ‘matrix’ or structure of Being that allows for such passing
to happen – really, these two clauses are terms in the same equation, though as it’s not really the
idea here I’ll choose to skip over that. Where I am uncertain of Peterson’s view, and see it as
possibly subtly metaphysical, is in whether or not Being has a discernable structure, one that is
representable at all, whether through the logical and explicit nature of the ‘left brain’ mode, or
through myth. I take your essay as saying essentially that Peterson makes the mistake, and that it
is a mistake, of assuming/finding a structure: that the Bible has value because it represents a
progressive accumulation of knowledge, which ‘progressiveness’ belies a reliable (metaphysical)
structure to Being. But, you say, Being is not so simple. I had originally thought that you were
making the same mistake as him, though it’s why I couched much of my language above carefully,
as that was surprising to me knowing you a bit. That is to say, if the only possible ultimate outcome
of experimentation were healthier, tastier burgers, and this were not just a superficial truth but
something itself reflective of how Being-in-culture works, then Being must itself have a reliable
structure.

I still think, playing devil’s advocate (certainly, Peterson isn’t that bad…) that Peterson is in
fact making a similar argument as you are: that the nature of Being is not metaphysical – it cannot
adequately be coded as being either ‘entirely random’ or as ‘ordered.’ That the nature of Being is
inclusive both of chaos and order, of creative novelty and endurance, and this is embodied in our
lives. The linguistic, conceptual paradox of, ‘Being has a structure, but we can’t say that.’ For sure,
he is talking about the Bible, and for sure, for the vast majority of people today and in the past,
The Bible is essentially about this structure, revealing truths, as it were. But Peterson is doing so
mostly as a corrective to Progressive naïveté in our times (‘it’s not that simple, you bloody
idiots…’) – a place where the roots of ‘progressive’ in ‘evolutionarily progressive’ and ‘politically
progressive’ elide nicely. Being is not ordered, you must order it! He is saying.

I actually think this is why Peterson finds so much value in the Bible: it communicates truths
that are beyond simple dichotomies, that are more than single principles, that are neither
metaphysically ‘conservative’ nor ‘progressive.’ That are, in a sense, post-metaphysical. Is this, as
you begin, merely his own perception of his own depths and maturity? Or is he making a different
mistake of finding a stability and order in the tradition that is metaphysical, that is scope-
inddependent – that is not a reflection of how similar our lives are to those who lived 2, 3, 4 and 5
thousand years ago, but a reflection of something inherently so? The very possibility of an Integral
reading (and enactment) of the Bible leads me to believe, no. If it stands up to such a (rigorous)
reading, it contains one. My own belief is creative – chaordic, an essay, a halting sense, not
dogmatic. But it’s what I am saying. Our circumstances, our environment, are similar enough to
the environment of all human beings, codified and shaped not only by the literate myths of the
Bible, but the myths these emerged out of, that we are wise to heed the words of our ancestors
passed down to us through the ages. But, we must always do so. We must engage with these words,
must evaluate them, must live them out creatively, which will itself entail the possibility – the
necessity – of overthrowing, re-casting, re-enlivening them.
Comments on PL by BL

As one of those too specific Catholics which you mention, your words give me a healthy pause. Having been raised within a purportedly Catholic household and community and being often unsatisfied with many aspects of that, I've usually rejected that tradition with hopes of finding more fertile human soil in other parts of the community. A difficult thing, however, of having Catholic images and stories carelessly sprinkled throughout your childhood without really understanding them is that as a person with bigger numbers in the age column, many of these stories seem to linger and hover like enchanting but confusing ghosts. There is a no man's land between a field of rejected symbolic content and a secular world which I lack the childhood for. Jordan Peterson sort of steps in here with the glimmering promise that all those symbolic husks strewn about my psyche like a Dali landscape could be rejuvenated if I could just work my way into their psychological core in that Peterson kind of way. Thank God for Layman Pascals with Romantic temptations like these!

Response/Rejoinder LP

It pleasures my depths to encounter Brendan and Andrew’s words – here as elsewhere. Like them, I turn my thoughts to the childhood of my mythological sensibilities. Perhaps it could be said that I was raised at the crossroads between my father’s agnostic Taoism, my mother’s mystical Christianity and my grandmother’s theosophical neo-paganism. Thus I succumb too easily to the terrible temptation to read the Holy Book as though it was an ultra-pagan architecture in which the vital forces of Nature and Psyche are conjoined in a globalized Judeo-Roman symbolism centered around the a-historical legend of a Taoist wonder-worker. It sounds delightful, I know, but I must caution my own first instinct in order to accommodate the experiences of many.

We are all similarly slaves of the erratic fragments of mythology that we inherit from the multi-tentacled impingement of ancestry upon our childhoods. Jordan Peterson is, I think, correct to suppose that ideology is incomplete mythology. That our historically recent cultural schemes and underlying political philosophies are not adequate representations of the full metaphysical or performative proto-schema that most effectively joins the soul to the culture to Nature and to the positive and negative forms of the Unfathomable.

What Peterson seldom does, however, is critique the extant records of mythology and official religious traditions in terms of how well they might present the potentially complete web of enactive mythological understanding. This issue has been the subject of many discussion at the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS). We have explored the idea that the “dharma” suggests a living network of wisdom-skills and developmental insights that may start to emerge in any historical, cultural or geographic zone. Successful local factors lead to a few people producing a few of the set of possible spiritual/maturational insights in a unique style – and then, if things keep going well, it grows little by little toward a more complete demonstration of the full complement of transrational structures. But how much is determined by this – keep going well!

So many things can regularly interrupt this process. Environmental stress, emotional pathology, bacterial health, complex collisions between the implications of local variants of universal truth, mismanaged of survival and aggression and love. Should we not expect that many common tendencies expressed in the dominant historical religions and mythologies represent not universal
truths but frequent perversions and common types of errors? Is it not possible that the desert cults of Sumeria, Egypt & Judea are very poor examples of the universal mythic infrastructure? That monotheism is not, in general, an indicator of a higher integration of mythological forces that raise the heroic spirit of exploration to the zenith of the pantheon but, on the contrary, already a sign of tyrannical distortion of the natural hierarchy? A hand-clenching-into-a-fist, an exaggerated emphasis, a Luciferian promotion which expresses the suppressive parent or imbalanced psyche or pathologically organized individual?

We don’t know this but we also do not hear much of this possibility from Peterson. We hear intimations of his own visions, femininity and gnosticism but we seldom hear about the actual shamanic and organic flavor of the “alchemical wedding” of opposites. Where is hermaphroditic priest who is higher than the kings? Where is the trickster, shape-shifter and utterer of poetic nonsense as the embodiment of the half-chaos/half-order needed to restore vitality to the human sphere? Isn’t the ritual subjugation of the Sumerian king to the priest already a decadent ritual that merely mocks the old potency of the true ceremony of Marduk in which the highest becomes lowest, the champion is humiliated, weeping and laughing predominate? Where is the image of the heroic spirit that divides and flows back together with divine cheer like Dionysus? Where is the tenderness, wildness, sexual experimentation, artistic strangeness and childlike glow of the psychedelic voyagers who personal experience in the collective unconscious brought these myths back into most of the early tribes?

There are many flavors that I assume to be part of the universal mythic grammar of humanity that I do not hear strongly echoed in Peterson – and perhaps this is because of his over-use of limited and partial “Western desert” texts. Perhaps. The truth is that we simply do not know how much of the most important transrational structures (of embodied knowledge for an informationally opaque universe) are present in the Torah, the Gospel, the Koran, the Eddas, the latest stained glass mandala from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Nor can we tell which parts that seem most evocative and pertinent and complex are actually signs of a common degradation process. The heroic spirit must revivify the naturalness of progressive culture but how many of the tales of the legendary gods and heroes are themselves rusted, ossified examples whose collective summation lead us to incomplete or perverse maps of meaning?

A cautionary note to end upon... :)

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Poems from the Postmetaphysical Edge

The Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality forum(s) include contributions over many genres, including poetry, visual art, and even musical offerings. We reached out to the IPS community for poems related to the themes discussed on the forums and were happy to receive the following.

Contents

Goddess, by Edward Berge
Signs in Country, by Tim Winton
Three Poems by Bruce Alderman

Goddess, by Edward Berge

Preface: These are the lyrics to a song I wrote while an initiate of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a western esoteric tradition (aka wesoterica). Therein we enacted spiritual experiences via ritual, ceremony, symbol, iconography, costumes, movements, gestures, invocations, astral projection and activating all the physical senses. I wrote this song as an opening for a ceremony celebrating the feminine. It uses Tarot Major Arcana imagery, as Tarot was one of the tools we used to activate the various psycho-dynamic archetypes.

Goddess

Oh Goddess of the sea and land, open the door of dreams to me
Hourglass shifting grains of sand, the door without a key
Soundless boundless bitter sea, the moon of man's desire
The deep dark well of memory, it's you that we admire
To thee do we aspire…Goddess

Goddess it is you we call, with our song do we enthrall
Come speak to us in our sacred hall

Dark one of the night of time, before the Gods were born
Priestess beyond the virgin veil, darkest hour before the morn
From thy robe the sea sprang forth, the earth your cubic chair
Crown the moon upon your head, wrapped in mystery your hair
Jachin and Boaz in your lair…Goddess

Dark Goddess it is your we call, with our song do we enthrall
Come speak to us in our sacred hall

Bright mother in the midst of day, the father in your womb
The dove descends into your heart, wheat springs from the tomb
With flowing stream you carve the stone, a crown of stars adorn
Generate the sacred image, matrix seed of form
And all creation born…Goddess

Bright Goddess it is you we call, with our song do we enthrall
Come speak to us in our sacred hall

Alike in light and darkness too, we cannot see you clear
The scales of justice balance you, strength lets us draw near
Sandalphon raises up her wand, and parts the polar two
Unveil the star of innocence, let us gaze at you
The dancing world we view…Goddess

Twilight Goddess it is you we call, with our song do we enthrall
Come speak to us in our sacred hall

Goddess it is you we call, with our song do we enthrall
Come speak to us in our sacred hall…Goddess

**Signs in Country, by Tim Winton**

*Signs in Country*

Did you not see the signal of the six-sided honeycomb in those white clouds?

Does that particular lack of disorder not render unto you a sign?

Has the Sun conspired against you?

Does the Land remain cold and secretive?

Have you been blinded, rendered unable, to read Signs in Country?

It was not always this way. Nor, will it be this way forever.

And you are not to be blamed my son. No one told me either.

But look over the flat plain and imagine hidden forces.

Not the wrinkled up skin, but the smoothed flood flats only. Start simply. Then move on.

The Mountains will only deceive you: the air there made clever—not to be interpreted but by other than the fully initiated.

And you are some way from there…
Do not be discouraged. I am not here to chide you. Watch carefully for the wind-twisted dust birds.

Follow their slow journey and use your God Given Vision.

For you know they must come back to earth.

Be still. Very still. Watch… Watch…

Let this unnoticed message thunder-roll though your emptiness.

How incomparably loud. How indescribably curious that you have not been deafened by those simple clouds till now?

And what of this?

So to you have the eye of eagle Vision.

And the scent Sense of bees. You can taste the Yarrow’s delicate nectar from 10,000 feet.

Feel the wind-dust rain in your long bones and become the buzzing motes moving lively in that chattering honey-coloured sun.

All then is revealed. Look down deeply onto this wax cloud capping.

Do you not see now, the very same sun-driven comb?

Three Poems by Bruce Alderman

Evening by the Ganges

The light of the evening falls
Into the spaces between the leaves
Till that is all you see: points of evening, ablaze,
As though the fire were drawn
From all things,
From mango and muchkand and stone,
And you cannot tell the light
From the singers in the trees,
Leaping from limb to limb,
And you cannot tell the singers
From the sun, broken
On the broad face
of the river –

All things speaking the same bright tongue,
Meaning born of leaps of light.

Long-fingered leaves reach
Into the pink evening,
Love moves out from my palms,
And the sun in the tree
In sudden shivers flashes
Through the body, through the brain,
And these words come, like Ganga
Throwing back the sun,

Like when an angel kisses your ear in sleep
And makes light in the body leap

And you come undone.

Nothing More

There is a light in the evening
Like light curving into a conch,
Whole in itself, prior
To the longing of night

In which the shapes of leaves,
And the tracks of worms, lie,
And the torn skin of the sycamore
Curls up, complete,

Like the mouth of Ananda, wholly
At ease, opening, just slightly,
Onto the unlabored singing
of the sea.

By the Verde River

Here, where the river slips like Sanskrit
From the mouths of rocks,
And the hawks in blue swing
Above the mistletoe,
And the dropped sun does nothing
On the water's face;

Where I sway by plum-colored currents,  
This as grass, and mad  
As a hermit, mad with prayer,  
In a hovel of trees,

Where, lit by dawn, the mountains cast  
Their blue light over miles;

Where, down by water, I am drowned  
In the mountains' shout;

Here is where I should be heard,  
With the birds in the rocks  
And dirt, my words dropped  
With the cough of crows  
In the wide quiet morning
A History of Symmetries (artists essay)

Dylan Thomas

For visual art included in Integral Review, 2019 Special Issue on IPS

In 1619, Johannes Kepler published Harmonices Mundi, a book that would revolutionize our understanding of astrophysics by presenting the geometric parallels of various physical processes. In the book, Kepler describes the geometric correlations that connect a diverse range of phenomena – from the physical structure of polyhedrons, to the elliptical orbits of astronomical bodies, to the consonance of musical notes and scales. Most notably, he established “Kepler’s laws of planetary motion,” which sharpened humanity’s understanding of the recently-adopted Copernican solar system. But despite all of the practical information presented in the book, it’s clear that Kepler’s reverence for geometry extends far beyond its intellectual or pragmatic value. Kepler believed that, beneath the web of ratios and symmetries, he saw the architecture of a divine craftsman. In one of his more fervent moments, Kepler wrote, “geometry is unique and eternal, a reflection of the mind of God.” Throughout his life’s work, Kepler frequently displayed a rapturous passion for geometry – witnessing the sacred in its structural harmony. But Kepler was not the first, nor the last, to use geometry as a window to the deeper truths of reality. From pagan artists, to religious devotees, to contemporary scientists – a diverse range of people throughout history has used geometry as a tool to decipher or represent the mysterious depths of the Universe. And as a geometric artist, I have drawn inspiration from many disparate eras and locations – and as a result, I feel a profound kinship with the many beings who have drawn intellectual, creative, and spiritual inspiration from the mysterious and fascinating nature of geometry.

Before humanity had ever used geometry to model physical reality, geometric structures had long been cherished for their aesthetic value. Geometric art has been a nearly omnipresent phenomenon in human cultures – appearing on various artifacts from across the world. The Blombos Cave Stone – an engraved piece of ochre found in South Africa – was, until recently, believed to be one of the earliest pieces of visual art ever discovered. The stone is decorated with a triangular crisscrossing pattern and has been dated to approximately 70,000 years ago. But newer discoveries have suggested that geometric art has a much longer history than first believed. In 2014, a researcher at the Leiden museum examined a collection of mussel shells that had been found on the Indonesian island of Java in the 1890s. The shells were remnants of food scraps left by homo erectus and had been stored away for nearly a century. But when a researcher examined them with modern technology, the shells revealed two deliberate modifications: a sharpened edge (used for cutting/scraping), and a pattern of carefully engraved zigzagging lines. The sharpened edge would have significant implications for our understanding of hominids’ technological

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1 Dylan Thomas is a visual artist from Victoria BC, Canada who blends contemporary media and technology with the traditional design elements of his Coast Salish heritage. His work has been featured in exhibits across North America, and in international publications such as the Journal of Mathematics and the Arts. Dylan plans to continue experimenting with his artwork and strives to keep exploring new creative syntheses between his cultural traditions and the ever-evolving media of the contemporary world. dylan@dylan-thomas.ca
evolution, but the engraved lines would prove equally important. The lines were arranged far too precisely to have occurred naturally or accidentally. With no plausible hypothesis for the lines practical utility, the researchers concluded that the engravings must have been created for aesthetic purposes. When the shells were dated to roughly 500 000 years ago, the finding had drastically changed our understanding of hominids’ artistic history. At half a million years old, older than homo sapiens as a species, this simple geometric design predates all of the earliest known figurative artwork (e.g. Venus figurines or European cave paintings) by hundreds of millennia – which suggests that geometry, not figurative imagery, likely inspired the earliest forms of visual art.

We can never know what inspired homo erectus to decorate those mussel shells, but if his motivations were anything like mine, or Kepler’s, or countless other artists and theorists who work with geometry, he too might have been awestruck when encountering the structural elegance of Nature’s geometry. It’s easy to imagine homo erectus being mesmerized by the radial symmetry of a blooming flower or the circular perfection of a midnight moon. While we can only speculate about homo erectus, humanity’s long and enduring admiration of geometry is perfectly clear. Throughout history, people from countless cultures have looked at the various breathtaking symmetries in nature – their technical ingenuity, their aesthetic grace – and inferred a deep and pervasive organization to the Universe. And as a result, geometry has played a significant role in various forms of religious art.

From the Chinese Yin Yang (two-fold rotational symmetry), to the Hebrew Star of David (three-fold radial symmetry), to the Egyptian Ankh (one-fold reflection symmetry) – humanity has a long history of creating geometric symbols to represent important metaphysical concepts – with some cultures taking geometry to a remarkable level of complexity. In the Himalayas, Tibetan artists created stunning circular images called “sand mandalas,” which often used multi-axis reflection symmetry and fractal scaling. Mandalas are painstakingly crafted using loose pigment of various colors, only to be deliberately destroyed at the end of the ceremony. These hypnotic images play a central role in Vajrayana Buddhist cosmology and rituals and are one of the most intricate forms of geometric art ever conceived.

Away from the Himalayas and into the Middle East, the Islamic world also took geometric art to a stunning level of mastery. Since even the subtlest forms of idolatry are considered blasphemous in Islam, Muslim artists abstained from creating images of religious figures. As a result, Muslims turned towards geometry for their religious art and mastered a complicated form of symmetry called tessellation. A tessellation is any-infinitely repeating pattern that consists of smaller identical shapes, called tiles. A checkerboard is one of the simplest tessellations (a series of identical squares), but Muslim artists took this geometry to stunning levels of complexity. Islamic tessellations were often constructed with dazzling arrangements of nesting and interlacing polygons that would merge together to form astral and floral forms. These patterns can be seen on Islamic pottery, textiles, and most notably architecture – decorating mosques that are among the most beautiful temples ever constructed.

But even today, as worldviews shift away from mythic narratives towards modern and postmodern models of reality, geometry has continued to play an important role in our quest to understand the universe. Scientists studying Quantum Field Theory use “Lie Groups” to visually
represent the properties of a set of subatomic particles. Once grafted, Lie Groups often result in futuristic mandala-like images with intricate radial symmetry and fractal properties. And in separate faction, the mathematics that underlies String Theory (one of the most popular hypotheses for grand unification in physics) relies on “Calabi-Lau manifolds” – beautifully exotic shapes that occupy hyperspace and can theoretically exist in up to seven dimensions.

As a geometric artist, unlike my religious and scientific counterparts, I am not attempting to deliberately decipher or represent the deepest nature of reality in my work. But despite one’s intentions – whether spiritual, theoretical, or aesthetic – there seems to be something inherently transcendent about the artistic elegance and structural ingenuity of Nature’s countless symmetries. I’d be lying if I described my relationship with geometry as anything but spiritual. My interest in geometric forms began with the traditional art of my Coast Salish heritage, but as time moved on, this passion outgrew its initial cultural boundaries. From the mythical to the astrophysical, from Stone Age mussel shells to the seven-dimensional shapes of String Theory, I’ve drawn artistic inspiration from the endless people and cultures that have shared my deep passion for geometry. Looking back through history, we can see how geometry – aesthetically and symbolically – has continuously transformed as humanity has evolved, but its relevance has endured through the ages. And beneath these superficial changes in form and meaning, it seems that, ultimately, geometry has frequently represented the same thing – whether we call it God, the Dharma, or The Standard Model: that mysterious force that builds near-miraculous order out of the depths chaos. So even though I’m certain that my worldview differs significantly from Johannes Kepler, a Tibetan sand artist, or a Muslim mathematician – we share in each other’s wonder and all have seen a beautiful mystery in the geometric architecture of Cosmos.
Brave New Whorl
Cascadian Fault
Ripples
Hummingbird House Post
Net Work (Victoria City Hall)
No Boundary
Cawutul Design coffee table prototype
Raven Panel
Event Horizon
Order and Chaos
Sun and Stone
Seahorse
The Union of Night and Day
Artistic Musings

Layman Pascal

Commentaries by Kathryn Winter

I’ve watched “Layman” make art for years. He comes from a family where everyone just does that periodically and nobody defines themselves as an artist. It’s normal. I admire that. He talks about art and shamanism in much the same terms. I think he wants to make pictures to see another world. A world that thinks like nature but isn’t nature. He thinks his mind isn’t real except where it combines conscious and unconscious. But that’s not everything. He also makes art as a public complaint or as what he calls “whim fulfillment as a spiritual practice.” I’ve seen him get angry at a boring portrait of Bill Murray and then make dozens of his own until it was out of his system. I’ve seen him rant against the use of canvases and declare that he will only make art on discarded cupboard doors. For like a year he refused to draw any line that he could predict. So he just made these tiny erratic squiggles. There’s a lot of intellectual passion in what he does but he also refuses to frame things or sign them. I guess he thinks art should be discarded as you go like a snakeskin. I’ve stolen some of his work over the years just to protect it from him.

1 Layman Pascal is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him -- this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting that what we have not yet done, but I digress -- He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral methatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.

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2 Kathryn Winter is a natal & death doula living in Victoria, British Columbia.

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THE TEMPLE OF THE COMING MAN is one of my favorite things Layman made. It was based
on a vision he had from a gnarly root cluster he found on the beach. I think he made several
versions using the bottoms of Ikea dresser drawers as a canvas. The speckly energy swirls in space
are my favorite part but I think he sees a terrifying but organic mind emerging upon the Earth.
THE PATERNAL LATTICE used to hang on the wall of his apart. His family always used to cast I-Ching for people when they had dinners. His dad insisted they switch from coins to yarrow stalks. This is one of the few remaining stalks. Hanging from it is a patch of Seine fishing net recovered from the collapse cedar boathouse on the property where he grew up in the middle of nowhere. His father was a fisherman on a native fishboat. The old nets used to hang dusty in the boathouse. He told me about dreams in which he was floating and twisting in a world of those nets. I think it’s the only piece of the family home he kept.
CTHULHU FOR PRESIDENT. These tentacled shells were actually hanging at my house but he was obsessed with them. He took a lot of photographs. Always of three. He liked the paper clip I used. I think it’s more of the idea that art has to capture the point at which rational forms break down. That’s what he likes about Lovecraft and Cthulhu. Cosmic complexity and unconscious order that you can almost grapple with. But not quite.
SPIRIT IS NOT AN ATTITUDE. This was two big cupboard panels. A diptych. He was doing a lot of fin de siecle poster art. Stripped down modernist style but with creepy spiritual messages. Layman always had a complicated relationship to positive emotional states. He lived in a Buddhist sangha for years where they practiced spiritual emotions like gratitude, love and contentment. He said it was undeniably good to have these “heart coherent intentional feelings” but they were insufficient. Too socialized. Too Hallmark. The force of chaos that becomes order in the eternal beginning is not necessarily nice or domestic or related to our ideas of kindness. And you don’t grow spiritually just be having the right inclusive attitude, I guess.
CHAPEL & FLOWER is kind of the world I think he lives in. Like he’s secretly living in a himalayan monastery overlooking a lotus point in the 13th century. I don’t think he thinks it’s lovely. I think he thinks it’s familiar.
I like OMINOUS. What the heck is that silver balloon? A UFO? Layman used to talk a lot about God being “cheerfully menacing.” And about “the dark bounce.” He find hints of apocalypse to be beautiful. Not full on holocausts but just the scent cosmic moodiness impinging on the human realm.
PLANETARY SHAMANISM is the only diagram he kept from all those talks he gave on Integral Theory, Subtle Energy and New Shamanism. He told me it shows how a personalized mythic experience of the natural exceeds the human just like the human exceeds the simple realm of nature. And that the biosphere isn’t bigger than us. I find that argument hard to follow. But I love his diagrams. He destroys most of them but they exist in notebooks, scraps, slides, jpegs. I think he thinks mostly visually. Like a manic architect. And then tries to put those shapes into words. And then tries to put some kind of sly, uncertain persona on top of the ideas so that they don’t like just like a person who believes in their own ideas. Something like that. I’d love to make a book of just his diagrams.
Layman loves Feng Shui. He always says, “That really Shui’s the Feng!” But he hates formalized systems of meaning. He thinks you should be able to invent Feng Shui by yourself on a desert island. Any encyclopedia of associations or meanings he hates. Dream Dictionaries drive him crazy. The interpretations aren’t anywhere near what he needs. But I remember his girlfriend at the time insisting on using the traditional Bagua hexagram for their apartment. She wanted him to put something in the TRAVEL & FRIENDLY PEOPLE corner. He tore up a giant mandala he was working on and did this on the back. I think his destinations and allies live in this cartoon twilight between the worlds. I like the giant orange beaver too. At least I think it’s a beaver.
BIOLUMINOSITY is really what it looks like in Layman’s head. The naturalness of trees, the creepiness of hanging moss and the brilliant light that bleeds through everything.
MODERN LOVE is funny. It’s was a huge image. You can’t see in the photo that it was like six feet tall. He did it when David Bowie died. The song Modern Love from 1983 obsessed him. He couldn’t get over the line, “I catch the paper boy... but things don’t really change!” He would rant about why anyone would suppose that things would change if you caught the paperboy? And caught him how? He would spin these elaborate scenarios where David Bowie had a paperboy trapped in a suburban basement and just couldn’t figure out why things still weren’t changing. There’s a kind of early 80s cold war apocalypse here but with surreal greenery. It used to always make me chuckle.
UNTITLED ALPHA is an example of the kind of abstract photography he did for years. Look closer into the world and you’ll find mixed feelings, I guess. He loves a threshold at which things could go in a number of different directions.
ALICE & THE FISH is from what he called his “inhumanist phase.” I think it’s important to him to play with the edges of attention, focus and meaning. Often he would make these images that were like tarot cards after a car accident. And frequently he put odd questions on them that can be answered. They just hold you at the threshold of a trance or a foyer between realms. This is him outputting what he receives. He always wanted to make a version of whatever he appreciated. But the thing he appreciated the most was this cheerful, focus confusion where you can’t tell if things make sense or not. I think he thinks that a superior state of consciousness. Better than knowing.