



**Institute for Cultural Evolution**

**Premises and  
Principles of the  
Evolutionary  
Worldview**

**2015**

*Focusing on the Cultural Roots  
of America's Challenges*



**Institute for Cultural Evolution**

# Premises and Principles of the Evolutionary Worldview

**2015**

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## 1. The Concept of a Worldview

The evolutionary worldview is an emerging cultural perspective—an enlarged frame of reality—that transcends and includes the best of what has come before. The evolutionary perspective can be understood as a distinct "worldview" because it provides an expanded set of values, a new way of seeing, and a discrete sense of identity for those who make meaning using its framework.

This conception of the evolutionary perspective as a distinct worldview is clarified through a comparison with other worldviews and the context of their historical development. For example, the widely accepted concept of the "modernist worldview" consists of a complex structure of value agreements that frame a well-defined view of nature, history, and what it means to live a good life. Modernist values include achievement, prosperity, liberty, democracy, science, and higher education. The origins of the modernist worldview can be traced to the European Enlightenment of the 18th century, which was brought about through the emergence of new forms of science and philosophy. And just as the modernist worldview was born through the rise of powerful new forms of philosophy, the evolutionary worldview is likewise emerging as a result of a new philosophy known as "integral" or "evolutionary" philosophy. Understanding the premises and principles of the evolutionary worldview thus begins with an understanding of the philosophy which serves as its foundation.

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## 2. Integral Philosophy and the Evolution of Consciousness

Evolutionary/integral philosophy is essentially a philosophy of evolution that emphasizes the evolution of consciousness and culture as a central factor in the process of evolution overall. Integral philosophy has evolved over the last century through the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Ken Wilber, and others. This philosophy also draws on the discoveries of developmental psychology and other social sciences, and it has been influenced by related forms of social philosophy, such as the widely respected work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Although these founders of integral philosophy differ on many points, they have all recognized that a greater understanding of consciousness is the key to a more complete conception of reality.

While the concept of consciousness is easier to illustrate than define, a common sense definition of human consciousness includes a person's thoughts, feelings, intentions, values, memories, and sense of self. Consciousness can be understood as the inside of human experience, what it is like to be and know ourselves; and this sentient personality, this original identity, is also the unique subjective presence through which others know us.

What makes integral philosophy compelling and important is its demonstration of the connection between the personal development of each person's values and character, and the larger development of human history overall. Through its insights into the

evolution of consciousness and culture, integral philosophy offers realistic and pragmatic solutions to the growing global problems that are increasingly threatening human civilization. That is, from the perspective of this philosophy, every problem in the world can be understood, at least partially, as a *problem of consciousness*. So it follows that the solutions to seemingly intractable problems, such as environmental degradation and climate change, nuclear proliferation and terrorism, hunger and overpopulation, unregulated globalization and gross inequality, can all be effectively ameliorated by raising or changing the consciousness that is continuing to create (or failing to prevent) these problems.

Moreover, understanding the human condition from this perspective shows how, in at least some places, human nature itself has developed, values and worldviews have evolved, and concepts of "worldcentric" morality have come to replace more narrow ethnocentric sensibilities. As a result of the evolution of consciousness and culture, some segments of the world's population have increasingly come to reject war, to condemn oppression, and to place a high value on the preservation of the natural environment.

Human consciousness can evolve in a wide variety of ways. It can be raised or evolved by increasing empathy and compassion, by cultivating knowledge, understanding and forgiveness, and by building political will and the determination to achieve social and environmental justice. Consciousness can also be raised by enlarging people's estimates of their own self-interest, by expanding their notions of what constitutes "the good life," and by persuading them to appreciate new forms of beauty and truth. The developed world's relatively recent acceptance of women as the social equals of men provides a good example of how the human condition can be improved through the evolution of consciousness.

According to integral philosophy, however, the evolution of consciousness is largely dependent on the evolution of human culture. When humans evolve their culture through new agreements or new forms of organization, this results in a corresponding growth in human consciousness. Through the "network effect" of cultural transmission, when one person has a conceptual breakthrough or new realization, this advance can be shared with others. And as new discoveries or new skills are adopted within a larger cultural context, such advances become refined and reinforced. Consciousness and culture—the individual and the group—thus co-evolve together.

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### **3. The Evolution of Worldviews**

This understanding of the co-evolution of consciousness and culture leads to another central tenet of integral philosophy, which recognizes the sequential emergence of values-based stages of human cultural development. Integral philosophy's view of cultural evolution sees history as unfolding according to a clearly identifiable *developmental logic* or cross-cultural pattern that influences the growth of human

society. This developmental logic need not be construed as a "deterministic law of history," or as implying a strictly unidirectional course of cultural development, but it does reveal a recurring theme in humanity's narrative story. The unfolding of this theme or pattern results in a dialectical structure of conflict and resolution, which is created by the interaction of specific worldview stages or levels of historical development. The most obvious and widely accepted example of this stage structure can be recognized in the distinct, historically significant worldview stages known as *modernism* and *traditionalism*.

Prior to the Enlightenment, the majority of the world's population was divided among the great religious civilizations. These are the cultural worldview structures identified as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and others. While there were, of course, major differences between these civilizations, there were also many remarkable similarities. And these similarities allow these diverse religious worldviews to be classified together under the general heading of the *traditional* stage of cultural development. Contemporary traditionalists value family life, lawful authority, self-sacrifice, and the sanctity of their beliefs. Although every traditional worldview has been significantly impacted and modified by the developments of ensuing centuries, this stage of cultural development continues to define reality for, and thus hold the allegiance of, billions of people today. Even in the developed world, the traditional worldview remains the cultural center of gravity for significant minorities who give more credence to scripture than to science.

However, as noted above, beginning in the 17th century, a radically new, reason-based worldview structure emerged, which is now identify as the *modernist* stage of cultural evolution. Like the traditional worldviews that preceded it, modernism provides a frame of reality and an agreed-upon set of values that help define the loyalties and identities of those who ascribe to it. Yet the historical record also confirms that there are more than just these two stages of traditionalism and modernism. Prior to the emergence of the traditional stage, which arose through innovations such as written language, law, and feudal forms of government, history reveals several *pre-traditional* stages of cultural development. These pre-literate, indigenous cultures used kinship-based forms of social organization and employed time-honored survival strategies that kept them closely connected to nature. And remnants of these ancient cultural structures continue to exist in parts of the world today.

Although there are many ways to divide up the course of human history, and although there are a variety of competing stage theories, few will disagree that the recognition of the pre-traditional, traditional, and modernist stages of cultural development represents a valid reading of the historical record. Like practically all forms of evolution, cultural evolution unfolds by discrete, emergent steps, rather than along a seamless continuum of growth. To paraphrase Jean Piaget, "there is no development that lacks a structure," and the development of human civilization is no exception.

A central tenet of integral philosophy is its recognition of the sequential emergence of values-based stages of human cultural development.



Integral philosophy uses the words "pre-traditional," "traditional," and "modernist" as defined terms to describe these stages of cultural evolution. Yet integral philosophy also recognizes forms of cultural evolution beyond modernism, and the first of these stages is defined using the term "postmodernism."

Unfortunately, the word "postmodern" has become a battleground of meaning. But although it has been used to describe art movements and critical forms of academic discourse, integral philosophy uses the term as a general description of the distinct cultural worldview that has emerged beyond modernism in many parts of the developed world. This large demographic group adheres to a different and distinct set of values that contrasts with both traditionalism and modernism. Although postmodern culture includes a great diversity of outlooks and beliefs, it does cohere as a recognizable worldview structure, showing many similarities to the historically significant worldviews that have preceded it. That is, like modernism and traditionalism, the postmodern worldview provides people with a sense of identity and thus creates strong loyalties to its perspectives. And following the pattern of the rise of previous worldviews, postmodern values stand in antithesis to the values of the existing culture from which they arose. Postmodernists are generally united by their concern for the natural environment, by their sensitivity to those who have been previously marginalized or exploited, and by their desire for self-actualization or spiritual growth. With the rise of postmodern values comes a rejection of the stale materialistic values of modernism, and the chauvinistic and oppressive values of traditionalism.

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There is no development that lacks a structure.

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However, as with the rise of modernism and traditionalism, the emergence of the postmodern worldview has also brought new problems and pathologies. Postmodernists can be prone to narcissism, value relativism, a return to magical or mythical thinking, and intense forms of anti-modernism that threaten to undermine the social foundations upon which the postmodern worldview ultimately depends.

A simplified overview of the characteristics of these major developmental stages is provided in *figure 1*, below.

Here in America, the worldviews of traditionalism, modernism, and postmodernism each vie for the allegiance of the population, with modernists comprising a majority of approximately fifty-percent, and the rest about evenly divided between traditionalism and postmodernism. As discussed in the next section, below, these demographic estimates have been arrived at through extensive research on both the psychology of individuals and the sociology of large groups. However, the research of social science is unnecessary to confirm these cultural realities; the culture war is evident on practically every evening's news broadcast.

Notwithstanding the simplified characterizations in *figure 1*, it is important to emphasize that these worldview structures are exceedingly subtle and complex. And it is possible for the same person to hold more than one worldview depending on the circumstances. According to integral philosophy, these stages of historical evolution represent an



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**Stages of Worldview Development**

Historical Timeline:			
	Traditional Worldviews	Modernist Worldview	Postmodern Worldview
Cultural Contributions	Faith in a higher order, black and white sense of morality, self-sacrifice for the sake of the group	Birth of reason, progress through science and technology, rise of democracy	Birth of environmentalism, multiculturalism, and a new spiritual sensitivity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of duty</li> <li>• Honors traditions</li> <li>• Strong faith</li> <li>• Focus on family</li> <li>• Law and order</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science and technology</li> <li>• Meritocracy</li> <li>• Middle class</li> <li>• Belief in progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental priority</li> <li>• Race and gender equality</li> <li>• Worldcentric morality</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional religions</li> <li>• Patriotism</li> <li>• Conservativism</li> <li>• Military organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporations</li> <li>• Modern science</li> <li>• Mainstream media</li> <li>• Professional sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progressive culture</li> <li>• Critical academia</li> <li>• Environmental movement</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feudalism</li> <li>• Dictatorships</li> <li>• Bureaucracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democracy</li> <li>• Corporations</li> <li>• Strategic alliances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic socialism</li> <li>• Consensus committees</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winston Churchill</li> <li>• Pope Francis</li> <li>• Rick Warren</li> <li>• Confucius</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thomas Jefferson</li> <li>• Charles Darwin</li> <li>• Thomas Edison</li> <li>• John F. Kennedy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mohandas Gandhi</li> <li>• Martin L. King, Jr.</li> <li>• John Muir</li> <li>• John Lennon</li> </ul>
Potential Pathologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigid intolerance</li> <li>• Dogmatism</li> <li>• Fundamentalism</li> <li>• Chauvinism</li> <li>• Denial of science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Materialism</li> <li>• Nihilism</li> <li>• Unscrupulousness</li> <li>• Selfishness</li> <li>• Exploitiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value relativism</li> <li>• Narcissism</li> <li>• Denial of hierarchy</li> <li>• Dislike of modernism and traditionalism</li> </ul>

Figure 1

unfolding trajectory of *values development*. Yet integral philosophy also recognizes additional lines of development, such as cognitive or emotional development, which are not directly tied to the evolution of values or worldviews.

## 4. The Evolutionary Authenticity of the Postmodern Worldview

Admittedly, describing the culture of the developed word in terms of a vertical scale of values development is certainly controversial. And claims that postmodern values are somehow more developed or evolved than the values of previous stages may be especially difficult for some to accept. Integral philosophy, however, does not claim that later appearing stages of development are absolutely better in every way. Integral philosophy holds that the values of each of these historically significant worldviews

are evolutionarily appropriate for a specific set of life conditions, that the accomplishments of earlier levels are prerequisite for the achievements of later appearing levels, that the core values of every worldview have a crucial and ongoing role to play within the larger culture, and that every one of these perspectives deserves consideration and respect. In defense of its contention that the postmodern worldview (as outlined in *figure 1*) is an historically significant form of culture that constitutes authentic evolution beyond modernism, integral philosophy offers the following evidence.

#### 4.1 Social Science Research

The academic field of developmental psychology has accumulated a large body of research on individuals, validating the idea that development in both children and adults unfolds according to distinct stages, which show a loose correspondence with historical worldviews. However, while this research has clearly revealed the existence of pre-traditional, traditional, and modernist stages of psychological or cognitive development, the findings usually end with the modernist stage. This can be explained by the fact that the researchers themselves are modernists, so it is unlikely they would be willing or able to identify development beyond their own level. While there are some notable exceptions, such as the research of Robert Kegan and Clare Graves,<sup>1</sup> which does identify postmodern development and beyond, developmental psychology alone cannot be relied on to provide adequate evidence of the course of humanity's overall cultural evolution.

Another body of empirical evidence from the social sciences that validates integral philosophy's view of the stages of cultural evolution is found in sociology. In 1995, sociologist Paul Ray published the findings of his national survey on the role of values in American life, which was sponsored by the Fetzer Institute and the Institute of Noetic Sciences.<sup>2</sup> Ray's research drew upon more than 100,000 questionnaire responses and hundreds of focus groups, and clearly revealed the existence of three large cultural blocks in America, which he called "Traditionals, Moderns, and Cultural Creatives." Although the implicit postmodern orientation of both Ray and his sponsors resulted in a glorification of the "Cultural Creatives" that did not recognize the accompanying shortcomings of this emerging culture, his research nevertheless had a large social and economic influence.

During the same period, a less well-publicized but more comprehensive sociological study of values development was published by Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan. This multi-decade international survey cataloged the "basic values and beliefs" of people from 80 different countries, and found abundant evidence for the recent appearance of what was termed "post-material values" in developed countries. Known as *The World Values Survey*,<sup>3</sup> this research corresponds with and generally confirms the findings of Ray and others. However, like the research of developmental psychology, research from the field of sociology is not sufficient, by itself, for the conclusion that cultural evolution in the developed world is moving toward postmodern values.

But what can be safely concluded from the research of the social sciences is that the distinct and dialectically separated stages identified as traditionalism, modernism, and

postmodernism do exist as cultural systems of values, and that they have arisen in a historical sequence, with traditionalism being the oldest and postmodernism the most recent. However, when it comes to the conclusion that postmodernism is "more evolved" than modernism, empirical research alone is not sufficient to make this value judgment; human history must also be considered. Thus, understanding how and why postmodernism represents authentic cultural evolution beyond modernism begins with the recognition of why modernism itself is more evolved than traditionalism.

## 4.2 Modernism's Evolutionary Advance Over Traditionalism

First, it must be emphasized that modernist culture is not *absolutely* better than traditional culture in every possible sense. Modernists are not kinder or more generous, they are not more loyal or committed, they are not always smarter or even more educated. What makes modernism unquestionably more culturally evolved than traditionalism is that modernists have achieved a more developed level of values in a variety of crucial areas, and this emergence of higher values has led directly to forms of civilization for which people have shown a consistent preference during the last 350 years. As examples, modernism's more evolved understanding of truth has led to science and economic development, and modernism's more evolved conceptions of morality have led to democracy and the advent of human rights. Ongoing cultural development from traditionalism into modernism (but not vice versa) can be seen in the historical record since the Enlightenment. So regardless of one's personal opinions of the merits of modernism, this achievement-oriented worldview has been, and continues to be, the goal of billions of people who perceive it as a way to improve their lives. Although not everyone feels this way, most people generally prefer democracy over dictatorships, they prefer scientific medicine over traditional forms of medicine, they prefer higher education over ignorance, and they prefer relative prosperity over poverty.

Modernism's evolutionary advance can sometimes be hard to see due to the presence of what integral philosophy recognizes as "the dialectic of progress and pathology."<sup>14</sup> As cultural evolution achieves new depths of understanding and new powers over the material world, these very advances carry with them corresponding problems and pathologies that can only be solved by still further evolution. Integral philosophy's concept of the dialectic of progress and pathology reveals how evolutionary advances and emerging social problems are linked in a kind of indestructible polarity, wherein every step forward results in new categories of problems that are intimately related to the positive features of that same developmental advance. And perhaps equally important is the fact that although emergent stages of cultural evolution result in improvements, some of the benefits conferred by previous stages are often lost in the process. However, when one begins to see how consciousness evolves—how new stages emerge as a result of the dialectical tension of thesis and antithesis—one can begin to detect authentic progress in cultural evolution, despite the appearance of new challenges and set backs that

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inevitably accompany the process.

Notwithstanding the horrific problems brought about by modernism, this form of culture is still what the majority of premodern people in the world seem to want.<sup>5</sup> Postmodernists often deny this by contending that traditionalists only aspire to modernism because they have been seduced into embracing empty, materialistic values that will only make them unhappy in the end. Yet there are few educated modernists or postmodernists who are ready to give up their middleclass lifestyles and embrace a mythic worldview and a more traditional way of life.

### 4.3 Progressive Postmodernism's Evolutionary Advance Over Modernism

Thus, once it becomes clear how modernism is generally more evolved than traditionalism, this same criteria can then be used to reach the conclusion that postmodernism is similarly more evolved than modernism. Authentic postmodern culture has become a significant demographic only in regions where underlying modernist culture is most successful and well-established. Where people are relatively wealthy and well-educated, where they have already received most of what modernism has to offer, one finds that significant numbers (especially the young) consistently embrace countercultural, "post-material," postmodern identities.

The manifestation of postmodern values can be recognized in the social movements of environmentalism, multiculturalism, feminism, and egalitarianism in general. Postmodernists are attracted to organic and natural foods, clothing, and related products, and they evince a strong preference for alternative medicine, alternative spirituality, progressive politics, and peace at all costs. And despite the diversity of views that are embraced within postmodern culture, what generally binds postmodernists together is their agreement regarding the abundant pathologies of modernism. Anti-modernism is thus the hallmark of contemporary postmodernism in practically all its forms.

If one has never shopped at a natural foods store, attended a yoga class, or read a book of non-traditional spirituality, the distinct values of the postmodern worldview may be difficult to recognize or acknowledge. But for those who are familiar with the more progressive segments of the Western world, the culture of postmodernism is unmistakable. Yet even if one grants that postmodernism is a discrete worldview that can be distinguished from traditionalism and modernism, this does not fully decide the question of whether this form of culture is somehow more evolved than the modernist culture from which it arises. So in making this value judgment and answering this question, the following inquiries must be considered: Is worldcentric morality more evolved than ethnocentric or nationalistic forms of morality? Is a deep concern for the

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environment more evolved than a general disregard thereof? Is an interest in the equality of women more evolved than paternalism or chauvinism? Is a holistic approach to science and medicine more evolved than a purely materialistic approach? It is easy to forget how prevalent were these latter views in the developed world of the 1950s, prior to the rise of the postmodern worldview. Thus, in light of these considerations, ICE affirms that the countercultural values of postmodernism are, in some important ways, authentically more evolved than the earlier values embodied in the modernist worldview.

#### 4.4 Shortcomings of the Postmodern Worldview

Yet while the ongoing development of the postmodern worldview is positive for the most part, at the current rate of growth it will be generations before the majority of Americans have a postmodern cultural center of gravity. Although postmodernists actively seek to persuade others to adopt their worldview, many postmodernists harbor the expectation that the world will soon "wake up" en masse and adopt ecological and compassionate values in a kind of worldwide spiritual renaissance. However, by explaining how each of these worldview steps serve as an indispensable foundation for the emergence of the next, integral philosophy shows that the next steps of cultural evolution must include ongoing progress into all of the world's historically significant worldviews. And because these steps cannot generally be skipped or bypassed, the postmodern strategy for cultural evolution, which relies on the notion of a miraculous great awakening of humanity as a whole, can be recognized as naive and even misguided. At this point in history the challenge of achieving further cultural evolution is too important to be viewed through the lens of fantasy or wishful thinking.

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Moreover, there are aspects of postmodern culture that retard, or even prevent, cultural evolution overall. The strident anti-modernist and anti-traditionalist rhetoric of postmodernists can make both modernists and traditionalists defensive, and this defensiveness serves to "pin people in place" culturally, as they develop a resistance to postmodern values of every kind. The irony is that despite being the most evolved form of culture that has yet to appear, the postmodern worldview has in some ways become a kind of "cork in the bottle" that prevents many modernists and traditionalists from adopting the values of environmental sustainability and social justice. Modernists and traditionalists who might otherwise be persuaded by the attractive features of the postmodern agenda find themselves locked in a culture war wherein loyalty to the values of their respective worldviews places them in opposition to the progress offered by postmodernism, which is perceived as being a threat to modernist and traditional values.

Thus, because of the polarizing effects of its social agenda, definition of the next steps of cultural evolution cannot be left to postmodernism alone. Humanity's global problems are becoming too urgent to allow progress in their amelioration to be stymied by the political stagnation that results from the developed world's culture war. For example, over the past few years consensus about the need to fight global warming has been in decline due to sustained efforts by conservative groups who have sought to discredit climate change science. This largely knee-jerk reaction against the environmental movement stems from the deep animosity and distrust that conservatives feel toward anything that is dear to the hearts of postmodernists. And

ironically, much of this acrimony began with postmodernism's own militant rejection of establishment values in the 1960s.

#### 4.5 The Promise of an Evolutionary or "Post-Postmodern" Worldview

Therefore, socially and politically significant evolution in consciousness and culture in the developed world awaits the articulation of a new set of values that can harmonize competing definitions of progress and bring peace to the culture war. And this needed vision is provided by the emerging evolutionary worldview, which offers solutions that are even *more progressive* than what passes for progressive culture today. Yet in this context, "more progressive" does not mean either "further left" or "further right"; this evolutionary perspective goes beyond the horizontal dimension of liberal and conservative by carrying forward the enduring strengths, while simultaneously pruning away the pathologies, of both positions. According to integral philosophy (as well as other forms of social philosophy), cultural evolution unfolds through the synthetic transcendence of thesis and antithesis, and this is exactly what the evolutionary perspective is attempting to do.

Although it may be a generation before this new evolutionary worldview has political power of its own, it can nevertheless make progress in the present by helping to reduce friction among the existing cultural structures of traditionalism, modernism, and postmodernism. And the evolutionary perspective can accomplish this by showing how the values of each of these historically significant worldviews have arisen within the dialectical structure of a larger *internal cultural ecosystem*. Integral philosophy makes clear how each of these worldviews is working to improve a distinct set of problematic life conditions that continue to plague society, and thus why each of these worldviews has an ongoing role to play in the structure of contemporary civilization. In other words, modernism and traditionalism have not been negated or completely outmoded by the emergence of postmodern values. Indeed, the ongoing success of the healthy and enduring values of these earlier worldviews is essential for the viability of postmodernism itself.

Although the postmodern worldview itself is still young, and although its growth will be continuing throughout this century, there are signs that it has grown beyond its original emergent phase and is now maturing and consolidating as a system of values. And it is both the successes and the failures of postmodernism that provide the necessary life conditions for the subsequent emergence of the evolutionary worldview. So even though the rise of the evolutionary perspective as a significant cultural force in the developed world may still be many years away, the usable values of this future worldview are becoming available today to those who are able to evolve their consciousness into this enlarged frame of reality.

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At this point in history the challenge of achieving further cultural evolution is too important to be viewed through the lens of fantasy or wishful thinking.

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## 5. Elements of the Evolutionary Worldview

Examining the historical record using the evolutionary perspective of integral philosophy shows how modernism emerged postmodernism in turn evolved beyond modernism. And this perspective also reveals the contours of the evolutionary worldview—the next stage of cultural evolution that is beginning to appear on the horizon of history.

By way of comparison, the rise of the modernist worldview during the Enlightenment was the result of many factors, making a comprehensive analysis of this emergent event beyond the scope of this paper. Yet among the many causes of the Enlightenment, historians are in general agreement that the metaphysical philosophy of René Descartes was particularly significant.

Beginning in the early 17th century, Galileo's demonstration of the heliocentric structure of the solar system had shown the superiority of scientific descriptions of reality over the mythical teachings of the Church. Spurred by these discoveries, Descartes developed an original philosophic foundation for the scientific revolution. His radical philosophy divided reality into a subjective, supernatural world of mind, and an objective, material world of matter. And by doing so he helped inaugurate a new era of reason and scientific discovery. By literally reframing reality using new metaphysical categories, Descartes helped open the eyes of scientists to the "objective" way of seeing and understanding the natural world.

**Socially significant evolution in the developed world awaits the articulation of a new set of values that can harmonize competing definitions of progress and bring peace to the culture war.**

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### 5.1 A New Ontology

Now, integral philosophy is doing something very similar; it is reframing reality so as to open up the "ontology of interiors." Guided by the philosophy of Whitehead, Wilber, and others, as well as by the breakthroughs of system science, integral philosophy has discovered that the worldview structures that provide the steps of evolution for consciousness and culture are actually *dynamic systems of agreement* that resemble the dynamical systems (also known as "dissipative structures") found in nature. These worldview systems have both an exterior, physical expression, and also an interior dimension. On the external side, the features of these dynamic systems of culture are fairly straightforward; they can be found in the various forms of communication and social expression through which worldviews are transmitted and consolidated. Yet on the internal side, in addition to the subjective experience of individuals, integral philosophy has revealed a previously unrecognized *collective interior* aspect of worldview systems. And it is through its expanded recognition of the collective interiors of cultural evolution that integral philosophy reveals a new ontology.

As noted, historically significant worldviews are powerful, multi-generational, large-

scale agreements that frame reality and provide identity for those who ascribe to them. And although these agreements are ultimately affirmed and maintained within the subjective consciousness of individuals, there is an element of such agreements that is neither wholly subjective nor completely objective. That is, worldview structures are partially objective, partially subjective, but also partially "intersubjective"—these dynamic systems occupy the "agreement space" that exists *in between* individuals. Put differently, evolutionarily significant, macro agreements about values occupy multiple domains simultaneously: these worldview systems subsist in objective forms of communication, subjective forms of assent and concurrence, and enduring intersubjective forms of connection that make up a large part of the "interior corpus" of these agreement structures.

This intersubjective aspect of worldview systems is not merely metaphorical. According to integral philosophy, the intersubjective realm is an interior dimension of reality that cannot be reduced to either objective or subjective categories. And it is by recognizing this collective interior dimension of cultural evolution that integral philosophy provides an expanded reality frame; a fresh perspective that offers an enlarged understanding of the overall developmental structure of human consciousness and culture. Of course, cultural worldviews are not conscious entities, but they do exhibit enduring systemic behaviors that resemble other types of self-organizing evolutionary structures such as ecosystems.

Recognizing the similarities between worldview systems and biological systems reveals the "metabolism of values" through which cultural structures maintain their systemic vitality. And just as cells are the micro-systems that make up an organism, agreements about specific values act similarly as the internal micro-systems that aggregate into historically significant worldviews that persist through time. Moreover, as discussed further below, this new understanding of value metabolism can help clarify why some cultures are vibrant and healthy and why other cultures remain dysfunctional. This expanded ontological recognition of cultural evolution thus allows change agents to better see, contact, and work with these worldview systems as never before.

Further, integral philosophy's expanded recognition of interiority avoids the problems of Cartesian dualism by explaining how the subjective category of consciousness (or interiority in general) is not "supernatural"; sentient subjectivity is as real and natural as the external aspects of reality. Building on the work of Whitehead, integral philosophy argues that every naturally occurring form of evolutionary organization possesses an interior aspect. While this recognition of pervasive interiority does not imply that structures such as cells or molecules have consciousness *per se*, it does show how consciousness does not simply "pop out" at the top of the evolutionary scale. This reframing of reality thus helps avoid the *mind/body problem*, which has vexed materialistic forms of philosophy for over 300 years.<sup>6</sup>

So, just as Enlightenment philosophy opened up the *external* universe to a new era of investigation and discovery through objective science, integral philosophy now promises similar advances within the *internal* universe of consciousness and culture. Although a thorough description of integral philosophy's ontology of interiors is beyond the scope of this paper, the sections below consider examples of how this new understanding can be used to diagnose and solve many of the cultural problems that



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currently plague humanity.

## 5.2 A New Epistemology

The "new way of seeing" that arose with the modernist worldview during the Enlightenment came about through the use of the emergent epistemological capacity of reason. Although premodern thinkers also used reason and logic, they lacked a systematic method of analyzing objective reality from a scientific perspective. Nor could they see how the mythical descriptions of the universe provided by their premodern worldviews were in fact inherently unreasonable, if not completely irrational. It was only through the new objective clarity provided by a thoroughly rational worldview that Europeans were able to "disenchant" their understanding of nature. And just as the rise of modernist consciousness provided a new epistemological capacity, the enlarged perspectives of the evolutionary worldview likewise provide the expanded vision of a new epistemological capacity. This new capacity, which Wilber calls "vision-logic," arises as one comes to view the world through dialectical perspectives.

This dialectical way of knowing can be distinguished from both "formal operational thought" (originally described by Piaget),<sup>7</sup> and "relativistic thought." Formal operational thinking, which is most often associated with modernist consciousness, usually perceives the world as presenting "right or wrong" choices within a closed system of lawful relationships. Relativistic thinking, which is most often associated with postmodern consciousness, can see the validity of more than one choice, but cannot usually see how such alternatives can be reconciled or synthesized. In contrast to both of these earlier ways of knowing, dialectical thinking always anticipates the possibility of development, and thus perceives the world as a fundamental process of changing dynamic relationships. This dialectical way of seeing thus recognizes how conflicting perspectives can actually work together, mutually supporting each other, even when in apparent opposition, in a manner that can be compared to the function of a tension strut in an architectural structure.

Developmental psychologist Michael Basseches illustrates dialectical thinking using the example of three college students who are each frustrated by standardized assignments and tests, and feel that their freedom and love of learning is being stifled. In Basseches' example, the first student (representing formal operational thinking) is angry about his situation, but resigns himself to the unfairness of the system and cynically decides to just give teachers what they want in order to get by. The second student (representing relativistic thinking) is confused; he knows his education would be improved if he had more curricular freedom, but he also "assumes that the college is run by experienced educators, who must have determined that the use of tests and assigned papers to measure and grades to motivate is the soundest educational method." However, the third student in Basseches' example (representing dialectical thinking), "reasons that this contradiction will only really be resolved when the basic relationship of the colleges and universities to society is transformed. He decides that he will devote his time at college to trying to learn all he can that might help him contribute to that kind of transformation of educational institutions. He accepts that in the meantime he will be given standardized assignments and grades and will have to make compromises ... But he is resolved not to lose sight of his own educational goals."<sup>8</sup> This example thus suggests how dialectical thinkers can take conflicts in their

stride, using them for further development. Additional examples are discussed below.

The emergent epistemological capacity of reason that arises with modernist consciousness is a *cognitive* capacity of the mind, which involves rational thinking. In contrast, the new epistemological capacity that arises with the evolutionary perspective is an emergent *volitional* capacity of the will, which comes about mostly through dialectical evaluation. That is, it is usually only by appropriately *valuing* the elements of a problematic situation that we can correctly perceive the crucial functions of such elements within the situation as a whole. This involves more than simply "weighing the alternatives" and assigning different values to various components; it is a way of understanding and appreciating that requires an intuitive sympathy achieved only by "getting in close"—by identifying with and actually entering into the alternative perspectives that generate opposing values. When one looks at evolutionary processes without this ability, all one can see is conflict. But when one comes to better recognize the unfolding of internal structures through time, one begins to appreciate how they are working together within a larger developmental system, and this allows these structures to be engaged more effectively. Recognizing this, developmental theorist Robert Kegan actually defines dialectical thinking as "the capacity to see conflict as a signal of our overidentification with a single system."<sup>19</sup>

**The enlarged perspectives of the evolutionary worldview provide the expanded vision of a new epistemological capacity.**

### 5.3 A New Set of Values

According to integral philosophy, historically significant cultural worldviews are made up of discrete sets of values that are related to the problems faced by a given worldview's "time in history." Continuing this pattern, the emerging evolutionary worldview also has its own relatively unique values, such as the aspiration to harmonize science and spirituality, an enhanced sense of personal responsibility for the problems of the world, an enlarged appreciation of conflicting truths and dialectic reasoning, and a new appreciation of the significance of evolution in general, and cultural evolution in particular. But unlike older worldviews, this evolutionary perspective also recognizes that every previous worldview contains important values that are necessary for the ongoing functionality of society. As a result of this understanding, the evolutionary view is able to better appreciate and thus better *use* the healthy values of the entire spectrum of cultural development. And it is by including a wider range of values within its purview that the evolutionary perspective is able to transcend all previous worldviews. In other words, earlier worldviews tend to see each other primarily for their pathologies, discounting the important cultural role that each worldview plays within the larger system of cultural evolution. But the evolutionary perspective can see existing cultural structures within a broader evolutionary context, and can thus more effectively "objectify" earlier values without being repulsed or embarrassed by them.

This process of cultural evolution through objectification is described by Kegan's well-known "subject-object theory." Kegan explains the evolution of consciousness through



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the stages of development by observing that a person transcends a given stage when what was previously embedded in that person's subjective consciousness becomes objectified, or recognized from an external perspective. According to Kegan, "[T]ransforming our epistemologies, liberating ourselves from that in which we were embedded, making what was subject into object so that we can 'have it' rather than 'be had' by it—this is the most powerful way I know to conceptualize the growth of the mind."<sup>10</sup>

For example, in the traditional stage of consciousness, one's religious belief system is a part of their subject—the traditionalist's subjective consciousness is embedded or contained within their belief system. The objective world is thus perceived and constructed to satisfy the demands of this belief system. However, when a person transcends the traditional stage and achieves the increased epistemological capacity of modernist consciousness, he may still hold the same essential religious beliefs, but these beliefs are now objectified; he can see beyond his beliefs, and thus gains a greater capacity to adopt the perspective of others and see the world through their beliefs as well as his own. As a person's consciousness evolves he can still "have his beliefs," but in more evolved stages those beliefs no longer "have him."

Kegan's description of the process of subjective evolution through expanding objectification also helps explain how the evolutionary worldview makes progress. Unlike previous worldviews, the evolutionary perspective is able to objectify the *entire spectrum of established cultural development*, and is thus able to achieve an "expanded vertical perspective" that can recognize a new kind of depth. Yet not only does this evolutionary view better *objectify* previous stages, together with the larger system of which they are a part, it also better *subjectifies* previous stages by identifying with them more closely. As noted, it is only by "getting in close" to the values of these earlier worldviews that one can begin to separate their "dignities" from their "disasters." Recall that as a result of the dialectic of progress and pathology, successes are often tied to failures in cultural evolution. And this means that the positive values of a given worldview are accordingly tied together with that worldview's shortcomings. Recovering the useful and enduring values of previous worldviews thus requires careful attention and a sophisticated form of sympathy.

Using the traditional worldview as an example, one can see how the values that society continues to need—values such as honesty, decency, modesty, and personal responsibility—are connected with outlooks that must now be discarded—such as sexism, racism, and religious fundamentalism. When one views the traditional worldview from the outside, it is these negative aspects that are often most apparent. But when one comes to also see this worldview from the inside, by better identifying with it, this leads to a greater appreciation of traditionalism's positive values. And this is how the enduring core values of traditionalism can be "teased apart" from its remaining outmoded prejudices, which continue to hold society back. Indeed, by making common cause with the healthy values of every worldview, "they" become "us."

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Dialectical thinking  
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## 5.4 A Second Enlightenment

As a result of its place within the sequence of historical development, the emerging evolutionary worldview is in many ways a synthesis of modernism and postmodernism. Without the sensitive and pluralistic values of postmodernism, the evolutionary perspective would be somewhat indistinguishable from cynical modernism. However, although it embraces many postmodern values, this evolutionary worldview also carries forward some of modernism's important strengths, such as its penchant for problem solving and its focus on progress. Thus, because the evolutionary perspective can be seen as a kind of "higher harmonic" of modernism, the historical context out of which this evolutionary view is emerging shows many similarities to the previous appearance of modernism during the Enlightenment. As mentioned, modernism came about through the rise of powerful new philosophical systems, which were rooted in the scientific advances of the 17th century. Similarly, this new evolutionary perspective is being catalyzed by philosophical advances in the understanding of emergent evolution, which reveal the influence of values and show how evolution is both driving and drawing the development of human consciousness and culture.

This parallel with the historical events of the Enlightenment can also be seen in the tension between contemporary academic philosophy and this new form of integral philosophy that is giving birth to the evolutionary worldview. During the Enlightenment period, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the legally sanctioned philosophy prevailing in universities and academies, and dominating philosophical discourse, was Scholastic Aristotelianism, a philosophical system that supported the precepts of the Christian Church. Although Scholasticism had been a vibrant part of medieval thought, by the time of the Enlightenment, this academic philosophy had stagnated as a result of having become the handmaiden of religion. Now a very similar situation can be observed wherein the officially sanctioned academic philosophy of the early 21st century has become stale. Yet the relative stagnation of contemporary professional philosophy has not resulted from its subservience to the traditional worldview; this time it is subservience to the modernist worldview that has caused the problem. In other words, just as Scholasticism had lost its potency by the time of the first Enlightenment as a result of being compromised by religion, now at the beginning of what may come to be recognized as a kind of "Second Enlightenment," much of professional philosophy, and especially the philosophy associated with life and evolution, has been similarly compromised by its subordination to scientific materialism.

Thus, just as in the first Enlightenment, when philosophy was liberated from the static confines of the reigning establishment, leaping forward like a coiled spring, a similar period of philosophical progress can now be anticipated. In the first Enlightenment, philosophy became separated from mythic religion, and now philosophy is becoming similarly liberated from the confines of scientism.

Admittedly, the emergence of the modernist worldview and the rise of science was one of the most significant events in the history of humankind, so these comparisons with the Enlightenment may be overstated. Yet the emergence of this new evolutionary perspective could end up having a similarly dramatic impact on history as a result of its ability to produce social progress. Again, modernist science's power came from its



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ability to better understand and thus more effectively control the external, material universe. Similarly, the promise of this emerging evolutionary view is that it can better understand and thus more effectively achieve evolution within the internal universe of consciousness and culture. And a significant part of this enlarged ability to help bring about cultural evolution arises from integral philosophy's new insights about values.

## 6. Value Dynamics Within Cultural Evolution

Integral philosophy shows more clearly than ever before the nature and behavior of the worldview structures that cohere into the larger internal ecosystem that forms global culture. However, the behaviors of these cultural structures cannot be completely understood from an external perspective. Although the social sciences of anthropology, sociology, and psychology have all contributed to integral philosophy's understanding of cultural evolution, these disciplines define themselves as sciences, so they cannot see into the internal universe of values with the clarity provided by this new philosophical perspective. Integral philosophy is able to surpass the social sciences in its ability to understand cultural evolution primarily because of its willingness to recognize the metaphysical and even spiritual aspects of values. And as explored in this section, it is through integral philosophy's expanded insight into the nature and behavior of values in human experience that the realm of cultural evolution is opened up to a new era of investigation and discovery.

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### 6.1 Values as a Leading Line of Evolution

Integral philosophy recognizes how the evolution of consciousness and culture occurs as a result of both the *pull* of values and the *push* of unsatisfactory life conditions. Values are thus defined and animated by their relation to the real and pressing problems faced by people as they struggle to improve their lives. Recognizing how consciousness and culture evolve through both the internal influence of values and the external pressure of problematic conditions underlines the fact that interior consciousness almost always co-evolves with exterior circumstances. In other words, wherever one finds the interior evolution of consciousness, one also finds a corresponding evolution in the complexity of the exterior structures associated with such interior development.

The consciousness of animals generally evolves in lockstep with the evolution of their bodies, but the consciousness of humans can evolve in ways that are partially independent from the physical evolution of their biological brains. In the brief course of historical evolution, humans have thus compensated for the relative absence of external biological development through the creation of artifacts such as language, tools, art, architecture, and social institutions. These external artifacts "stand in" for the lack of appreciable biological evolution and

**Integral philosophy's expanded insight into the nature and behavior of values in human experience opens the realm of cultural evolution to a new era of investigation and discovery.**

provide the physical counterparts of the mental evolution through which humans have developed beyond the animal level. The evolutionary emergence of human artifacts thus provides a rough exterior indicator of the interior evolution of consciousness. For example, the emergence of organized agriculture and writing are external indicators of traditional consciousness, and the emergence of industrial technology is an external indicator of modernist consciousness.

The interiors of consciousness and culture thus always co-evolve with exterior developments in institutions and technology. And just as emerging new forms of consciousness can give rise to new technologies, the growth of external artifacts and organizations can in turn raise the consciousness of the people who use them (at least in some cases). Indeed, one of the valid insights of Marxist philosophy was that the consciousness of people is significantly influenced by their "means of production." While the material determinism of Marxism ultimately goes too far in its emphasis on external, physical influences, the role of exterior factors in cultural evolution is well appreciated by integral philosophy.

Adding to the complexity of the co-evolution of interior consciousness and exterior artifacts is the fact that interior development cannot be reduced to a singular trajectory measured by the growth of one's values alone. As also discussed above, consciousness evolves through a variety of cognitive and emotional lines of development, each of which can exhibit growth that is relatively independent from the development of one's values or worldview.

Yet even though the evolution of consciousness and culture is a subtle and complex phenomenon involving many influences, it appears that the development of values is nevertheless a particularly significant factor in the process. This is shown by the way new stages of history are most often initiated through the emergence of new truth, new beauty, and new ideals of morality. Although the values of new worldviews only become widely established socially when they result in the creation of new external institutions and technologies, new ideas and new ideals themselves first appear "on the inside," in the minds of innovators and thought leaders. And the reason why the development of values is perhaps the single most important factor in understanding cultural evolution overall is that *it is through the gravity of values that consciousness and culture are drawn toward ever-higher levels of evolutionary development.*

## 6.2 The Internal Cultural Ecosystem

As discussed above, cultural evolution develops through a series of emergent stages. These stages or levels are not simply stacked on top of one another like geologic strata, they are developmentally related to each other within a larger structure that contributes to the form and character of each emergent stage. In other words, each stage of cultural development comes to be shaped and defined by its place or position within the larger structure of human history overall.

Some may argue that this stage conception oversimplifies cultural evolution. Yet culture and consciousness do evolve, and this developmental unfolding does evince structural elements. Although from certain perspectives history's course of development may appear more like a "river" (that runs uphill) than like a series of discrete steps, even if

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one prefers a model that describes a continuous flow of intermixed development, one must nevertheless acknowledge that this "river's" course exhibits antithetical bends and dialectical meanders. So regardless of whether the preferred metaphor points to discrete stages or continuous flows, there is clearly dialectical tension in the structure.

Although integral philosophy holds that historically significant worldviews are literally dynamic systems of values that can be compared in certain ways to ecosystems, it does not follow that psychosocial evolution can be conceived as, or reduced to, biological evolution. Unlike the apparently blind and partially mechanistic functioning of biological evolution, the cultural realm of evolution is governed more by internal *reasons* than by external causes. In fact, the gravitational influence of transcendent forms of value shapes the trajectory and structure of cultural evolution by *attracting and persuading* the outworking of human choices. And because "value gravity" only functions by agreement, because it requires the assent of consciousness to take effect, it cannot be understood as a deterministic law or a physical cause of cultural evolution.

But even though the evolution of culture is not entirely "law like," the structuring influence of values on cultural evolution results in the large-scale historical pattern of dialectical development by stages. And within this stage structure of history, the success of each stage is crucial because the accomplishments of one level are necessarily taken up and used by the next appearing level. Recognition of this "nested" or "Holarchic"<sup>11</sup> structure within cultural evolution thus reveals an important principle that can help bring about further cultural evolution throughout the world.

### 6.3 The "Holarchic Principle" of Cultural Evolution

The rise of historically significant new worldviews depends on both the previous accomplishments and increasingly evident shortcomings of the preexisting culture from which such new worldviews emerge. And this is why worldview stages cannot usually be skipped or bypassed, and why the success of later-appearing stages depends, at least partially, on the ongoing health and functionality of underlying earlier stages. This cultural "ecosystemic interdependence" can be readily observed in the relationship among the worldviews of traditionalism, modernism, and postmodernism in America. But this overall "holarchic principle" of cultural evolution is best illustrated using international examples, where these relationship dynamics are even more evident.

For instance, examining the recent history of Russia provides a clear illustration of this holarchic principle of cultural evolution in action. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, many in the West assumed that Russia was poised for significant economic growth, like that seen in Germany and Japan after World War II. As a result of this expectation, substantial foreign investments in the Russian economy were made in the early 1990s. These investors did not realize, however, that the *modernist culture* required for Western-style economic growth did not exist in large segments of the Russian populace at that time. Although Marxism may have originated

**Regardless of whether the preferred metaphor points to discrete stages or continuous flows, there is clearly dialectical tension in the structure.**

at a higher level of cultural development than the traditional stage, by the second half of the 20th century, Russian communism had come to resemble other forms of traditional, conformist culture. The communists effectively swept away the Russian Orthodox Church, but then simply replaced it with the "Religion of the State." Then when communism itself was swept away, much of what remained consisted of the underlying structures of pre-traditional, egocentric consciousness. So instead of stimulating sustainable economic growth, foreign investment in Russia in the early 1990s only contributed to the rise of horrendous levels of organized crime. This is due to the fact that the achievement-oriented values that are necessary for the development of modernist economies *use and depend on* the underlying values of "fair play" and respect for law, which are usually only found where healthy traditional structures are functioning within the society overall.

What distinguishes the individualistic orientation of the modernist level from the similarly individualistic worldview of the pre-traditional level, is the *inclusion* of the intervening and moderating values of traditional culture. This intervening communally oriented stage serves to socialize and restrain the individual by providing a clear sense of right and wrong and by emphasizing the importance of law and order. Without a stable base of traditional culture of one form or another, attempts to evolve into modernism usually collapse back into the chaotic conditions of pre-traditional culture as a result of corruption and conflicts between rival groups. Thus, modernism in Russia did not develop (and still has not fully developed) as hoped, because a crucial stage of prerequisite development was partially missing from the ecosystemic structure of their culture.

As another example, the obverse of Russia's developmental failure can be seen in Japan's developmental success. Japan was the first non-Western country able to evolve its own homegrown version of modernism because it had previously developed a strong and healthy version of traditional culture, which had been nurtured by two hundred years of self-imposed isolation and unfettered refinement, and which had never been colonized. So when the Japanese made the leap to modernism in the late 19th century, they were extremely successful (even after the devastation of World War II) because their strong base of traditional values served as a supporting foundation for their uniquely Japanese form of modernist culture.

These examples show why the success of earlier stages is generally required as a foundation or platform for the subsequent emergence of more developed stages. Just as in biological evolution, where later appearing levels depend on the accomplishments of earlier levels, this holarchic principle also functions in the realm of cultural evolution. And not only does this principle influence the relationship between traditionalism and modernism, it also shapes the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Moreover, as the following example illustrates, the history of postmodernism's emergence from modernism reveals how a new level relies not only on the success of its previous stage; each new stage of cultural emergence also requires a degree of discontent, or evolutionary restlessness, stemming from the growing pathologies that are inevitably produced by the previous stage's successes (as a result of the dialectic of progress and pathology).

Although postmodern cultural structures arose in a number of Western countries in



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the 1960s, America was the clear epicenter of this worldview's emergence. By the mid-sixties, after years of postwar prosperity and middleclass development, America had produced one of the world's most successful forms of modernist culture. And it was from the heart of America's well-educated modernist middleclass that the sixties youth revolution arose. Having grown up with all the advantages of modernist cultural development, the Baby Boom generation eventually became dissatisfied with the "establishment" and embraced the countercultural values of postmodernism in large numbers. Clearly, this dialectical move away from the achievement-oriented values of modernism was only made possible because of modernism's previous success. Postmodern youth came to reject the values of achieving wealth and status because most of them had been raised within a prosperous culture, and thus felt no need to strive for further upward mobility. They were therefore able to recognize and reject the problems and limitations of modernist society because they had already received most of the benefits that modernism had to offer.

These examples show how this holarchic principle of dialectical "transcendence and inclusion" functions within the timeline of human history. And because the state of human cultural development throughout the world remains spread out over the last 5,000 years of history, recognizing this principle helps show what can be done to help cultivate and stimulate the kinds of evolutionary emergences that are needed to solve many global problems. This is not just a matter of better appreciating the needs and values of each stage, it also involves understanding the formative relationships that continue to exist between the stages.

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Yet once the dynamics of this larger holarchic structure of history are better understood, this reveals how important the overall health of this larger structure is to the particular health of each individual worldview system. In other words, within this holarchic cultural ecosystem, if the evolution of a given stage has tried to move "too far ahead" in the timeline of development beyond its previous stage, if it gets ahead of itself by not appropriately *including* the values of its predecessor, it can fail to achieve evolutionary success. This can be seen in the example of Russia, above, where the situation calls for redevelopment of their traditional cultural structures as a prerequisite for the growth of vibrant forms of modernism. Conversely, if a given stage remains "too close" to its previous stage in the holarchic sequence, if it has not adequately *transcended* its predecessor, it can likewise fail.

A good example of social stagnation resulting from dialectically related stages of development remaining too close together can be found in the case of Islamic culture. One of the main reasons why most Islamic countries remain centered within their traditional culture—having failed to produce their own version of homegrown non-Western modernism, like Japan—is that the values of their traditional culture are intermixed with too many pre-traditional values. This can be seen in the significant influence that tribalism continues to exert upon Islamic societies in the Middle East, even after the recent political developments of the "Arab Spring." The intense fighting between small rival groups that characterizes pre-traditional cultural structures serves to undermine traditionalism's critical function of providing social unity and central authority. The excessive admixture of traditional and pre-traditional values within many Islamic societies can also be seen in the extreme pride that is often demonstrated by these cultures, which contributes to the virulent militancy that continues to plague

Islam. While Islam's problems have certainly been exacerbated by Western imperialism and colonialism, this once-great civilization remains in the backwater of history primarily because its traditional form of culture is currently developmentally handicapped.

A similar set of circumstances afflicted Christianity prior to the Reformation. By the beginning of the 16th century, the Catholic Church had become corrupted and was thus sapped of much of its moral authority. This eventually led to the upheavals of the Reformation, which produced Protestant Christianity. This new kind of Christianity, which emerged from the struggles of the Reformation, had been largely purified of the negative aspects of pre-traditional values, making it a far more successful form of traditional religious culture. The demonstration of this success is seen in the fact that it was in Protestant countries where the Enlightenment first began to take root. And it is in these same historically Protestant countries where postmodernism is now most well developed.

Thus, when history is viewed through the lens of the evolutionary worldview, it provides a prescription for the cure of many of the world's current ills. This evolutionary perspective shows how the emergence of democracy, prosperity, and worldcentric morality depends on relatively healthy forms of underlying traditional culture to provide a foundation of responsible values. And this perspective also shows that where traditional cultures remain stagnant or unhealthy, some kind of "reformation" will be needed before an "enlightenment" can come about.

This new understanding of the nature of cultural development can increase humanity's ability to solve many of its problems by becoming more effective at stimulating and sustaining the evolution of consciousness and culture. Although promoting cultural evolution is almost always a complex and difficult task, this discussion suggests an opening for a new approach. And obviously, this new approach has many potential political applications. So, with these insights in mind, this Appendix concludes with brief consideration of "evolutionary politics."

**Because human cultural development remains spread out over the last 5,000 years of history, recognizing this principle helps show what can be done to help cultivate and stimulate the kinds of evolutionary emergences that are needed to solve many global problems.**



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## 7. Evolutionary Politics

Any discussion of a "new approach to politics" must begin by acknowledging that some of the worst mischief in history has been wrought by "true believers" who were convinced they had a better idea. This risk is exacerbated in the case of the evolutionary worldview because of its willingness to recognize a vertical dimension of development. Indeed, claims that some cultural groups are more developed or evolved than others can be problematic or even dangerous. And previous efforts to apply

evolutionary theory to politics resulted in severe mistakes, as seen in the case of both social Darwinism and Marxism. But these lessons of history are not lost on those who now advocate a new kind of evolutionary approach to politics.

This evolutionary method is better prepared to avoid the risks associated with attempting to bring about positive development because it includes the evolutionary achievements of the postmodern worldview within its perspective. The postmodern values of social justice and multiculturalism, together with the postmodern distrust of globalization and unrestrained economic expansion, serve as a safeguard that can help prevent this evolutionary political perspective from perpetuating the pathologies of modernism. Moreover, this evolutionary approach maintains a firm commitment to the proposition that "people have a right to be who they are." That is, there is no imperative to evolve, and people who live in less developed societies are certainly no less intrinsically valuable than those who dwell in postmodern cultural settings.

However, although people have a right to be who they are, as the world becomes increasingly interdependent, the problems of the few become the problems of the many. As carbon-intensive modernist economic development continues in places like China and India, the need for more effective forms of global politics becomes acute. Evolutionary politics accordingly seeks a synthetic approach that can help achieve worldwide social and cultural development while avoiding imperialism and neo-colonialism on one side, and by also avoiding the confusion and inaction that can result from strict multicultural relativism on the other side. Further, this evolutionary approach attempts to strike a balance between "realism" and "idealism," recognizing that politics is the art of the possible.

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"What's wrong is not simple," and neither are the solutions to humanity's problems. So the insights and goals of evolutionary politics are not being asserted as a panacea for every problem. However, sustainable solutions to current global challenges will certainly require cultural evolution, and it is in this area that evolutionary politics can be particularly useful.

Within America, the agenda of evolutionary politics encompasses both short-term and long-term goals for both national and international political evolution. In the relatively near term, the evolutionary approach seeks to move the overall cultural center of gravity of Americans forward in history. This goal is guided by the recognition that the American body politic can no longer be accurately conceived as simply "left and right." There are now at least five major political segments: religious traditionalists, republican modernists (including both conservatives and libertarians), centrist modernists, liberal modernists, and progressive postmodernists. These five or six distinct blocks often work at cross purposes with their allies along the political spectrum, and have thus

produced the debilitating political stagnation witnessed at the time of this writing.

Therefore, one of the short term pressing concerns of evolutionary politics is to break the current logjam and help build the necessary political will required to solve the growing problems of climate change, peak oil, unregulated globalization, war, hunger, poverty, and numerous other dilemmas. Yet despite the pressure of these threats, forming the political will necessary to make sacrifices and confront unpopular challenges remains extremely difficult because of America's ongoing culture war. Therefore, if the evolutionary approach to politics can help bring peace to the culture war, this will go a long way toward addressing many culturally complex problems.

As exemplified by the strategy and tactics articulated in ICE's Climate Campaign Plan, bringing peace to the culture war can be achieved by reducing postmodern contempt for both traditionalism and modernism. As increasing numbers of progressive postmodernists adopt the evolutionary perspective and come to better appreciate the interdependence of all the stages of America's cultural ecosystem, this will in turn help traditionalists and modernists to become more sympathetic to legitimate postmodern concerns. And as the core values of traditionalists and modernists are carried forward into postmodern and "post-postmodern" culture, many modernists and traditionalists themselves will also be "carried forward" into a new era of progressive agreement. This evolutionary approach can thus help achieve progress in cultivating the political will that is now sorely lacking.

So perhaps ironically, from this perspective, the duty to evolve now rests most squarely on the shoulders of postmodernists. It is they who must first "become the change" that they implore in others. If even a minority of postmodernists can soften their positions and evolve from their stance of staunch antithesis toward a more synthetic view of America's cultural conditions, this can help bring peace to the culture war and produce the political agreement needed to address many problems. Moreover, this kind of cultural evolution does not require a "great awakening." The close political margins by which elections are currently decided in the U.S. assures that even a small movement in the collective cultural center of gravity can make a big difference.

Because those who are beginning to adopt this emerging evolutionary understanding are coming primarily from postmodern culture, the rise of the evolutionary worldview is having its biggest impact on postmodernism. And because helping postmodernism to evolve—helping "uncork the bottle"—is a key to producing cultural evolution overall, even a relatively small demographic movement, such as the nascent evolutionary worldview, can nevertheless make positive progress in American politics in the near term.

As noted, the evolutionary perspective has the ability to "get in close" and identify with

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the healthy values of all the worldviews that comprise American culture. By thus "metabolizing" a larger spectrum of values, those who adopt the evolutionary perspective become both *more postmodern and less postmodern*—more effective at working for environmental sustainability and social justice, but less handicapped by an anti-modernist resentment that rejects a large part of American civilization. Similarly, the evolutionary perspective also helps its adherents become both *more traditional and less traditional*—more stalwart in protecting America from those who would destroy it, and at the same time less ethnocentric and imperialistic. This "values approach" to political evolution may at first seem vague or only marginally useful; but with the culture war costing America so dearly in terms of the decay of its collective political will, the potential of these kinds of culture-based solutions is immense at the domestic level of American politics.

There is obviously much more to say about evolutionary politics and integral philosophy, but this brief paper provides some of the basics.

## Endnotes

1. Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982), Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994), and Clare W. Graves, *Levels of Human Existence* (Santa Barbara, CA: National Values Center 2004). See also, Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (New York: Routledge, 1928); Lawrence Kohlberg, *From Is to Ought* (New York: Academic Press, 1971); Don Beck and Chris Cowan, *Spiral Dynamics* (New York: Blackwell, 1995); Jenny Wade, *Changes of Mind: A Holonomic Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996).
2. Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000).
3. Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), and Ronald Inglehart, *Human Values and Social Change* (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003). See also, Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization* (New York: Tarcher Putnam, 2009).
4. This phrase, "the dialectic of progress and pathology," was originally coined by social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who describes it as follows: "Evolutionarily important innovations mean not only a new level of learning but a new problem situation as well, that is, a new category of burdens that accompany the new social formation. The dialectic of progress can be seen in the fact that with the acquisition of problem-solving abilities new problem situations come to consciousness. A higher stage of development of productive forces and of social integration does bring relief from the problems of the superseded social formation. But the problems that arise at the new stage of development can—insofar as they are at all comparable with the old ones—increase in intensity." Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1979), p. 164.
5. This conclusion is based on the social dynamics evident in developing countries such as China, India, and Brazil, which are experiencing the rapid growth of their middle class. While not everyone in these countries is striving for upward mobility, rising GDP in these countries provides evidence that significant segments of these populations are seeking forms of material consumption that are consistent with the modernist lifestyles found in the U.S. and Western Europe.
6. This point about the mind/body problem is explained further by McIntosh in *Integral Consciousness*: "From the perspective of the integral worldview, the mind/body problem is seen as merely a conundrum that arises from the limitations of a materialist metaphysics. That is, the very idea that the universe is purely material, that all phenomena can be explained by or reduced to the laws of physics, is itself highly metaphysical because it is ultimately a proposition that must be taken on faith. ... Yet materialism [has] stubbornly persisted even as it was demonstrated that a reality frame claiming that the universe was nothing more than 'matter in motion' was just as extra-scientific as any other kind of metaphysics. As the materialists continued to struggle with the mind/body problem, as they continued to ask: 'how can conscious experience arise from the electrical activity of the brain?,' they couldn't quite see that starting their inquiry with the false certainties of physical matter was still a thoroughly

metaphysical starting place. This dilemma arises from what Whitehead famously identified as 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.' Steve McIntosh, *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution* (Minneapolis, MN: Paragon House 2007), p. 10 and p. 203.

7. Jean Piaget's research revealed how the psychological growth of individuals, from childhood into adulthood, proceeds through a series of cross-cultural "major stages" of evolutionary development. Piaget identified these universal stages of development as: "sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational." Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence* (New York: Routledge 2001).

8. Michael Basseches, "The Development of Dialectical Thinking As An Approach to Integration," in *Integral Review Journal*, vol. 1, 2005.

9. Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994), p. 351.

10. Ibid, p. 34.

11. In the 1960s, philosopher Arthur Koestler advanced the theory of "holons" and "hierarchy," which describes the pattern created by emergence wherein each evolutionary entity is a whole in one context and a part in another. Koestler pointed out that in the sequence of emergent evolutionary levels, every whole entity is composed of parts, but is also itself "a part" that is included in larger wholes. For example, in the sequence of biological emergence, a cell is simultaneously a whole that contains organelles and molecules, and also a part that is contained by living tissue. Every form of evolutionary organization consists neither of simple wholes nor simple parts; in the organization of evolution there are only "whole/parts," or what Koestler called "holons." Moreover, the development of holons does not result in a simple hierarchy, like geological strata stacked on top of each other. Rather, the pattern resembles the structure of an onion or a nested series of concentric spheres that are interdependent and complexly interactive—this structure of evolutionary systems is thus itself a system. Koestler also coined the term "hierarchy" to refer to the natural hierarchy formed by evolution's construction of holons within holons. Koestler's important insight about this underlying structure of evolution has since been adopted by a number of prominent writers on evolution, including Lynn Margulis and Ken Wilber.



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