



WAY BEYOND DARWIN

Evolution of Human Consciousness and the Future of Interpretation

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From within our field, we might entertain the thought that interpretation changes and evolves according to actions of our own thinkers and programs, independent of the trajectories by which other fields such as environmental education, forestry, sociology, or even hair design might travel. But a momentary step outside our box might reveal that all society evolves in a larger sweep, a giant historical track that guides the future.

To glimpse this requires that we become conscious of the universal dimension of evolution, way beyond that of Darwin. Then, we can understand from whence interpretation has come and to where it marches. And,

hopefully, we can help it arrive as soon as possible.

Universal Evolution Is Accelerating

Evolution did not start with Darwin's theory of natural selection. Evolution began with a bang. The Big Bang unleashed galactic evolution. At first only hydrogen atoms populated infant space, but from its simplest atom evolved helium, lithium, beryllium, and on down the periodic table. Atoms clumped into clouds, then stars, then solar systems and galaxies, each time more complex than the time before.

After billions of years on our planet, the rocks cooled, sedimented, heated, and metamorphosed into tectonic plates, digging canyons,

building mountain ranges, and creating ever more species of minerals.

After millions of years, the first prokaryotic unicellular organisms bubbled into existence among organic-chemical soups. Then came multicellular organisms, which grew larger and more complex, able to react to more stimuli in more interesting ways. Then proto-hominids evolved to the first self-conscious organisms on the planet.

After hundreds of thousands of years, many different cultures emerged. Then civilization.

After hundreds of years technologies evolved ever more rapidly.

With each passing scale, the universe grows more complex and conscious.

Human Consciousness Is Going Somewhere

If consciousness is an organism's ability to perceive and react to ever more kinds of stimuli, then clearly from the earliest most archaic bacteria to humans, a lot of consciousness has evolved. But now in our modern age, our egocentric consciousness asks if evolution has stopped with people—if the natural driving forces that drove speciation for a couple billion years no longer applies to the pinnacle species that can short-circuit disease and hunger, and live under any condition. It's a tempting thought since in the 10,000 years of human civilization, our bodies, even our brain mass, have not physically evolved in any substantial way.

Yet our brain power, our processing speed, and our ability to conceptualize and identify patterns and categories have increased by orders of magnitude. Powers beyond our ancestors' imagination have emerged from within our skulls without any material change in that same skull. Development psychologists, such as Jean Piaget, have known for a long time that human cognitive, emotional, and other strictly interior capacities expand as we mature. These psychologists warn that no one gets to skip development levels, even if we move at different paces and attain different endpoints.

A newer kind of developmental psychologist now studies the evolution of consciousness both in individuals—adults are clearly more conscious than infants—and in cultures and societies. Consciousness, like everything else in the universe, evolves and becomes more complex. After many years, researchers and philosophers have mapped the levels of consciousness that humanity has experienced.

Archaic: This early consciousness corresponds to pre-culture hominids with the basic instinct of survival. Today this level can only be found in infants or adults who have regressed due to severe cerebral injury or illness.

Tribal: With the evolution of true culture, the life conditions of hunter-gatherers was a world controlled by animistic spirits who exercise power

over humans. Fear and mystery envelop tribal folks whose most successful survival strategy has been to group together into tribes where everyone does all they can to support the group. Following rites and rituals to appease the spirits, this form of existence has succeeded for thousands of years. But eventually some began to reject the complete submission of individuality to the group and express individual motivation and expression.

Warrior: In this level of consciousness warriors excel based on their own strength and intelligence. They take what they can and lead through power. Through personal initiative and expression, the warrior consciousness, manifested in the likes of the Mongols, Vikings, and barbarians, survived successfully for many centuries and still exists today in certain parts of the world.

Traditional: In time some rejected the chaos and violence of the warrior mentality and from them evolved the traditional consciousness or worldview. Such cultures have a definitive code of law, usually revealed from a higher power that none of its followers can question. The code allows much greater order and organization capable of defeating warrior cultures and ushered in civilization, division of labor, great works of art and architecture, and also great ethnocentricity to any outside the "correct" way of living.

Modernists: Starting in the Enlightenment, people began to reject the traditionalist requirement of accepting the code based on faith and submitting to the hierarchy that mediated communication with the gods. The modernists instead wanted to progress based on personal merit, thought, rationality, and ability. They created science and believed deeply in power of the mind and the individual's right to exercise that power and enjoy its benefits. The modernists created democracy, capitalism, and professional bureaucracies, but in the process of promoting individual rights and merits, anyone not strong enough or smart enough or powerful enough fell by the wayside. Their materialist approach stripped

away anything that could not be measured by science, such as morality and spirituality, leaving minority groups and the environment to suffer at the bloody hands of progress.

Post-modernists: Since the 1960s this new consciousness has emerged to challenge the waste, exclusion, materialism, individualism, and environmental destruction of modernism. The post-modernists promoted inclusion and every cause they could think of whether environmentalism, human rights, peace, green living, back-to-earth, organic, etc. Yet despite their achievements, the world still worsens. Post-modernists apply value relativism to all situations and while they claim to be open-minded and tolerant they despise the abuses of traditionalists and modernists.

Integralists: Starting in the 1980s a few people disenchanted with the worsening conditions of the world and the ongoing culture wars between traditionalists, modernists, and post-modernists came to realize that in fact there exist multiple levels of consciousness coexisting simultaneously and depending on different sets of life conditions. They realize that individuals and groups evolve along a developmental course that brings them through these levels and ultimately all problems have a large consciousness component. This is the first level to realize that different kinds of consciousness and different values exist, none being the one right way, and each contributing something positive and negative to overall human consciousness on Earth.

Integral Theory, then, embodies this new worldview and even anticipates new post-integral worldviews to come.

Paradigm of Interpretation Goes with the Worldview Flow

Every worldview embodies a forest of paradigms, where each paradigm explains how some aspect, technology, belief system, or field works. Paradigms can pass between worldviews but evolve when they do so. For example, environmental education, adaptive management, and interpretation all were born in modernism with their



Modernist nature interpreters focus only on nature and science, preferring to avoid cultural, social, and ethical issues of concern for postmodern interpretation.

principal paradigm and corresponding rules and beliefs.

Modernists created all three fields as a response to mounting damage from modernism's own exploits. Both Enos Mills and Freeman Tilden worked in the modernism era and expressed values of trying to rectify damages to nature and national parks. With the arrival of post-modernism in the 1960s these fields began to take on post-modern ideas. Modernism had left people without meaning by stripping spirituality, community, and sacred spaces from common thought. This presented a big opportunity for interpreters who could help to instill or re-instill the notion of place, rather than just a material, utilitarian, modernist space. Interpreters could integrate multiple forms of knowing rather than just science, modernism's sole source of legitimate knowledge. Some interpreters adopted the idea that meanings are relative to the meaning-makers rather than inherent in places, a modernist idea.

Even today, interpretation (and most other fields in society) suffers from being caught between worldviews. Many modernist interpreters, for example, focus only on science and

nature interpretation and leave out social systems when interpreting environmental and conservation problems. These same interpreters employ anthropocentric universal themes (where the definition of a universal theme is one that all people, regardless of culture can relate to). Post-modern interpreters, on the other hand, have thrown themselves full into integrating indigenous messages, underground railroad, and stories of other erstwhile-ignored or suppressed minority points of view, or themes that take up causes the world over, and not just particular sites.

Integral Interpreters Focus on Evolving Consciousness and Global Crisis

To be an integral interpreter requires an even broader consciousness, to embrace universal themes that do not refer only to universal human experiences but themes about the entire universe. For integralists, evolution becomes the highest value and deepest source of interpretive themes. Understanding evolution, integralists see the directionality of greater complexity and greater consciousness. This direction gives purpose

to evolution, to the universe, and all creation, much more enriching than the modernist claim that life is simply the result of random and purposeless natural selection. It integrates spirituality into interpretation, a forbidden topic in the modernist world. Evolution ties together interpretation about all other systems, whether shipbuilding or forest history or the Civil War or the Crab Nebula. Integralists integrate the modern science with post-modern spirituality. They interpret how different life conditions give rise to different worldviews, and they understand and interpret that all problems in the world have a large consciousness component. Integral interpreters, because of the gloomy life conditions in which we live today, understand that they need to interpret problems and solutions to audiences with different worldviews within the context of values relevant to each worldview. This integrates an entirely new aspect to understanding one's audience.

Integralists, by their more holistic nature, don't just interpret geographically bounded heritage places (and they don't use the modernist term "resources" anymore), but the heritage's place in the evolving universe.

Conclusion

With climate change, pandemics, peak oil, and food shortages, the life conditions—especially of Westerners in the 2000s—grow increasingly obvious and urgent. We need interpreters to look beyond the 19th-century modernist concept of protected areas and identify with a larger consciousness, at least world-centric, if not beyond. Interpreters, to be truly relevant in this century, can't simply hide in local sites, but must participate in helping solve problems based in consciousness. This age, though with dire challenges afoot, presents the most glorious moment in history for interpreters, but first we must evolve beyond Darwin.

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