

**Social Justice and Superorganisms:
On The Moral Phenomenology of Participating in The Evolution of The Cosmos**

Supplemental contribution for the roundtable discussion of David Sloan Wilson's,
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Zak Stein
Marc Gafni

The Center for Integral Wisdom

***Introduction: The New Paradigm Is Old Hat:
Or Why There Have Always Been Alternatives to Darwinism***

Wilson's *Does Altruism Exist* comes as a welcome and succinct statement of recent advances in a host of evolutionary sciences. Many of the ideas are presented as "new paradigm," and this is indeed the case. What we would like to note here that this "new paradigm" is actually better thought of as an alternative lineage of evolutionary thinking, which has been around since before Darwin ever boarded the Beagle.

Keeping with Wilson's epistemology of *equivalence*,¹ we suggest rekindling the respect and attention that was once paid to certain alternative frameworks that broke off from the Darwinian mainstream —alternatives with just as many insights (and just as many liabilities). This is only to say that absent in Wilson's narrative about human evolution, multilevel selection, and emergent super-organisms is a scholarly tradition that has made its legacy by focusing on the role of consciousness in evolution, as well as the role of humanity's self-consciousness as a factor in future evolution. The idea being that humanity is continuing evolution by new means. This group has basically been arguing for or assuming the existence of Wilson's new paradigm phenomena from day one of the evolutionary discourse.² This is a group that never worshiped Darwin, although some did in passing or in youth, rather they explored evolutionary events and

¹ This is a form of epistemological pluralism similar to the *integral methodological pluralism* found in Integral Meta-theory, see: Stein (2015) *Beyond Nature and Humanity: On The emergence and Meaning of MetaTheories*; Wilber (2007) *Integral Spirituality*. However Wilson's meta-theoretical tools lack the capacity to rank or organizing different frameworks in a principled way, or at least he does not use them that way or suggest that can be used in that way.

² This is slightly overstated, but the point holds that this tradition goes back to Hegel (and he draws his lineage to Heraclius, perhaps the first theorist of evolutionary process). The post-Darwinian players include Darwin himself in many moods, Lamarck, James Mark Baldwin, C. S. Peirce, Julian Huxley, Bergson, Whitehead, Jantsch, Prigogine, Kauffman, Wilber, Hubbard, and Lazlo. One might also include those with more explicit religious bents, such as the great Zionist and mystical scholar Rabbi Abraham Kook, the Indian freedom fighter and sage Sri Aurobindo, and the Jesuit scientist and seer, Teilhard De Chardin. This is the tradition or lineage in which the authors of this contribution place themselves. We are each affiliated with the Center for Integral Wisdom and the Foundation of Conscious Evolution, which are organizations that see their chief aim as the deepening of this intellectual lineage and its delivery into culture.

systems with alternative but equally scientific frameworks. This is a tradition that focused more explicitly on interiors and on consciousness, on the role of psychological process in evolution.³

Long at the center of this alternative discourse has been the idea of the emergence of super-organisms, which functionally integrate lower-order parts, lessening within group selection pressure, to make the many into one, and thus foster the evolution of a new organismic totality. This led many to suggest the (inevitable?) emergence of some kind of new evolutionary event—a super-organism of humans. The idea has very, very old roots, to which Wilson only alludes by way of reference to the *Fable of The Bees*.⁴ Wilson is more interested to argue that, now, with new evidence, we finally really know that, for example, cooperation can have an impact on evolution via group selection, even as it seems counter intuitive to cooperate at the level of individual selection. Kropotkin said as much in his 1902, *Mutual Aid*, and offered similar kinds of evidence in his field reports (just to give mention of a conspicuously missing name in Wilson's account).

Like the anarchist prince and biologist Kropotkin, the concern of many of the heterodox evolutionists has long been with outlining preferable human futures in light of evolutionary principles and trajectories. What are of concern to this group most are not the mechanisms by which such emergent forms arise, but rather the ethical and existential implications of the inevitable occurrence of emergence at the level of the human. That is, what would it mean for our humanity if we become swept up into a super-organism, as if becoming cells organized for the benefit of some larger organelle?

Wilson alludes only in passing to the lineage from Hegel through Darwin to the Nazis, and the plethora of evolutionarily inspired totalitarian and fascist ideologies that swept the

³ Despite the occasional hubris of biologists, psychological mechanisms have always been thought to play a role in evolutionary theory, and Darwin had a great deal to say on the matter that would make modern self-declared Darwinists blush, see: Richards, (1992) *Darwin and The Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*.

⁴ Smith's idea of the "invisible hand" was very explicitly a religious notion, which Wilson does not mention. See Graber (2014) *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, on the fact that Smith always intended the invisible hand to be that of "God's Providence". This theological idea about human economic functions has strong connections to medieval Islam, with which Smith was familiar.

industrialized world during the short and violent 20th century.⁵ Wilson is right, after this only a few would dare weave grand theories of everything that integrated humanity with evolution. Limits were set on the kinds of work that would be done relating evolutionary theory with human social planning. There was a related rise of human sciences that were anti-biology, as post-modernism was ascendant, and the big questions that dominated the pre-war intellectual landscape receded to the background.

Wilson is among the group putting them back on the agenda, but the heterodox evolutionists never took these questions off the table, especially those looking at the role of human self-consciousness as a factor in evolution. This tradition spent more time looking into the implications of evolutionary thinking for the self-understanding of the species, and less time working with models of mechanisms and exteriorities. So the question of whether altruism exists is not as interesting to us as questions about the many forms of selfless behavior, as well as the higher levels of moral development individuals can attain while “becoming a part of something larger than themselves.”⁶

⁵ As much as is it painful for contemporary biologists and psychologist, one should not gloss over the Eugenics movement when discussing the implications of evolutionary theory for society, as if there is wide spread public knowledge of this movement, or even wide spread knowledge among scholars. There is not. Many contemporaries seem to treat it as if some how not it is a mistake that could not be repeated; but see Gould, (1996) *The Mismeasure of Man*; Kelves, (1999) *In The Name of Eugenics*. We discuss this further below.

⁶ Importantly, ethical and political realities are such that it is not always a good thing to become part of something larger than your self. Wilson only briefly mentions this. It is not a good thing, for example, to act altruistically in support of your group if you are in a group of Nazis. This is the crux of the issue: not all forms of group cohesion and efficiency should be seen as signs of evolution, nor as advancing justice and humanity, especially victories in violent competitions between groups. Wilson notes that a planetary civilization would have no other civilizations to compete with, and thus there is no survival function to decide the “fitness” of humanity as a whole. This is precisely the point. Survival and efficiency at the group level cannot be taken simply as ends in themselves. If we can’t use simple victory and survival as an index of the evolutionary fitness of a society, then what can we use? Group selection between societies to this point in history has been “might makes right,” as warfare and economic domination have been the primary means by which certain societies have survived and others have passed away. Wilson notes the role of war in-group selection only once (and yet his first example of a superorganism is an aircraft carrier, and he frequently mentions jumping on grenades as a kind of altruism). Needless to say, the unification of humanity into a single global village is an abstraction, but nevertheless, the coagulation of globalization does hold the specter of a world in which there are mass extinctions of cultures and we are left with no alternatives but those of the global victors. This is why protesters take to the street to defy the World Bank and IMF, who they see as closing off futures for alterative societies and cultures, leading us to a steady state society where there are at last no competitions between different ways of life.

The most recent work in this tradition has refined the phenomenology of moral consciousness⁷ associated with evolutionary emergence in human groups, especially with regards to the balance between what Wilson calls (unfortunately) “selfishness” and “altruism.” We call them autonomy and communion. Too much of either and any group is pathological. Too much communion and you get a kind of totalitarianism or coercive fascism. Too much autonomy and you get narcissists and rouges, lawlessness and violence (like the wolves of Wall Street Wilson laments).

To make a long story short: heterodox evolutionists who have been concerned with the future role of self-consciousness as a factor in evolution have found that the keystone concept needed for thinking about the future of human evolution is that of *uniqueness*. It is one of the few keystone concepts that can bridge the gap between interiors and exteriors, science and ethics, matter and spirit. And it is the ideal keystone concept to orient the strivings of the only planetary keystone species.⁸ So fostering uniqueness is, in a way, a planetary evolutionary imperative, but that is ahead of the story. First, to understand why we are arguing for the centrality of uniqueness, we must offer a brief redux of some of the features of our tradition’s *evolutionary meta-theory*.⁹

⁷ The term comes from Habermas (1990), *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, who used it as part of describing the basic methods for building ethical frameworks that might evaluate between different stages and processes of cultural evolution. Habermas’s theory of socio-cultural evolution is not causal/predictive, but normative/hermeneutic. There is not space here to go into this critical distinction in the study of the evolution of society, but see Habermas (1982), *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Moral phenomenology is about the *1st person experience* of one’s society and culture; this is perhaps the polarity to Wilson focus on *action*.

⁸ See Paine, 1966, *Keystone Species*, which have a disproportionately large effect on their environment relative to its abundance and play a critical role in maintaining the structure of an ecological community, affecting many other organisms in an ecosystem and helping to determine the types and numbers of various other species in the community. Humanity is a keystone species at the level of the global ecosystem.

⁹ We use the term *evolutionary meta-theory* in a very specific sense, following from the discourse about the meaning and nature of meta-theory that emerged in the wake of the encounter between Ken Wilber and Roy Bhaskar, two of the great meta-theorists of the 20th century (See: Stein, 2015, “Beyond Nature and Humanity: On The Emergence and Meaning of Meta-theories”). Briefly, a meta-theory is a theory about theories or a theory built from other sub-theories, and so on. It is a mode of theorizing that bleeds into philosophy and has become quite a cottage industry in certain sectors of the social sciences (see: Sean’s volumes). Needless to say, evolutionary meta-theory is simply meta-theorizing in the domain of evolutionary theory and science, building super-theories, or theorizing about relations between theories, etc.

Evolution as Crisis and Invitation: The Four Big Bangs

One thing all evolutionary theories have in common is the idea that evolution is hard, painful, crisis prone, and existential (a matter of life and death). It is clear that at key moments evolutionary crises occur, cataclysmic events that bring into the universe something that is totally new and truly unprecedented. There is little doubt in the minds of those thinking seriously about evolution that we are in the midst of one such great evolutionary crisis. This is the first totalizing crisis of the Anthropocene,¹⁰ as humanity and the planet itself are forced into a reconfiguration toward higher order evolutionary emergence. This is a moment of crisis, and yet such a crisis is perfectly in fitting with the structure of reality. Everything we know about evolution suggests that it is basically inevitable that evolution on Earth will again shift to a higher level (that is, if it continues at all, which is a big “if”). This shift will not only be of physical systems, exteriors, but also of interiors, of consciousness. And this evolutionary leap will take the form of a crisis. It is this crisis that we are in the midst of right now. This crisis is not only to do with the geo-history of technology and the limits of the biosphere; it is also a crisis of self-understanding. We are in the midst of an unprecedented and reflective species wide identity crisis (and this during the very decades when the self-inflicted extinction of our species has become a reality for the first time). We no longer know what it means to be human, what our purpose is on the planet, and we are aware of this ignorance collectively, for the first time.¹¹

¹⁰ Anthropocene (from the Greek roots: *anthropo*, meaning "human" and *-cene* meaning "new"). This term is now being used as a formal unit of geological epoch division, basically suggesting that humanity has so impacted the Earth, that from a strictly scientific position our age constitutes a new geological epoch, a new stage in the history of the planet's basic physical being, especially its atmospheric and chemical composition. The term has deep roots, but was brought to prominence by Paul Crutzen, a Nobel Prize winning atmospheric chemist. The second shock is a cultural corollary of this, our new planet-changing species being.

¹¹ To avoid any misunderstanding, it should be said that humanity has *never* known its true identity and purpose. This is not something we once knew and have forgotten, or something we lost and must now find. No doubt, certain cultures have previously been *convinced* of a particular identity and purpose for all humans, and there have been visionaries who've offered their stunning guesses at the riddle of our being. The difference now is not ignorance—we've always been ignorant—the difference is that now there is wide spread knowledge of our ignorance and an unprecedented groping toward truly new answers; answers that are post-dogmatic, post-disciplinary/academic, post-conventional, and trans-national/ethnic.

Importantly, consciousness and self-understanding are not epiphenomenal—they are not merely supervening or reacting to a more basic bio-technological base—human consciousness and self-understanding are driving the global crisis at all levels. So it is conscious evolution from here on out: we are able to know and do too much to pretend otherwise; we must consciously orchestrate the future of the planet and the biosphere. Our generation is in an unprecedented position to take responsibility for participating in profoundly generative and destructive evolutionary crises. The question is: can we understand our crises in cosmic context, as opportunities for the emergence of the unprecedented, and as invitations into a higher form of life?

To do so we must come to see that the evolution of the universe and biological life is not a *fact*, it is a *story*. Evolution is a story about us, who we are, and what we are going through now. The universe itself is best understood as a story, not as a mere fact. The universe is a love story. Like all true love stories (and unlike harlequin romances or romantic comedies) it has been as story of profound crisis, cataclysm, tragedy, hope, emergence, and creativity. One of the best ways to summarize the narrative arch of this story was offered by Teilhard de Chardin (1955), who followed C.S. Peirce as well as cryptic strains in Kant's early metaphysics of nature, and organized his master work according to three epochal emergent properties of the evolving universe: matter, life, and thought. This same tripartite division has been rehearsed recently by Holmes Rolston (2010) in his, *Three Big Bangs: Matter-Energy, Life, Mind*.¹² We use this

Don't misread the recent upwelling of fundamentalist religion as a sign to the contrary. This reactive—and often violent—grasping and entrenchment of tradition is driven precisely by the now inescapable and hegemonic force of *alternative stories* about the meaning of humanity. The biggest sacrilege—and what looks to fundamentalist cultures like godlessness—is really the “storylessness” of post-modern culture, which stems in part from its (pseudo)-scientific basis; a non-foundationalist, open-ended, “choose your own adventure” worldview that glibly dismisses ancient traditions by citing the latest scientific headline, and then dismisses that headline when a newer study is released.

¹² Interestingly, no reference is made in this book to Teilhard's previous renditions, despite their striking similarities. This is either a sign of independent “discovery” or, what is more likely, it is a case of the orthodox appropriation of heterodox voices, where the marginal status of figures like Teilhard in mainstream scientific contexts allows them to serve as sources of inspiration that are not really worth citing. This is a common pattern in the history of ideas, especially during periods when the orthodoxy is breaking down and questions once on the periphery are drawn into the center. Most evolutionary sciences are in just such a position, as Wilson's text demonstrates. Determining the degree to which *Does Altruism Exist* is full of *unnamed* heterodox voices is some of what this contribution is about.

framing to tell the story of cosmic evolution, only we add a Fourth Big Bang, which is the planetary phase-shift resulting from evolution's becoming consciousness of itself in and through humanity. We stand today on the edge of this Fourth Big Bang and have only a glimmer of the unimaginable horizons it opens. The best image available to capture what is currently potentiated in humanity is the image of a universal non-coercive human superorganism, constituted as a *Unique Self Symphony*. We discuss this further below.

We must tell this story because understanding the story of cosmic evolution is an essential part of expanding the self-understanding of humanity during this time of crisis. Importantly, our ability to position the evolution of humanity in the vast deep-time context of cosmic evolution emerged only recently. It is truly remarkable that in the same historical moment we are confronted with the perilous reality of our impending self-induced extinction, we are also confronted by a breathtaking new vision of humanity's precious and miraculous place in the universe. The future depends on our ability to make sense of the past, and not just our cultural and social history, but the history of the biological and physical universe that birthed our species.

One of the seminal moments in modern science was the "discovery" of the Big Bang—although, as has been suggested, a better name is the Primordial Flaring Forth. With remarkable irony, a scientific worldview dedicated to denying the existence of the unmeasurable and questioning the reality of the immaterial, lead inextricably to the conclusion that everything in the universe came into being as a spontaneous explosion of something from nothing. The mystery school of modern physics tells of many mysteries, but none is more mysterious than this. Moreover, we are told that in less than a millionth of a second after something exploded out of nothing, intelligent structures¹³ began to emerge, structures that

¹³ By calling these structures "intelligent" we are taking a stand on the panpsychism vs materialism debate, but we are *not* endorsing any kind of "intelligent design" argument. All we are noting here is the *fact* that the universe was "born" already intrinsically structured, ordered, and driven toward increasing complexity and self-organization along certain very specific lines. This could be simple chance, some big cosmic "Oops!" But to believe that would be to cling to randomness and chance in the face of obvious structure and purpose. Again, we are not arguing for intelligent design, which is the idea that there is some outside intelligence that designed and built all we see before us. The problem with this view is

would make it possible for the universe to unfold toward a kind of structured novelty, leading to the emergence of new and more intricately organized structures, such as solar systems, suns, and planets.

As billions upon billions of years passed, a Second Big Bang was being prepared, breathtakingly improbable from the perspective of the sciences that have demonstrated its reality: *the emergence of life from lifeless matter*. The genesis of the biosphere on Earth is nearly as amazing as the explosion of everything from nothing. And as Stephen Jay Gould and many others have demonstrated, the sheer statistical improbability of such an occurrence is truly mind blowing.¹⁴ Yet it is a scientific reality that cannot be denied. Earth would come to be entirely encased in life, as the surface of the once barren rock was transformed into a teeming wilderness of biological diversity. The tendencies displayed in the evolution of the material universe, such as the spontaneous confluence of diffuse matter into organized forms and the emergence of higher-order structures, resulted in even more complex expressions during the evolution of the biological world. Thus *emergence* and *self-organization* have in the past decades become the watchwords of the branches of biology seeking to explain the earliest forms of life on Earth. Simply put, *emergence* appears to be an intrinsic property of the universe. It is a process in which synergies and symbioses resulting from self-organization propel matter toward unprecedented new forms. When what were once independent entities reach a certain

twofold: it is usually professed by those claiming allegiance to an ethnocentric and homophobic God, and is thus a fundamentalist ruse; also, it denies the reality of an imminently self-organizing and self-evolving universe, a reality that is now well established both theoretically and empirically. We are arguing that the universe itself *is* intrinsically intelligent, that matter itself *is* full of life, meaning, and purpose—these qualities do not need come from outside the universe, they are primordial properties of the universe. Moreover, from a non-dual perspective, there is no “outside” or “inside” to the universe. Thus, technically speaking we endorse a form of panentheistic evolutionary non-dualism—or acosmic humanism—with the understanding that none of those concepts can, by themselves, replace an actual Waking-Up in consciousness that grasps the ultimate mystery. Otherwise, all of these terms are just more dualistic concepts (even “non-dualism,” as a concept, only makes sense contrasted to “dualism”—which is why the great Buddhist sage Nagarjuna denies both terms as being adequate for ultimate truth).

¹⁴ This is not the place to get into these numbers, which include more zeros than could fit on a million single-spaced pages of 1-point font. For good overviews of these issues see: Kauffman, S. *The Origins of Order*; Capra, F. & Luisi, P. *The Systems View of Life*. For a discussion of the compounding improbabilities involved in the emergence of “higher-order” life forms—i.e., beyond the already stupefying improbability of primordial ooze—see: Ward, P. & Brownlee, D. *Rare Earth*. In non-scientific parlance, the term “impossible” comes to mind when considering these kinds of figures; and yet, here we are.

density of interconnectedness, they spontaneously become interconnected elements of a new higher-order whole, and in so doing they can no longer be understood as separate parts.

As evolution unfolded on Earth for billions of years, a Third Big Bang was being prepared, again a seeming miracle from the perspective of traditional science: *the emergence of self-conscious awareness and human culture*. It is not clear exactly when the transition from animal signaling to human language occurred, or when the natural activities of foraging and hunting became tied into the reflective transmission culture and technology that characterize even the earliest human societies. Aside from the very first microorganisms that transformed the atmosphere of the Earth into oxygen, and thus created the conditions for the possibility of the biosphere, the emergence of human culture is perhaps the most significant moment in the history of the planet.

Human self-consciousness led to the development of civilizations, and eventually our modern capitalist world-system.¹⁵ This is, of course, a long and complex story. But as culture evolved through various (and largely cumulative) political and scientific revolutions, a Fourth Big Bang was being prepared. Eventually culture itself would come to be informed by thinking about evolution. Evolution was becoming conscious of itself through human consciousness. This has been a halting and error prone process, and even today the majority of the world's population does not believe in anything like a scientifically informed theory of evolution. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the coming decades will be those during which evolutionary realizations spread like wildfire and new a species wide self-understanding emerges, including

¹⁵ The idea of "world-systems" is essential for any serious thinking about evolutionary futures for the human species (see: Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis*). World-system analysis is a growing trans-disciplinary field, encompassing economics, politics, sociology, and history. The modern world-system, which began to emerge during the long 16th century, is the largest functionally integrated unit the human species has ever created. Its existence and continuation has fundamentally changed the very frontiers of human possibility and fundamentally altered the self-regulatory processes of the biosphere. It is the highest order unit of selection and is unprecedentedly close to literally encompassing all of humanity, something never achieved before by any actually existing historical world-system. Wallerstein argues that at this point in geohistory, when there emerges a world-system without peripheries or frontiers, an evolutionary crisis ensues and a fundamentally new world-system must be painfully and violently born, one no longer predicated upon endless accumulation, growth, profit, and exploitation.

new ideas about the nature of the self and human personality, and new ideas about the evolutionary function of human collectives and cooperatives.

Unfortunately, the first glimmerings of an evolutionary view of humanity and the universe coincided with one of the most violent and divisive periods in human history. We have already raised the specter of Eugenics that still haunts all attempts to apply evolutionary theory to the social world. These demons cannot be exorcised without having the courage to call them by name and look them in the eye. What has been said again and again, and was perhaps best said by Gould and Kevles, is that these first attempts at applying the biological sciences to the design and governance of society resulted in a nightmare. Evolutionary theory was coopted by warring capitalist nation states and used to buttress racist ideologies that perpetuated nationalism, imperialism, and ultimately total global war. This is all true. But it is important to know why and for what exact reasons things went so horribly wrong, especially given the optimism expressed by many early pioneering biologists that evolutionary theory would unite humanity, an optimism shared by many to this day (including the authors of this contribution).¹⁶

Two things stand out that should free us from the fear of inevitably repeating the horrors yielded by our progenitors' attempts at applying evolutionary theory in thinking about human systems.¹⁷ One is that these early attempts were based on extremely simplistic ideas about genetic inheritance, selection, and other key aspects of evolutionary processes, and there are a massive number of key advances in the biological sciences that have recently obliterated such outmoded forms of thought. Yet, despite the simplicity and easily demonstrable inadequacy of their ideas, the early Eugenicists had huge ambitions, ambitions that they should have known

¹⁶ Make no mistake: racism was a major problem throughout the world-system during this period, and remains a major problem today. The arguments offered here are not intended to downplay this aspect of the historical context. Instead, the goal is to identify the illicit epistemological moves that allowed for the perpetuation of racist ideas by creating the *illusion* that they were backed by scientific theories and objective measures. When the early IQ testing movement, for example, is simply dismissed as racist, without further analysis, we have gained no insight into the mechanisms by which science was made an 'accomplice in the crime of political inequality.' Moreover, we miss the fact that many of these mechanisms are still in play as aspects of contemporary ideology.

¹⁷ However, we must always continue to be in touch with this fear of repeating history. And we ought to continue to retell and remember the horrors we wish not to repeat, even if only to honor the victims and to educate the younger generations who might otherwise forget.

actually required extremely complex ideas and tools—ideas and tools they did not have, and which were decades away. They needed a scalpel; all they had was an ax. So why did they run ahead into surgery on the body politic anyway? It appears this was a case of politics trumping science and of scientists being coopted by money power, intoxicated by state sanctioned violence, and caught up in the kind of Utopian dreams hatched during periods of profound social upheaval. Today we have fundamentally more adequate tools and ideas about the nature of evolution, no question. But can we shield them from cooptation by political and economic powers that have no interest in scientific truths and their ethical application, especially during a time of great crisis?

The second is that early attempts at applying evolutionary theory to society radically under-theorized human interiority, consciousness, and especially the nature of human personality. The self and its experiences were understood as an artifact of the racial group or functional purpose under which any given individual was subsumed. This abstraction from interiority and consciousness disabled empathy, and ultimately gave ideological justification to state sanctioned violence of unimaginable proportions. By looking only at evolution in terms of exterior physical systems (genes, biology, technology) the evolution of interiors (both individual and collective) were occluded from consideration. A whole generation was blinded by reductive evolutionary thinking and rendered unable to see “the other” as anything but a vehicle for the evolution of bloodlines.

Today we not only need a theory of evolution that is qualitatively more complex and adequate in its dealing the material and external aspects of evolutionary processes, we need one that can illuminate the evolution of interiors, the evolution of self and culture. We are called to weave a unified vision of humanity as part of an evolving universe, one that integrates interiors and exteriors, matter and consciousness, agency and communion. With this aim in mind, *uniqueness* emerges as an essential and broadly integrative concept at the heart of the complex new sciences of evolution.

Unique Selves and Unique Self Symphonies

The key insight that guides Unique Self Theory¹⁸ is that one of the central dimensions of evolutionary process is uniqueness. That is, one of the things evolution does is to produce the unique, and as evolution unfolds uniqueness increases. This means that the idea of evolution becoming conscious of itself can be reframed in terms of uniqueness becoming consciousness of itself. The moral implications could not be more important. Here we lay out the basic ideas in schematic form as a series of related postulates:

- 1) Evolution is a process that moves from simplicity to complexity and from less consciousness to more consciousness (this is Teilhard's (1955) "law of complexity and consciousness").
- 2) This movement towards greater complexity and consciousness is also a movement towards increasingly unique forms of life.
- 3) Increases in complexity, consciousness, and uniqueness correlate with increases in creativity and Eros as organismic potentials.
- 4) Evolution is thus the move from unconscious uniqueness to conscious uniqueness.

¹⁸ The notions of Unique Self and Unique Self Symphony emerged at the interface of religious scholarship, psychological meta-theory, and evolutionary meta-theory—expressed collaboratively in different forms by Gafni, Stein and Hubbard. This work naturally integrates with Hubbard's seminal work expressing and exploring *Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential* (Hubbard, 2015, revised edition). For a detailed look at the genesis of Unique Self Theory itself, see the special issue of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* (6:1), which is dedicated to Unique Self Theory. The volume was edited by and largely penned by Gafni, with the lead article, *The Evolutionary Emergent of Unique Self, A New Chapter in Integral Theory*. See also major works by Gafni (2012; 2014) *Unique Self; Two Views of Self*, on the core articulation of Unique Self theory and the forthcoming work by Stein & Gafni, *Towards a Politics of Evolutionary Love*. For the first book length treatments of Unique Self Symphony, see: Gafni & Kincaid (2015); Gafni and Hubbard, *Becoming the New Human and the New Society* (Forthcoming); Gafni, Hubbard & Shmachtenberger, *The Universe, A Love Story* (Forthcoming). The Center for Integral Wisdom is supporting a series of book projects currently underway involving scholars from over a dozen fields, including business, psychotherapy, attachment theory, evolutionary theory, medicine, and technology. For more details about this emerging school of thought, see the think tank at the Center for Integral Wisdom: <http://centerforintegralwisdom.org>

- 5) The reflectively unique self—the organism aware of its own evolutionary uniqueness—becomes a possibility with the emergence of humanity, and can be thought of as a key strange attractor in the evolutionary process.
- 6) Thus your Unique Self is the *personal* face of a universal evolutionary process—in this way the qualities of personality participates in the evolution of the universe.

It is necessary to pause here to clarify the meaning of Unique Self and to preempt some common objections. Firstly, there is a difference between what is typically referred to as “ego” and Unique Self.¹⁹ The term “ego” is typically used with reference to a contracted sense of self, where one emphasizes difference and asserts self over other. Unique Self, on the other hand, can be understood as *personality beyond ego*.

Note that this is different from most typical spiritual and ethical teachings, which suggest *overcoming* or *forgetting* ones personal story—disappearing and outshined by the Absolute, be it the Eternal Fact or the Evolutionary Impulse. Rather, our story is a part of things. Each unique personal story drives the larger story. There is no split between person evolution and the evolution of reality. You don’t overcome or forget you story; you clarify the uniqueness of your story. There is an evolutionary imperative to promote uniqueness. And uniqueness is a relational category.²⁰

- 7) Unique Selves come together to form Unique Self Symphonies, which is how the universe optimally and ethically self-organizes and evolves at the level of human culture and personality.

¹⁹ See Gafni (2012) for 25 distinctions between Unique Self and Ego. There is no space to go into all that here.

²⁰ Uniqueness is what philosophers call a “relational category,” which contrasts with an “entity category.” This means uniqueness describes something that occurs between and among things, arising out of relationships, as opposed to being an intrinsic abstract property of a thing in isolation. Uniqueness is not just about difference; it is about differences defined through relations. Interesting enough, it was our friend C.S. Peirce who did the first pioneering work on the differences between relational categories and entity categories, see: Parker, K. *The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought*.

- 8) This a just form of emergent super organisms because it requires that we care about everyone's story. It has social justice—the view from everywhere—at its core and leverages the benefits of justice to promote further harmoniums evolutionary emergence.²¹

The First Age of Conscious Evolution:

Unique Self Symphonies and the climax of the Anthropocene

So it is that in humanity evolution has become conscious of itself. *We are evolution.*²²

Humans are increasing aware that we are affecting our own evolution by everything that we do – the food we eat, the babies we have, the wars we fight, etc. Our problems are evolutionary drivers. We see that by our own acts we could render ourselves extinct...and here is the great good news...we could also evolve ourselves to a higher order of love, being, creativity, fulfilling our untapped human creative potential.

²¹ The image of the Unique Self Symphony elaborated in these pages—as the pinnacle emergent property of Earth's evolution, the culmination of human capacities for autonomy and community, and an embodiment of justice itself—this echoes a history of such images of justice as a kind of embodied interpersonal harmony, which are found especially in the Western philosophical tradition. The great 18th century philosopher, Immanuel Kant, was the first to tentatively and cryptically suggest that the laws humanity gives itself are best read as an autonomous extension of the self-regulative and self-organizing processes of the natural world. According to this view, humanity's *autonomy*—literally, its self-legislating capability—represents nature's crowning innovation, wherein are found startling advances toward novelty and complexity. Importantly, a capacity for autonomy entails the acceptance of responsibility. This is the root of the notion that humanity is somehow accountable for the trajectory of evolution. Kant argued that humanity ought to facilitate the transformation of the *kingdom of nature* into the *kingdom of ends* by proceeding such that the norms of our actions might be fit to serve as universal laws (akin to natural laws). The kingdom of ends—a kind of idealized coordination and harmony of all beings in perfect justice—is given esoteric significance by Kant, who views it as the *teleologia rationis humanae*, a vision of reason's future, an immanent catalyst of the *corpus mysticum*. This was some of Kant's motivation when he articulated one of the earliest and most influential normative global meta-theories in a series of publications about the history of human civilization and the necessary future emergence of a polycentric global governance system.

²² For those wondering, it was Julian Huxley first probably first voiced the idea that in the mind of modern humanity evolution had become conscious of itself and that therefore the future of evolution is taking place through us, consciously.²² Huxley expressed this idea in many places, and was echoed by many of his contemporaries, such as Teilhard. One of the more interesting places the idea appears in print is in the essay: "Transhumanism" In *New Bottles for New Wine* (1957).

We now face evolution by choice, not chance. Evidently, “God” put freedom in the system. It is not a robotic universe.

This is a great wake up call for humanity. While we have been morally guided by all great traditions to love one another, now we find that pragmatically, if we do not learn to join together in collaboration and concretion—in Unique Self Symphonies—we will become one of the many extinct species.

This leads to even a greater opportunity. It offers us the chance to learn from nature the extraordinary capacity to form whole systems out of separate parts through allurements, through attraction, through love. As members of a global civilization we can enter into a *conscious* process of connecting and synergizing innovations, creativity, loving action quickly enough to foster a whole system, a global system, beyond current forms of organization. It would be a synergistic whole system on Earth in which each person would be free to offer his or her irreducible expression of unique essence or creativity.

The composite cooperative whole cultural system of humanity presents us with the vision of a genuine next stage of evolution. We have called it *Homo universalis*. When humanity connects to co- create in the light of the vast new technological capacities of our species we realize we are mutating even now. We are emerging as a species capable of co-evolving with Nature, co-creating with Spirit, entering the multi-billion trend revealed by Teilhard's Law of Complexity. That is, moving toward higher consciousness, greater freedom and complex order by choice.

From a spiritual point of view, we can see we are integrating internally the Impulse of Evolution, called by Sri Aurobindo “Consciousness Force” as our own impulse to love and to create. We find that we and the impulse become one when we find our unique life purpose and YES.

We are on the threshold of becoming literally Co-Creators with the Divine, with Spirit, an expression of the Implicate Order, or the Process of Evolution. That is, we are capable now of

consciously participating with the Creative Process of the universe, as evolutionary unique selves joining.

Within this opportunity is the evolution of relationship itself. As we have fewer children and live longer lives, we are entering a new period of Eros itself. We call it “Telerotic” , that is the combination of Eros, and Telos, or high purpose. When we become “vocationally aroused” by our desire to express our unique creativity we yearn to *join genius* with others who need our gift as we need theirs. This joining in love and creativity activates *more* of our potential. We find ourselves becoming newer, more excited by life, regenerating.

We can foresee a time on Earth when Unique Self Symphonies are occurring on a massive scale. Imagine everyone who is attracted to realize their potential sounding their unique note. The “symphony” is the result of nature’s extraordinary capacity to form whole systems out of separate parts when in a “field” of resonance. This magnificent genius of nature has brought together cells, multi-cells, animals, humans, biospheres for 14 billion years. This is the trend we a calling upon consciously.

We have called this evolutionary phase change a Planetary Awakening. It could even be called a “planetary pentecost,” in which each person speaks in their own voice the inner words of Spirit. The walls that divide us would come down. We would find that we are already members of one planetary body of extraordinary brilliance and capacities, when we overcome the illusion of separation. Since it is an illusion, it can happen quickly when the time is right. We may read with new sense of reality. St. Paul’s famous statement: “Behold I show you a mystery...we shall not all sleep, we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump and the trumpet shall sound...” The fact is the trumpet *is* sounding on one phase of human growth and consciousness. The noosphere, the global brain, is getting its collective eyes. Countless co-evolving co-creative unique selves are emerging globally. Our joining together as co-creators to realize our own full potential selves, in love, may induce a collective awakening that is natural, normal and possibly immanent if we so choose together.

Conclusion: Towards a New Story of Humanity and Nature

Core to the work of the Center for Integral wisdom is the development of Unique Self theory as a core structure of psychology, attachment theory, economics, conscious capitalism, spirituality, and evolutionary science. Joining with The Foundation for Conscious Evolution as well as all other aligned groups, we are attempting to lay the groundwork for the emergence of the coming planetary Unique Self Symphonies that will bend the arch of history and change the face of the Earth.

Social justice is when all have a shared sense of that inviolability and value of each individual's Unique Self is what constitutes the evolution and health of any group. When a group comes together in such a way where no one's unique self is diminished, but all are, in fact, leveraged, there emerges a Unique Self Symphony. This requires all the members to hold the group in mind, to envision their part in the self-organizing and self-orchestrating social reality to which they consent to participate.²³

A self-conscious Unique Self Symphony *is* the feeling of being ethically integrated into a larger totality; social justice is about the feeling of harmonious social integration—the felt integrity of one's unique self is the core of an evolutionary phenomenology of moral consciousness, especially when a group is in the midst of dynamic autocatalytic closure. To fit into the evolutionary puzzle or story (why is it always a struggle?), the shape required by each individual is unique. Other forms of super-organic closure require violence and will ultimately be undone, unseated not because they are physically unsustainable, but because they are unbearable for human identity formation and moral development.²⁴

²³ Uniqueness and democratic forms of self-governance are related. This line of thinking is and very much in tune with the design principles for CRP organizational governance structures outlined by Wilson. Although not all forms of deliberative democracy are created equal: see Buck (2006) *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy*; Habermas (1996) *Between Facts and Norms*.

²⁴ Human systems are different from other biological ones in the sense that they can have identity crises (of self-understanding and conscience) as well as systemic crises (of resources, reproductive capacities). Habermas (1978) *Legitimation Crises*, makes this point, suggesting the limits of views of social evolution

Without an elaborate language of moral consciousness, “a language of strong evaluation” (as Charles Taylor (1989) would put it) all this talk about the super-organisms of tomorrow will fall short of catalyzing them. Our modest proposal here is simply that the emerging insights from mainstream evolutionary sciences, (which are still struggling to get out of the old paradigm) begin to be enlivened with the insights of the alternative narrative, where the consciousness and morality implicated the next steps of human evolution have been the focal point of concerted scholarly efforts for over a century.

that focus on systems and objectives, resources and economies, and neglecting the fact that meaning making systems are equally as important in sustaining the continuity of society and life.