

The Eye of the Spirit

An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad [Abridged]

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Chapter 1:

The Spectrum of Consciousness: Integral Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy

Biological and medical scientists are now in the midst of intensive work on the Human Genome Project, the endeavor to map all of the genes in the entire sequence of human DNA. This spectacular project promises to revolutionize our ideas of human growth, development, disease, and medical treatment, and its completion will surely mark one of the great advances in human knowledge.

Not as well known, but arguably more important, is what might be called the **Human Consciousness Project**, the endeavor, now well under way, to map the entire spectrum of human consciousness (including, as well, realms of the human unconscious). This Human Consciousness Project, involving hundreds of researchers from around the world, *includes a series of multidisciplinary, multicultural, multimodal approaches that together promise an exhaustive mapping the entire range of consciousness, the entire sequence of the "genes" of awareness, as it were.*

These various attempts are rapidly converging on a "master template" of the various stages, structures, and states of consciousness available to men and women. By comparing and contrasting various multicultural approaches--from Zen Buddhism to Western psychoanalysis, from Vedanta Hinduism to existential phenomenology, from Tundra Shamanism to altered states--these approaches are rapidly piecing together a master template--a spectrum of consciousness--using the various approaches to fill in any gaps left by the others.

Although many of the specifics are still being intensively researched, the overall evidence for the existence of this spectrum of consciousness is already so significant as to put it largely beyond serious dispute. The "master template" that is emerging from this modern research is therefore able to honor and connect with the essence of the world's wisdom traditions, while simultaneously attempting to update and modernize their insights where appropriate. The goal of the integral approach is thus a judicious blend of ancient wisdom and modern knowledge.

Known as the "**perennial philosophy**"--"perennial" precisely because it shows up *across cultures and across the ages with many similar features*--this world view has, indeed, formed the core not only of *the world's great wisdom traditions, from Christianity to Buddhism to Taoism, but also of many of the greatest philosophers, scientists, and psychologists of both East and West, North and South.* So overwhelmingly widespread is the perennial philosophy--the details of which I will explain in a moment--that it is either the single greatest intellectual error ever to appear in humankind's history--an error so colossally widespread as to literally stagger the mind--or it is the single most accurate reflection of reality yet to appear.

Central to the perennial philosophy is the notion of *the Great Chain of Being*. The idea itself is fairly simple. Reality, according to the perennial philosophy, is not one-dimensional; it is not a flatland of uniform substance stretching monotonously before the eye. Rather, *reality is composed of several different but continuous dimensions. Manifest reality, that is, consists of different grades or levels, reaching from the lowest and most dense and least conscious to the highest and most subtle and most conscious.* At one end of this continuum of being or spectrum of consciousness is what we in the West would call "matter" or the insentient and the nonconscious, and at the other end is "spirit" or "godhead" or the "superconscious" (which is also said to be the all-pervading ground of the entire sequence, as we will see).

The central claim of the perennial philosophy is that men and women can grow and develop (or evolve) all the way up the hierarchy to Spirit itself, therein to realize a "supreme identity" with Godhead--the ens perfectissimum toward which all growth and evolution yearns.

But as used by the perennial philosophy--and indeed, as used in modern psychology, evolutionary theory, and systems theory--a hierarchy is simply a ranking of orders of events according to their holistic capacity. In any developmental sequence, what is whole at one stage becomes merely a part of a larger whole at the next stage. A letter is part of a whole word, which is part of a whole sentence, which is part of a whole paragraph, and so on. **Arthur Koestler** coined the term "**holon**" to refer to *that which, being a whole in one context, is a part of a wider whole in another.* With reference to the phrase "the bark of a dog," for example, the word "bark" is a whole with reference to its individual letters, but a part with reference to the phrase itself. And the whole (or the context) can determine the meaning and function of a part--the meaning of "bark" is different in the phrases "the bark of a dog" and "the bark of a tree." The whole, in other words, is more than the sum of its parts, and that whole can influence and determine, in many cases, the function of its parts.

Hierarchy, then, is simply an order of increasing holons, representing an increase in wholeness and integrative capacity. This is why hierarchy is so central to systems theory, the theory of wholeness or holism ("wholism"). And it is absolutely central to the perennial philosophy. Each expanding link in the Great Chain of Being represents an increase in unity and wider identities, from the isolated identity of the body through the social and communal identity of the mind to the supreme identity of Spirit, an identity with literally all manifestation. This is why the great hierarchy of being is often drawn as a series of concentric circles or spheres or "nests within nests." As we will see, the Great Chain is actually the Great Nest of Being.

And finally, hierarchy is asymmetrical (or a "higher"-archy) because the process does not occur in the reverse. For example, there are first letters, then words, then sentences, then paragraphs, but not vice versa. And that not vice versa constitutes an unavoidable hierarchy or ranking or asymmetrical order of increasing wholeness.

In any developmental or growth sequence, as a more encompassing stage or holon emerges, it includes the capacities and patterns and functions of the previous stage (i.e., of the previous holons), and then adds its own unique

(and more encompassing) capacities. In that sense, and that sense only, can the new and more encompassing holon be said to be "higher" or "wider." Whatever the important value of the previous stage, the new stage has all of that plus something extra (more integrative capacity, for example), and that "something extra" means "extra value" relative to the previous (and less encompassing) stage. This crucial definition of a "higher stage" was first introduced in the West by Aristotle and in the East by Shankara and Lieh-Tzu; it has been central to the perennial philosophy ever since.

As Hegel first put it, and as developmentalists have echoed ever since, each stage is adequate and valuable, but each higher stage is more adequate, and, in that sense only, more valuable (which always means, more holistic).

It is for all these reasons that Koestler, after noting that *all complex hierarchies are composed of holons, or increasing orders of wholeness*, pointed out that the correct word for "hierarchy" is actually holarchy.

So that is normal or natural holarchy, the stage-like unfolding of larger networks of increasing wholeness, with the larger or wider wholes being able to exert influence over the lower-order wholes. And as natural, desirable, and unavoidable as that is, you can already start to see how holoarchies might turn pathological. If the higher levels can exert control over the lower levels, they can also over-dominate or even repress and alienate the lower levels. That leads to a whole host of pathological difficulties, in both the individual and society at large.

It is precisely because the world is arranged holarchically, precisely because it contains fields within fields within fields, that things can go so profoundly wrong, that a disruption or pathology in one field can reverberate throughout an entire system. And the "cure" for this pathology, in all cases, is the essentially the same: rooting out the pathological holons so the holarchy itself can return to harmony. The cure does not consist, as the reductionists maintain, in getting rid of holarchy per se, since, even if that were possible, it would simply result in a uniform, one-dimensional flatland of no value distinctions at all (which is why those critics who toss out hierarchy in general immediately replace it with a new scale of values of their own, i.e., with their own particular hierarchy).

Rather, the "cure" of any diseased system consists in rooting out any holons that have usurped their position in the overall system by abusing their power of upward or downward causation. This is exactly the "cure" we see at work in psychoanalysis (shadow holons refuse integration), democratic social revolutions (monarchical or fascist holons oppress the body politic), medical science interventions (cancerous holons invade a benign system), critical social theory (opaque ideology usurps open communication), radical feminist critiques (patriarchal holons dominate the public sphere), and so on. It is not getting rid of holarchy per se, but arresting (and integrating) their arrogant holons.

Which brings us to the most notorious **paradox in the perennial philosophy**. We have seen that the wisdom traditions subscribe to the notion that reality manifests in levels or dimensions, with each higher dimension being more inclusive and therefore "closer" to the absolute totality of Godhead or Spirit. In this sense, Spirit is the summit of being, the highest rung on the ladder of evolution. But it is also true that Spirit is the wood out of which the entire ladder and all its rungs are made. Spirit is the suchness, the isness, the essence of each and everything that exists.

The first aspect, the highest-rung aspect, is the *transcendental nature of Spirit*--it far surpasses any "worldly" or creaturely or finite things. The entire earth (or even universe) could be destroyed, and Spirit would remain. The second aspect, the wood aspect, is the immanent nature of Spirit--Spirit is equally and totally present in all manifest things and events, in nature, in culture, in heaven and on earth, with no partiality. From this angle, no phenomenon whatsoever is closer to Spirit than another, for all are equally "made of" Spirit. Thus, Spirit is both the highest goal of all development and evolution, and the ground of the entire sequence, as present fully at the beginning as at the end. Spirit is prior to this world, but not other to this world.

Failure to take both of those paradoxical aspects of Spirit into account has historically led to some very lopsided (and politically dangerous) views of Spirit. Traditionally, the patriarchal religions have tended to over-emphasize the transcendental nature of Spirit, thus condemning earth, nature, body, and woman to an inferior status. Prior to that, the matriarchal religions tended to emphasize the immanent nature of Spirit alone, and the resultant pantheistic worldview equated the finite and created Earth with the infinite and uncreated Spirit. You are free to identify with a finite and limited Earth; you are not free to call it the infinite and unlimited.

Both matriarchal and patriarchal religions, both of these lopsided views of Spirit, have had rather horrible historical consequences, from brutal and large-scale human sacrifice for the fertility of the earth Goddess to wholesale war for God the Father. But in the very midst of these outward distortions, the perennial philosophy (the esoteric or inner core of the wisdom religions) has always avoided any of those dualities--Heaven or Earth, masculine or feminine, infinite or finite, ascetic or celebratory--and centered instead on their union or integration ("nondualism"). And indeed, this union of Heaven and Earth, masculine and feminine, infinite and finite, ascending and descending, wisdom and compassion, was made explicit in the "tantric" teachings of the various wisdom traditions, from Neoplatonism in the West to Vajrayana in the East. And it is this nondual core of the wisdom traditions to which the term "perennial philosophy" most applies.

The point, then, is that if we are to try to think of Spirit in mental terms (which necessarily involves some difficulties), then at least we should remember this transcendent/immanent paradox. Paradox is simply the way nonduality looks to the mental level. Spirit itself is not paradoxical; strictly speaking, it is not characterizable at all.

This applies doubly to hierarchy (holarchy). We have said that when transcendental Spirit manifests itself, it does so in stages or levels--the Great Holarchy of Being. But I'm not saying Spirit or reality itself is hierarchical. Absolute Spirit or reality is not hierarchical. It is not qualifiable at all in mental terms (lower-holon terms)--it is shunyata, or nirguna, or apophatic--unqualifiable, without a trace of specific and limiting characteristics at all. But it manifests itself in steps, in layers, dimensions, sheaths, levels, or grades--whatever term one prefers--and that is holarchy.

The whole point is that these are **levels of the manifest world, of maya**. When maya is not recognized as the play of the Divine, then it is nothing but illusion. Hierarchy is illusion. **There are levels of illusion, not levels of reality**. But according to the traditions, it is exactly (and only) by understanding the hierarchical nature of samsara that we can in fact climb out of it, a ladder discarded only after having served its extraordinary purpose.

So "soul" is both the highest level of individual growth we can achieve, and also the final barrier, the final knot, to complete enlightenment or supreme identity, simply because as transcendental witness it stands back from everything

it witnesses. Once we push through the witness position, then the soul or witness itself dissolves and there is only the play of nondual awareness, awareness that does not look at objects but is completely one with all objects (Zen says "it is like tasting the sky"). The gap between subject and object collapses, the soul is transcended or dissolved, and pure spiritual or nondual awareness--which is very simple, very obvious, very clear--arises. You realize that your intrinsic being is vast and open, empty and clear, and everything arising anywhere is arising within you, as intrinsic spirit, spontaneously.

And so we can end on a happy note: **After being temporarily derailed in the 19th century by a variety of materialistic reductionisms** (from scientific materialism to behaviorism to positivism), the Great Chain of Being, the Great Hierarchy of Being, is making a stunning comeback. That temporary derailment--an attempt to reduce the hierarchy of being to its lowest level, matter--was particularly galling in psychology, which first lost its spirit, then lost its soul, then lost its mind, and was reduced to studying only empirical behavior or bodily drives, a restriction that at any other time or place would be considered a precise definition of insanity.

But now evolutionary holarchy--the holistic study of the development and self-organization of fields within fields within fields--is once again a dominant theme in many scientific and behavioral disciplines (as we will see), though it goes by many names (Aristotle's "entelechy," to give only one example, is now known as "morphogenetic fields" and "self-organizing systems"). This is not to say that the modern versions of the Great Hierarchy and its self-organizing principles offer no new insights, for they do, particularly when it comes to the actual evolutionary unfolding of the Great Chain itself. Each glimpse of the Great Hierarchy is adequate; each advancing glimpse is more adequate. . . .

But the essentials are unmistakable. *Ludwig von Bertalanffy*, the founder of General System Theory, summarized it perfectly: "Reality, in the modern conception, appears as a tremendous hierarchical order of organized entities, leading, in a superposition of many levels, from physical and chemical to biological and sociological systems. Such hierarchical structure and combination into systems of ever higher order, is characteristic of reality as a whole and of fundamental importance especially in biology, psychology and sociology."

There is, really, only one major thing left to be done, one fundamental item on the homecoming agenda. While it is true, as I said, that one of the unifying paradigms in modern thought, from physics to biology to psychology to sociology, is evolutionary holarchy (see, for example, Laszlo, Jantsch, Habermas, Lenski, Dennett), nonetheless most orthodox schools of inquiry admit the existence only of matter, body, and mind.² The higher dimensions of soul and spirit are not yet accorded quite the same status. We might say that the modern West has still only acknowledged three fifths of the Great Hierarchy of Being. The agenda, very simply, is to *reintroduce the other two fifths (soul and spirit)*.

Once we recognize and honor all the levels and dimensions of the Great Chain, we simultaneously acknowledge all the corresponding modes of knowing--not just the eye of flesh, which discloses the physical and sensory world, or just the eye of mind, which discloses the linguistic and symbolic world, but also the eye of contemplation, which discloses the soul and spirit. (We will return to this important topic in chapter 3.)

And so there is the agenda: Let us take the last step and reintroduce the eye of contemplation, which, as a scientific and repeatable methodology, discloses soul and spirit. And that integral vision is, I submit, the final homecoming, the reweaving of our modern soul with the soul of humanity itself--the true meaning of multiculturalism--so that, standing on the shoulders of giants, we transcend but include, which always means honor, their ever-recurring presence. Uniting ancient wisdom with modern knowledge is thus the clarion call of the integral vision, a beacon in the postmodern wilderness.

An acknowledgment of the full spectrum of consciousness would alter the course of every one of the modern disciplines it touches--and that, of course, is an essential aspect of integral studies.

But indeed the first and most immediate impact would be on the field of psychology itself. I have explored this full-spectrum psychology in a number of books (including *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, *No Boundary*, *The Atman Project*, *Transformations of Consciousness*, and *A Brief History of Everything*).

These books present a view of human development that attempts to incorporate the entire spectrum of consciousness, from instinct to ego to spirit, from prepersonal to personal to transpersonal, from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious. If nothing animal, human, or divine is alien to me, then no state of consciousness can be dismissed from the generous embrace of a truly integral psychology. In the Preface to the new edition of *The Atman Project*, I try to suggest why such an integral and inclusive stance is so important.

The Atman Project was, as far as we can tell, the first psychology that suggested a way of uniting East and West, conventional and contemplative, orthodox and mystical, into a single, coherent, and plausible framework. In so doing, it incorporated a good number of approaches, from Freud to Buddha, Gestalt to Shankara, Piaget to Yogachara, Kohlberg to Krishnamurti.

I began writing *The Atman Project* in 1976, along with its sister volume, *Up from Eden*--one covering ontogeny, the other phylogeny. In the almost two decades since writing *Atman*, I have found its basic framework to be as sturdy and solid as ever, and thus I believe that its general tenets, with a little fine tuning here and there, will continue to be valid for a long and fruitful time.

A few critics complained that I had simply used various sources in a literary fashion, that my approach wasn't based on clinical or experimental evidence. But this is perhaps a bit disingenuous: the vast majority of theorists that I relied on were exactly those who had pioneered direct clinical and experimental evidence, from Jean Piaget's method clinique to Margaret Mahler's exhaustive videotaped observations to Lawrence Kohlberg's and Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking moral investigations--not to mention the vast phenomenological evidence presented by the contemplative traditions themselves. *The Atman Project* was directly based on the evidence of over sixty researchers from numerous approaches, and hundreds of others in an informal way.

(We will return to, and carefully explore, this integral psychology in chapters 6, 9, 10, and 11.)

The Atman Project also ended my flirtation with Romanticism and its attempt to make regression into a source of salvation. I had in fact begun to write both *Atman* and *Eden* as a validation of the Romantic view: men and women

start out in an unconscious union with the Divine--an unreflexive immersion in a type of Heaven on Earth, a paradisiacal Eden, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically; then they break away from that union, through a process of alienation and dissociation (the isolated and divisive ego); then return to the Divine in a conscious and glorious union.

Human development thus proceeds, so to speak, from unconscious Heaven to conscious Hell to conscious Heaven. I started writing both books to validate that Romantic notion... But the more I worked on the books, the more it became obvious that the Romantic view was hopelessly muddled...

Hence, the overall Romantic view: one starts out in unconscious Heaven, an unconscious union with the Divine; one then loses this unconscious union, and thus plunges into conscious Hell; one can then regain the Divine union, but now in a higher and conscious fashion.

The only problem with that view is that the first step--the loss of the unconscious union with the Divine--is an absolute impossibility. All things are one with the Divine Ground--it is, after all, the Ground of all being! To lose oneness with that Ground is to cease to exist.

Follow it closely: **there are only two general stances you can have in relation to the Divine Ground:** since all things are one with Ground, you can either be aware of that oneness, or you can be unaware of that oneness. That is, you can be conscious or unconscious of your union with the Divine Ground: those are the only two choices you have.

And since the Romantic view is that you start out, as an infant, in an unconscious union with Ground, you cannot then lose that union! You have already lost consciousness of the union; you cannot then further lose the union itself or you would cease to be! So if you are unconscious of your union, it can't get any worse, ontologically speaking. That is already the pits of alienation. You are already living in Hell, as it were; you are already immersed in samsara, only you don't realize it--you haven't the awareness to recognize this burning fact. And so that is more the actual state of the infantile self: unconscious Hell.

What does start to happen, however, is that you begin to wake up to the alienated world in and around you. You go from unconscious Hell to conscious Hell, and being conscious of Hell, of samsara, of lacerating existence, is what makes growing up--and being an adult--such a nightmare of misery and alienation. The infant self is relatively peaceful, not because it is living in Heaven, but because it isn't aware enough to register the flames of Hell all around it...

As the infant self grows in awareness and consciousness, it slowly becomes aware of the intrinsic pain of existence, the torment inherent in samsara, the mechanism of madness coiled inherently in the manifest world: it begins to suffer. It is introduced to the first Noble Truth, a jolting initiation into the world of perception, whose sole mathematics is the torture-inducing fire of unquenched and unquenchable desire. This is not a desire-ridden world that was lacking in the infant's previous "wonderful" immersion state, but simply a world that dominated that state unconsciously, a world which the self now slowly, painfully, tragically becomes aware of.

And so, as the self grows in awareness, it moves from unconscious Hell to conscious Hell, and there it may spend its entire life, seeking above all else the numbing consolations that will blunt its raw and ragged feelings, blur its etchings of despair. Its life becomes a map of morphine, and folding itself into the anesthetic glow of all its compensations, it might even manage to convince itself, at least for an endearing blush of rose-tinted time, that the dualistic world is an altogether pretty thing.

But **alternatively, the self might continue its growth and development into the genuinely spiritual domains: transcending the separate-self sense**, it uncoils in the very Divine. The union with the Divine--a union or oneness that had been present but unconscious since the start--now flares forth in consciousness in a brilliant burst of illumination and a shock of the unspeakably ordinary: **it realizes its Supreme Identity with Spirit itself**, announced, perhaps, in nothing more than the cool breeze of a bright spring day, this outrageously obvious affair.

Now, there is indeed a falling away from Godhead, from Spirit, from the primordial Ground, and this is the truth the Romantics are trying to get at, before they slip into their pre/trans fallacies. This falling away is called *involution*, the movement whereby all things fall away from a consciousness of their union with the Divine, and thus imagine themselves to be separate and isolated monads, alienated and alienating. And once involution has occurred--and Spirit becomes unconsciously involved in the lower and lowest forms of its own manifestation--then *evolution* can occur: Spirit unfolds in a great spectrum of consciousness, from the Big Bang to matter to sensation to perception to impulse to image to symbol to concept to reason to psychic to subtle to causal occasions, on the way to its own shocking self-recognition, Spirit's own self-realization and self-resurrection. And in each of those stages--from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit--evolution becomes more and more conscious, more and more are, more and more realized, more and more awake--with all the joys, and all the terrors, inherently involved in that dialectic of awakening.

At each stage of this process of Spirit's return to itself, we--you and I--nonetheless remember, perhaps vaguely, perhaps intensely, that we were once consciously one with the very Divine itself. It is there, this memory trace, in the back of our awareness, pulling and pushing us to realize, to awaken, to remember who and what we always already are.

In fact, all things, we might surmise, intuit to one degree or another that their very Ground is Spirit itself. All things are driven, urged, pushed and pulled to manifest this realization. And yet, prior to that divine awakening, all things seek Spirit in a way that actually prevents the realization: or else we would be realized right now! We seek Spirit in ways that prevent it.

We seek for Spirit in the world of time; but Spirit is timeless, and cannot there be found. We seek for Spirit in the world of space; but Spirit is spaceless, and cannot there be found. We seek for Spirit in this or that object, shiny and alluring and full of fame or fortune; but Spirit is not an object, and it cannot be seen or grasped in the world of commodities and commotion.

In other words, we are seeking for Spirit in ways that prevent its realization, and force us to settle for substitute

gratifications, which propel us through, and lock us into, the wretched world of time and terror, space and death, sin and separation, loneliness and consolation.

And that is the **Atman project**.

The Atman project: the attempt to find Spirit in ways that prevent it and force substitute gratifications. And, as you will see in the following pages, the entire structure of the manifest universe is driven by the Atman project, a project that continues until we--until you and I--awaken to the Spirit whose substitutes we seek in the world of space and time and grasping and despair. The nightmare of history is the nightmare of the Atman project, the fruitless search in time for that which is finally timeless, a search that inherently generates terror and torment, a self ravaged by repression, paralyzed by guilt, beset with the frost and fever of wretched alienation--a torture that is only undone in the radiant Heart when the great search itself uncoils, when the self-contraction relaxes its attempt to find God, real or substitute: the movement in time is undone by the great Unborn, the great Uncreate, the great Emptiness in the Heart of the Kosmos itself.

And so, as you read this book, try to remember: remember the great event when you breathed out and created this entire Kosmos; remember the great emptying when you threw yourself out as the entire World, just to see what would happen. Remember the forms and forces through which you have traveled thus far: from galaxies to planets, to verdant plants reaching upward for the sun, to animals stalking day and night, restless with their weary search, through primal men and women, yearning for the light, to the very person now holding this book: remember who and what you have been, what you have done, what you have seen, who you actually are in all those guises, the masks of the God and the Goddess, the masks of your own Original Face.

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