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Special Issue Introduction

Issue Editor: Bahman A.K. Shirazi

Integral Education

The essays appearing in this special issue of Integral Review are selections from the proceedings of the 2010 California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) Founders Symposium on Integral Consciousness. This annual symposium provides a forum for CIIS community members and friends to exchange and deepen their understanding of integral consciousness, its evolution, and its relationship to the current planetary challenges and transformational processes. Each year the Symposium covers one or two major themes, as well as several other themes pertinent to the integral world view and its interface with academic disciplines. One of the major themes of 2010 was integral education.

Contributions to this issue are by a cross-section of CIIS community members including administrative leaders: President Joseph Subbiondo and Academic Vice President, Judie Wexler; three faculty members: Matthew Bronson, Ian Grand, and Kaisa Puhhaka; two alumni: Anne Adams and Christian de Quincey; and two current students: Maureen Dolan and Adrian Villasenor-Gallarza. There is also an essay by Lynda Lester, an active practitioner of integral yoga who was a guest presenter. The topics range the full gamut from integral philosophy, ontology, epistemology, methodology to pedagogy.

The editor’s introductory article gives a summary of the founding vision, as well as ontological and epistemological principles of the integral framework expounded by Haridas Chaudhuri, founder of CIIS and his key collaborators.

Joseph Subbiondo gives a brief account of the history of CIIS and its predecessor institution, the American Academy of Asian Studies, focusing on several key founding figures of both institutions. He argues that the role played by these unique institutions of higher learning has been crucial in the cultural life of San Francisco Bay Area, and now continues to promote an integral, whole-person approach to higher education.

Judies Wexler, who has lead and facilitated the faculty discussions on integral education at CIIS in the last nine years, explores the concept of integral education as a way to prepare students for the complex, rapidly changing global environment in which they will be living and working. She contends that education must help students focus both internally and externally if they are to be effectively prepared. The experience of CIIS is used as a case study to discuss key dimensions of integral education.

Matthew Bronson showcases an integral approach to education through the lens of a trans-disciplinary graduate-level class on “Sexuality and Language.” The class brought together students from six separate academic programs and drew from a wide array of performative and
arts-based modes of inquiry to create a deep context through which to unpack the complex relationships between language and sexuality.

Ian Grand draws on some key principles of integral philosophy, embodied spirituality, and transformative action in the world, to make a case for a creative emergence in this historical time of new possibilities of being and becoming. He stresses that the conditions, practices and tools of the historical era in which we live shape us as we shape them and writes that what becomes important in practice is to learn tools and perspectives that expand our ability to participate in the making of the world.

Kaisa Puhakka explores the tension between two movements in human evolution—shifting and settling—where shifting breaks out of existing structures and conceptual moorings and settling solidifies the movement of evolution into structures. Both are seen as essential aspects of the evolutionary process, but a bias for settling is noted among living creatures. She argues that for humans shifting arouses anxiety whereas settling promises security. She calls for a correction of this bias in the educational process to help realign human consciousness and culture with the rest of nature and cosmos.

Maureen Dolan examines some of the main topics in the works of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri regarding the philosophical bases for an integral understanding. She describes concrete ways to introduce the integral paradigm into practice in the U.S. through an example of a particular undergraduate course she teaches at DePaul University in Chicago titled: Body, Mind, Spirit: Yoga and Meditation. Her introduction includes a brief description of the cultural milieu of 21st century American realities, identifying some of the conditions which can serve as impetuses to integral thought and action.

Anne Adams explores the critical role education plays in the attitudes and behaviors in our everyday experiences and introduces Integral education as a catalyst for transformation, moving our emphasis in education from gathering knowledge to growing consciousness through a paradigm shift which would fundamentally alter where our attention is focused—from having and doing to being.

Adrian Villasenor-Galarza addresses the need to incorporate often ignored perspectives and formulations derived from the “deep south” into the field of integral education as currently practiced at CIIS. The deep south—the metaphorical conglomerate of wisdom ascribed to the global south and associated epistemologies—is used as a broad framework from which he proposes, through the exploration of shamanic practices and symbols, the creation of an organizing vertical metaphor, a North–South axis of dialogue.

Christian de Quincey argues that the details of evolution or the structures of the brain are irrelevant to the study of consciousness. He maintains that science informs us only about the physical world whereas consciousness is non-physical and, therefore, there are no ontological leaps possible. He explores how we may account for the fact that consciousness exists in an otherwise physical universe.
Lynda Lester believes that the chasm between spirit and matter is bridgeable as predictable by Sri Aurobindo’s integral philosophy, which states that the entire universe is a manifestation of consciousness. She argues that science has changed our view of matter as solid and objective, to a view that is more complex and which includes the possibility that consciousness has a part in manifesting reality. She makes a case that some of Mother Mirra Alfassa’s experiences in bringing supramental consciousness into her body bear similarities to the discoveries of quantum physics.

These writings provide an opportunity for the reader to become familiar with an example of how integral philosophy, epistemology, and pedagogy are currently understood and practiced at a pioneering institution of higher learning that aims to embody and practice a holistic world view in its overall approach to education. Despite the clarity of the founding vision, the actual processes of articulation and praxis of a whole-person approach to education are still in their infancy and are a perpetual experimental work-in-progress.

In the integral view, human beings are considered to be transitional beings and not a final product of evolution. It is hoped that this continual process of reflection on learning and praxis will facilitate the goal of educating and integrating the total person: attainment of wholeness of individual personality, and the collective fulfillment of human purpose on Earth.

Bahman A.K. Shirazi,
San Francisco,
June 2011
Integral Education: Founding Vision and Principles

Bahman A.K. Shirazi¹

Abstract: This introductory article gives a brief account of the founding vision and ontological and epistemological principles of the integral framework expounded by Haridas Chaudhuri and some of his original collaborators at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). A brief biographical account of Sri Aurobindo and Mother Mirra Alfassa, originators of integral yoga and education, is provided and some of the principle tenets of an integral worldview that informs the philosophy of integral education are discussed.

Keywords: Haridas Chaudhuri, integral education, integral philosophy, integral worldview, Mother Mirra Alfassa, Sri Aurobindo.

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century may be regarded as a crucial turning point in the history of the evolution of consciousness on our planet Earth—the beginning of profound transformations of consciousness marked by a significant leap from a predominantly mind-centered consciousness, to an emerging all-inclusive, spirit-centered integral consciousness.

Jean Gebser was one of few western visionary philosophers who had anticipated the arrival of this new modality of consciousness. Before him, others such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Rudolph Steiner also offered world views that indicated that a certain convergence and a culmination point in the long history of terrestrial evolution could be anticipated. Moreover, beginning in the latter part of the 19th century, eastern movements such as the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement, Meher Baba’s work, and the eastern-inspired theosophical movement were also exploring and preparing the grounds for the arrival of this new era. The most explicit and pragmatic work in the adventures and the advent of integral consciousness, however, may be credited to the works Sri Aurobindo and Mother Mirra Alfassa, the originators of integral yoga.

Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose, 1872-1950) was India’s foremost philosopher, poet, and spiritual figure of the 20th century. At age seven he was sent to England where he mastered Western classical literature and languages. He returned to India at age twenty-one and soon mastered classical Indian literature and languages as well. He was active in the Indian independence movement until 1910 when he moved to Pondicherry to pursue his spiritual work. From 1910 to 1950 his spiritual practice focused on the reconciliation of the spiritual and

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material realities with the ultimate goal of utilizing the most powerful spiritual forces to accelerate and transform human evolution. He recognized that the current human state of consciousness is merely a transitional state with endless potential for spiritual development and called for the integration of Eastern and Western cultural and knowledge traditions.

Sri Aurobindo rejected the notion of illusoriness of the phenomenal world and recognized spiritual and material realities as equally real dimensions of a whole and indivisible spectrum of reality. He reconciled several major schools of Vedanta with the essential teachings of the Tantric approach, thus synthesizing a comprehensive approach known as Integral Yoga, emphasizing a balanced approach to spiritual development with equal emphasis on knowledge/wisdom, love/compassion and action.

He stressed the purposefulness of human life on earth as embodiment of spirit and taught that human suffering stems from ignorance and unconsciousness due to disharmony between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions. He rejected the world-negating as well as individualistic approaches to spiritual development as escapism and embraced embodied spirituality and the reintegration of the feminine Divine. (Shirazi, 2009a)

The Mother (Mirra Alfassa, 1878-1973) was an extraordinary mystic and spiritual leader, and was Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual collaborator. As a child she had a series of spiritual experiences leading to her realization of the Divine. She was also an accomplished artist, musician, and writer. In 1914 she met Sri Aurobindo and six years later joined him in Pondicherry where she stayed for the rest of her life to collaborate with him in his spiritual mission aimed at complete transformation of human consciousness.

The Mother oversaw the daily activities of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, founded the International Centre of Education, and in 1973 founded Auroville, an experimental international community devoted to human unity. The Mother’s spiritual work was concerned with activation of the highest human spiritual potential and the transformation of the physical body at the cellular level (Shirazi, 2009b). Sri Aurobindo and the Mother affirmed on numerous occasions that their consciousness were one and the same.

Haridas Chaudhuri (1913-1975), an Indian professor of philosophy who wrote the first doctoral dissertation on the works of Sri Aurobindo stated:

The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is all-comprehending in its integration of the past, and prophetic in its vision of the future. As a connected view of the totality of existence, it brings to light the ultimate unifying principle of life. On the basis of a balanced appreciation of the multifarious values of life, it shows how to reconcile the various conflicts of our human existence. Out of a broad survey of cosmic evolution it evolves a creative idea which bids fair to impart a new rhythm to the historical order. In reaffirming the central truths of ancient wisdom in the context of our present-day problems, it creates new values and opens up new vistas of human progress. In an endeavor to meet the challenge of the present age, it gives a new dynamic form to the spiritual heritage of the human race—a unified and integrated form to the highest cultural values of East and West.
With a penetrative insight into the profound meaning of life it lays the foundation for a complete art of harmonious and creative living. (Chaudhuri & Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 17)

In the fall of 1950 Haridas Chaudhuri was invited by Frederick Spiegelberg—a spirited professor of Indic and Slavic studies at Stanford University who was charged with the task of forming the core faculty of a new and unique pioneering graduate school called the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco—to come to America to bring his expertise on Integral yoga and philosophy to a dynamic educational exchange that made a major contribution to the cultural and spiritual life of the San Francisco Bay Area, and eventually to other parts of the western hemisphere. Later Chaudhuri implemented his integral vision of higher education in the initial curriculum design at the California Institute of Asian (now Integral) Studies.

The following statement by Chaudhuri provides the context in which the need for an integral approach to education becomes apparent.

The widespread discontent of modern youth the world over is a manifestation of the hunger of the soul for authentic and universal spiritual values. It is also an expression of disenchantment with established educational systems with their overemphasis upon intellectual, vocational, and technological values. Out of the inner anguish of fragmented living, there is a passionate reaching out for wholeness of being. Without the balancing of the intellectual with the emotional, the vocational with the spiritual, and the technological with the humanistic dimensions of human existence, it is rightly felt that man cannot be fully human. Nor can he be fully happy without the full flowering of the holistic urge inherent in life. (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 50)

This is as relevant today as it was at the time of the publication of this statement.

Shortly before his passing Chaudhuri summarized his basic ideas on integral education in an article titled *Education for the Whole Person*. He wrote: “… integral or holistic education does no doubt pose a serious challenge to all those responsible for curricular development in educational institutions. It poses a new responsibility of serious proportions upon all teachers and educators with sincere dedication” (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 51).

He summarized his fundamental principles of integral education in the need for inclusion of following five aspects: “(1) The physical or bodily aspect; (2) The socio-ethical aspect; (3) The instinctual-emotional aspect; (4) The cognitive-pragmatic-vocational aspect; (5) The religious-mystical-humanistic aspect. “ (p. 51) These various dimensions were consequently reflected in the academic curricula of CIIS programs in the 1970s, 80s and 90s and class syllabi were structured according to three broad dimensions: Cognitive/didactic, experiential/self-reflective, and applied/practical.

As Ryan (2005) summarized:

There may be numerous facets to the ideal ‘Integral’ education, but three stand out. First, the Integralists believed that education should be of the whole human being; it must involve the physical, the emotional, the mental, and the spiritual. Second, it must be global and have
reference to the, “total human situation” ... Third, it must attempt to surmount the contradictions and antagonisms inherent in ordinary human cultural and philosophical positioning. (p. 25)

A more systematic attempt was undertaken in the first decade of the 21st century at CIIS to reflect on what integral education means and how various academic programs interpret and apply its principles and practices in their respective fields. As part of this process, the Integral Education Committee produced the following definition for integral education.

Education at CIIS is designed to foster rigorous intellectual development and personal growth through self-reflection. We believe that teaching and learning are most effective when they recognize and reflect diverse ways of knowing and connect difference and similarity. CIIS advances the education of the whole person (body, mind and spirit) by integrating knowledge of the interior and exterior dimensions of our lives. Committed to building a better and more inclusive world, academic programs encourage students to pursue inquiry that transcends disciplinary boundaries and situates their work in communities outside their own.

Some of the work of the members of the Integral Education Committee and other faculty were published in two consecutive issues (fall 2005 and winter 2006) of the journal *ReVision*.

In his CIIS commencement address, Parker Palmer (2007), a contemporary leader in holistic education, described CIIS in the following way.

What happens at CIIS is very nearly unique in the world of higher education. It is also revolutionary, and probably has more revolutionary potential than those of us who are dedicated to this form of education may realize.... And what is the revolution I have in mind? It's an intellectual and cultural transformation that takes the reality and power of the inner world just as seriously as our culture takes the reality and power of the outer world. It's a revolution that links inner and outer, that rejoins soul and role, that understands that the world we live in is constantly being co-created by the interplay of what is within us and what is around us. It’s a revolution in which we understand that no one is truly educated until heart and mind have been joined with action and we have learned to think and act the world together rather than think and act the world apart.

**Integral Worldview: Fundamental Assumptions**

In the chapter on education, in his book, *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness*, Chaudhuri wrote:

We are living in the twentieth century and we are citizens of the world. It is for us to be able to draw on the limitless wisdom of East and West and North and South. That is the great privilege of modern man. The cultural heritage of the entire human race is open to him. Wherever there is truth, wherever there is wisdom, we can freely draw upon it and bring it together in a grand synthesis. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 43)
Based on my conversations over several years with two of Haridas Chaudhuri’s closest colleagues and founders of the first two programs at CIIS, Paul Herman and Dionne Sommers, I have put together the following list of ontological and epistemological principles and assumptions that inform the integral worldview and, by extension, the philosophy of integral education.

1. Balance and harmony are the ultimate laws of life and the essential goal of existence;
2. Experience of higher truths presuppose and result from an integration of all levels of consciousness: unconscious, sub-conscious, conscious, and supra-conscious;
3. Highly integrated consciousness is characterized by transcendence of the dualistic framework characteristic of mentally-dominated consciousness (the common fabric of human consciousness at the present stage of evolution);
4. At highly integrated spheres of consciousness the duality between subject and objects of experience (self vs. the universe) disappears;
5. Duality reflects the polarized structure of reality; it is a fact of life. Dualism, or dualistic thinking, however, is the natural product of the ordinary mental functions that results in perception of opposites as essentially independent (rather than complementary) aspects of a vaster unified reality;
6. Reality is a multidimensional whole. All diversified appearances are expressions of a unified whole;
7. Due to this multidimensional nature of reality all truths are valid in specific places for specific durations of time;
8. Any principle taken to its extreme transforms into its own opposite;
9. Reality can be found halfway between truths and falsehoods;
10. Truths and falsehoods are characteristics of statements or theses about reality. Reality transcends truth-and-falsehoods;
11. Increasingly holistic truths can be arrived at through the method of integral dialectics (also known as dialectical synthesis);
12. Integral dialectics is the application of an organismic dialectical process to the totality of human onto psycho-somatic (spirit/mind/body) organism;
13. Symbolic abstractions (such as language and thought etc.) are not capable of representing the whole of reality;
14. The same truth can be expressed in different conceptual frameworks.

**Key Assumptions of a Holistic Paradigm in Healing**

The integral framework holds that healing and wholeness are intimately interconnected. As the etymology suggests, the Greek word *holos* is the common root of the terms: healing, health and wholeness.

1. Human beings have a natural right to, and an **innate potential for, wholeness;** and **urge toward wholeness** is the primary motive in human life;
2. This essential wholeness is already present at the innermost core of the human psyche and our evolutionary challenge is to manifest this wholeness in our embodied existence;
3. Healing is the process of **restoration of wholeness;**
4. Reality is more than a mental construction—it is **non-dual and multidimensional;**
5. This implies that mentally constructed categories and labels about mental health or illness are not always capable of representing the more complex reality of lived experience. To fully understand human developmental growth and its impediments, one must take into account the uniqueness of each individual;
6. Mental disorders are not ultimately separable from physical, emotional, and spiritual problems; therefore, diagnoses and interventions must take into account the whole person; often symptoms manifested at one level have roots originating at another level.
7. Psychological disorders may be multi-faceted and their causes are not always reducible to physical (genetic or biological/biochemical) factors.
8. We need to have viable models for understanding human health and wholeness, rather than the current clinical models that tend to use only pathological categories for clinical assessment and treatment.

In the larger world today, there is a need for new viable models of optimal psychological health and healing based on the whole-person understanding. Clinical and psychotherapeutic assessment is still done primarily on the basis of psychopathology and clinical categories. Such models need to take into account not only mental, but emotional, spiritual and physical dimensions of human existence and their complex relationship during the course of lifespan development.

Almost half of CIIS students are enrolled in counseling and clinical psychology programs that acknowledge and work with the above principles in their academic and professional training.

I conclude with the following words by Haridas Chaudhuri:

We are going through a very transitional period of terrestrial evolution. In this period of transition and transitional crises, all the latent contradictions and discrepancies of human nature come to the forefront of our consciousness, resulting in a very chaotic situation in the fact that we see so much darkness around us. However, Aurobindo reminds us that the night is darkest before the dawn. It is also the strategy of nature that, as these things come to the front, as our problems come out in all their nakedness, we have a chance to understand them, and do something about them. The problems that we see today—the problems of division and separation, the problems of conflict and crisis—are ultimately traceable to the level of consciousness on which we are functioning now; that is, the mental level. (Chaudhuri, 1979, p. 6)

References

CIIS and American Higher Education

Joseph L. Subbiondo

Abstract: In this article a brief history of the California Institute of Integral Studies and its predecessor institution, the American Academy of Asian Studies is discussed, and several key founding figures of both institutions are introduced. It is argued that the role these unique institutions of higher learning have played have been crucial, initially in the cultural life of San Francisco Bay Area and the social and cultural movements it inspired, and currently in the context of the role that an integral, whole-person oriented education plays in higher education.

Keywords: American Academy of Asian Studies, California Institute of Integral Studies, Haridas Chaudhuri, Louis Gainsborough, Paul Herman, higher education, integral education, San Francisco Renaissance, Alan Watts.

Introduction

The story of the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) serves as a living case study—a work in progress that documents that a university can maintain academic credibility and institutional accreditation while challenging the prevailing dualistic educational model. Moreover, it demonstrates that an institution can even thrive in this progressive approach to higher education. CIIS faculty members and students are drawn to, and remain at, CIIS because of its unique pioneering model of integral education.

Louis Gainsborough and the American Academy of Asian Studies

The story of CIIS begins in 1951 with the founding of the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco by Louis Gainsborough and the arrival of two of its most prominent professors: Alan Watts and Haridas Chaudhuri.

Louis Gainsborough, a business entrepreneur and importer, traveled throughout Asia and became convinced that world peace depended upon an enduring and collaborative relationship between the East and the West. He was so moved by the embodied peace message of Mahatma Gandhi that he produced a documentary film featuring rare original footage of Gandhi. In 1957, on the day following his second inauguration, President Dwight Eisenhower screened

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1 Joseph L. Subbiondo, president of CIIS since June 1999, has an accomplished background in both administration and academics. He brings a 30-year history of achievement in higher education, including appointments on several international academic committees, and has been active on many accreditation teams for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Prior to coming to CIIS, he served as dean of the School of Liberal Arts at St. Mary's College of California; vice president for academic affairs at the University of the Pacific; dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Santa Clara University; and as a professor of English and linguistics at four universities.

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Gainsborough’s film at the White House with Jawaharlal Nehru, then prime minister of India, and Gainsborough present.

Recognizing that education was critical in creating an enduring East/West relationship, Gainsborough founded the first graduate school in the United States exclusively devoted to a study of Asia—the American Academy of Asian Studies. Gainsborough's launching of the Academy was a courageous act because of the contentious anti-Asian sentiment in the US: in 1951, the United States was still in the wake of its war with Japan and it was actively engaged in the Korean conflict. Nonetheless, Gainsborough persevered in his vision and his Academy not only led to the creation of CIIS later in 1968, but it also contributed much to shaping the San Francisco cultural milieu of the 1950s and 60s. Over the years, the intersection of the Academy, CIIS, and San Francisco Renaissance significantly influenced the integration of Eastern and Western wisdom traditions throughout the US and the Western world.

**Alan Watts**

In 1951, Alan Watts (1915-1973) arrived at the Academy. By then, Watts had published eight (of his eventual twenty-two) books as well as many essays on Eastern religious and spiritual traditions, particularly Zen Buddhism. He was established as one of the leading writers and teachers of Eastern mysticism. Through his scholarly reputation and personal connections, Watts positioned the Academy to be a principal meeting place for artists, writers, teachers, activists, and practitioners of the emerging counter-cultural movement of the San Francisco Renaissance.

As Monica Furlong (1986) noted in her biography of Watts, the counter-culture movement in San Francisco with its new ways of thinking contributed immensely not only to “normalizing” Eastern religious and spiritual practices in the US; but it also provided a catalyst for the national, and often international, 1960’s movements in civil rights, anti-war, environment, and transpersonal psychology. In his autobiography, In *My Own Way*, Watts (1972/2001), looking back at the 1960s, extensively and convincingly documented that “The American Academy of Asian Studies was one of the principal roots of what later came to be known, in the early sixties, as the San Francisco Renaissance…” (p. 232).

Watts’ account of the spirited debates among the founders of the Academy sheds light on the early evolution of humanistic and transpersonal psychology during this period in the United States. Some founders of the Academy (particularly Gainsborough) wanted the Academy to offer studies of Asian culture to prepare people to engage in business in Asia while others (Watts and Chaudhuri among them) “were concerned with the practical transformation of human consciousness…” (Watts, 1972/2001, p. 234). Watts indicated that the latter group prevailed, and the Academy cultivated “the actual living out of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist ways of life at the level of high mysticism: a concern repugnant to academics and contemptible to businessmen, threatening to Jews and Christians, and irrational to most scientists” (Watts, 1972/2001, p. 234).

Watts played a critical role in developing the Academy’s weekly colloquia that attracted many of San Francisco’s leading artists, writers, psychotherapists, and scholars as well as visiting guests like D.T. Suzuki.
In these dialogues, as Watts pointed out, the participants of the colloquia mixed rather than mixed-up the disciplines. Watts recalled with heartfelt appreciation his many dialogues with Chaudhuri who with “his gentle humor and learned mind made him a wonderful partner in debate, so that we could argue endlessly without losing tempers” (p. 235). The students who attended these colloquia included Michael Murphy and Richard Price who later established the Esalen Institute at Big Sur in 1962, as well as Gary Snyder, who became a noted poet, professor of literature, and the inspiration for the character “Japhy Ryder,” the Buddhist beatnik hero, in Jack Kerouac’s (1958) The Dharma Bums, the classic novel on the San Francisco Renaissance.

In 1961, Watts published his views on the integration of Eastern wisdom traditions and Western psychology in his book Psychotherapy East and West (Watts, 1961/1975). By the end of the 1960s, Watts would comment on the emerging themes of his day—themes that were swirling around the Academy and the soon-to-be California Institute of Asian Studies:

I have the impression that the psychiatric world has opened up to the possibility that there are more things in heaven and earth than we dreamed of in its philosophy… The field is giving way to movements and techniques increasingly free from the tacit metaphysics of nineteenth-century mechanism: [these include] Humanistic Psychology, Transpersonal Psychology, Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Psychology, Encounter Therapy, Psycho Synthesis, … Bioenergetics, and a dozen more interesting approaches with awkward names. (Watts, 1961, p. 337)

Watts’ brilliance and charisma brought attention to the American Academy of Asian Studies, the predecessor of CIIS. Moreover, Watts greatly influenced Chaudhuri and their mutual colleagues in setting the agenda for the founding vision of CIIS. Years after leaving the Academy, Watts acknowledged the success of Chaudhuri in continuing the work they had begun at the Academy twenty years earlier. He wrote: “Haridas Chaudhuri went off on his own and replaced it [the Academy] with the California Academy [sic] of Asian Studies, which is where something of the original tradition of the work is now alive and kicking quite interestingly” (Watts, 1972/2001, p. 277).

Haridas Chaudhuri

In 1949, Haridas Chaudhuri (1913-1975) earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Calcutta University, submitting a dissertation on the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Chaudhuri was recognized as the leading scholar and commentator on the extensive works of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) even by Aurobindo himself; and he was appointed to the Academy, the predecessor of CIIS, to teach courses on the works of Aurobindo within the context of the panoramic landscape of Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions. Chaudhuri included many of the original educational themes of the Academy as he developed the California Institute of Asian Studies (later changed to Integral). In 1981, the Institute was granted regional accreditation which meant that the Institute’s students would be eligible for federally funded financial aid and the institute was a member of the national community of colleges and universities. Throughout his years preparing the Institute for accreditation, he never lost sight of the urgent need in higher education for integral education: he wrote “The educational system, as it operates today, does not
Chaudhuri (1977) maintained that Aurobindo provided a complete art of integral living because his work points the way to dynamic integration of the material and spiritual values of life. It is a call to the reconstruction of human life and society on the basis of abiding spiritual values (pp. 135-136). Chaudhuri’s definition of the “art of integral living” as “the dynamic integration of the material and spiritual values of life” is especially relevant to our assertion today that higher education needs to develop an integral approach to education. Chaudhuri’s assessment of the state of higher education is as pertinent today as it was a half century ago: it continues to influence integral educational programs as evidenced by Ken Wilber’s (2006) aspiration for his Integral University that it “cultivate body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature” (p. 32).

In *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness*, Chaudhuri (1977) clearly stated the need for higher education to include a holistic view of the human being:

> It is important to have a comprehensive, holistic, integrated view of humanity. The integral view of … [humanity] implies that no individual is a separate self-existent entity. Just as the different elements of our nature—body, mind, spirit—are interrelated aspects, in the same way, every individual is a factor in a social continuum… Individuality conceived as a self-existent atom is an abstraction of our mind; it does not exist. Nobody lives by himself. Human beings become more and more human through social interrelations, interactions. (p. 74)

Chaudhuri’s vision of integral education, like that of Alan Watts, was based on connecting the cultural traditions of the East and the West:

> The integral world view and integral thinking are in truth two sides of the same coin …. The method of integral thinking represents a dynamic integration of the scientific, phenomenological and dialectical methods of the West and the self-analytical, psycho-integrative, nondual values of the East. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 85)

Like Gainsborough, Chaudhuri was convinced that global peace depended upon profound connection between the East and West and he recognized the need to include Indian core values in Western education. To implement this vision, Chaudhuri and his colleagues developed a new vision of theory and practice in psychology by integrating Aurobindo’s psycho-spiritual perspective and integral method with the new and growing academic and professional field of counseling psychology. Integral counseling psychology has been central to the educational mission of CIIS because it blends what Chaudhuri considered the best in the East with the best in the West. Brendan Collins, a CIIS professor who studied with Chaudhuri, recalls that Chaudhuri often said that he thought that spirituality would return to the West not through philosophy or religion, but through psychology.
Unfortunately, Chaudhuri’s formulation of a unique program in integral counseling psychology was cut short by his untimely death in 1975; however, the initiative was completed by Paul Herman, Professor of Psychology who began teaching at the Institute in 1969.

**Paul Herman**

In 1973 Paul Herman designed the Institute’s first independent program—a graduate degree in integral psychology that was based on his and Chaudhuri’s collaborative vision. He appropriately entitled the new program “Integral Counseling Psychology.” To ensure the long term viability of the new program, Herman (1972) insisted that it be clinically professional and state credentialed in order to prepare students for employment in various counseling sub-specialties, such as developmental, vocational, rehabilitation, mental health, marriage and family, and transpersonal and yoga counseling. The degree program was designed to fulfill the suggested education and training standards of professional counseling and psychological associations, both state and national, and to profit by the close collaboration of specialty groups in humanistic and transpersonal psychology as well as those concerned with innovations in parapsychology and healing.

The Integral Counseling Psychology (ICP) degree was launched in September of 1973. In his announcement, Herman credited Chaudhuri for the original concept of the program stating that the degree was developed according to the integral view of the late Haridas Chaudhuri in including the major spiritual traditions of East and West, recent cultural and social science research, and the writings of leading humanistic and transpersonal psychologists. Writing ten years later, Herman reiterated his founding vision for the program. In a paper published in 1983, Herman defined Integral Psychology as:

… an emergent East-West study of the human psyche. It draws upon the findings of both Western depth psychology, and ancient Eastern teachings and yogas, to express a whole, unfragmented view of human nature which does not remain merely theoretical, but also functions to resolve human conflicts and open the way toward activating high levels of potential … it includes the whole range from protohuman awareness to expansive transcendent experience. (Herman, 1983, p. 95)

In that same paper, Herman echoed Gainsborough’s anticipation that education could be a principal catalyst for world peace:

Integral psychology, as a science of the psyche or soul, concerns itself with whole potential of human consciousness. Thus it looks forward to a full transformation of the manifest cosmos, including humankind, in the evolutionary future. All human beings may assist in cosmic evolution, as well as help resolve personal, social, national, and international conflicts, by centering consciousness at the innermost core of the being until its guidance and energy are activated. (Herman, 1983, p. 1)

By insisting at the outset that the program would only accept and graduate students who could demonstrate competence in both the classroom and the counseling center, Herman assured that the program would not only meet the standards of accreditation but also that its graduates would
find professional acceptance. After meticulously grounding the program in the requirements of established programs in counseling psychology, Herman integrated Eastern perspectives into the program. In the end, the program had more required courses than that of traditional counseling psychology programs. To this day the Integral Counseling Psychology Program is one of the most sought after courses of study at CIIS.

**Conclusion**

Huston Smith, revered historian of religious and spiritual movements, commended CIIS for its role in advancing US higher education:

In the course of decades, American higher education has created tradition-bound ruts and it works in those ruts. Consequently, it is vitally important that mainline universities be complemented by alternative programs that are not stuck in those ruts. CIIS is the best of these alternative programs that I know of. (Smith, n.d.)

We are blessed to be living in an age in which unprecedented global and cultural shifts are enabling us to get beyond our many “tradition-bound ruts” in higher education that have held us in place since the seventeenth century. While many faculty members and administrators may not have changed their educational visions, the students have. This change is evident in the extensive longitudinal research on university students and their spirituality that is being conducted by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute (UCLA, 2006). The surveys reveal that the fastest growing group of university students in the US is those who identify themselves as spiritual non-religious. Fortunately, CIIS is not alone in meeting the needs of the changing student population. Higher education currently faces challenges not only in supporting curricular changes to include, interdisciplinary, integrative, and transpersonal studies but also supporting the pedagogical shifts and the life style changes that reflect a holistic worldview.

**References**


Evolving Dimensions of Integral Education

Judie Gaffin Wexler

Abstract: This article explores the concept of integral education as a way to prepare students for the complex, rapidly changing global environment in which they will be living and working. It contends that education must help students focus both internally and externally if they are to be effectively prepared. The experience of the California Institute of Integral Studies is used as a case study to discuss key dimensions of integral education.

Keywords: Contemplative practice, diversity, education, holistic, integral, interdisciplinary, transformative.

Introduction

In this paper I will be examining the concept of integral education using the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) as a case study. CIIS is a university based in an integral worldview and created out of a critique of American society and higher education. Now, over 40 years later, we are in another turbulent time in which we are considering if and how higher education prepares students for the future. As the 2007 report on College Learning by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has put it,

In this global century, every student—not just the fortunate few—will need wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary knowledge, higher-level skills, an active sense of personal and social responsibility, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge to complex problems (AACU, 2007, p. 11).

AAC&U looks to liberal education to provide this; I believe that the innovations that come out of the integral and transpersonal approaches have the potential to move us even further toward the kind of transformation that is needed.

Integral Education

Over the last few years at CIIS we have spent a lot of time discussing what we mean by integral education as we practice it in the 21st century. As part of this discussion we have gone back to our roots to look again at the goals and philosophies of our founding as well as at the multiple realities of our present day university. The schools, programs and faculty that make up academic life at CIIS are interconnected by common mission, history, values and concerns.

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Our integral education project has focused on identifying common dimensions without creating a statement of orthodoxy. Being careful to leave room for creativity and innovation, there is no CIIS checklist against which every program is to be measured but there are dimensions that each program expresses. The dimensions are the visible manifestations of the holistic education we strive to provide; they emanate from a mission that strives “to embody spirit, intellect, and wisdom.” Part of our understanding of integral is that it allows for dialogue between incommensurable truths and for the holding of paradox. In the face of pressures to tie everything together, it allows for the recognition that this is not always possible or desirable.

In writing about education at CIIS, I want to focus on a few key aspects:

— What it means to provide an accredited education that includes the spiritual aspects of human life;
— The dimensions of integral education we have identified; and,
— The implications of the higher education context in which we do this work.

Underlying academic life at CIIS is a worldview that holds that the spiritual dimension is important; as an educational institution we seek to embody the spiritual as part of the intellectual. As a university we must make sure that we provide our students with the knowledge and thinking skills central to advanced education. As an integral university we want to do more; we want to also support them in exploring their interior lives and the intersections between that and their academic work.

There is a creative tension here as we try to hold the paradoxes that arise out of competing paradigms. The two do not fit together seamlessly but, I believe, it is in the tension between them that our most creative and important work arises. As an accredited university we have to meet the expectations of the dominant paradigm. Those goals sit side-by-side with other more transformational aspirations. In combination we have the potential of addressing the knowledge and characteristics needed in these complex and rapidly changing times.

We have identified five dimensions of integral education:

— Multimodal, valuing different ways of knowing;
— Integration of intellectual rigor and personal (including spiritual) growth;
— Transdisciplinarity and integrative;
— Social relevance and interface with the external world; and,
— Space for difference in the curriculum and classes.

One could argue, and I would agree, that these dimensions are found in varying degrees in many higher education institutions. However, I contend that the worldviews that form the context for them at CIIS differentiate them from similar practices in universities formed by other world views.

Brant Cortright, in his book *Psychotherapy and Spirit*, asks what transpersonal psychology looks like in psychotherapy, “Is it shown by what the therapist does or how the therapist is?... Are there some common principles, methods, guidelines which characterize a transpersonal
approach?" (Cortright, 1997, p. 7). I think the same questions can be asked about education that is transpersonal or integral. Is it shown by what the educator does or by what the educator is? While it is easy to focus on techniques, it is not the techniques that are definitive. Instead, I think that it is the worldviews that are definitive. It is what the educator is.

**Spirituality and Higher Education**

The incorporation of the spiritual into higher education is not without its controversy. This kind of inner work has been regarded as personal and subjective, and so as unrelated to the reasoning and logic that are more appropriately the domain of education. There is also some concern that the incorporation of spirituality is code for a religious litmus test or a denial of science. On the other hand, learning is never solely an objective enterprise. What people learn and how they understand what they learn is always related to previous ideas and existing conceptual frameworks.

Spirituality is clearly important to American college students and faculty. Over half of American college students place a high value on integrating spirituality into their lives and more than two-thirds report having had a spiritual experience (Astin, 2004). Spirituality is not only important to the students, survey data indicate that 40% of American faculty can be described as high in spirituality (Lindholm & Astin, 2006, p. 69). Can we really ignore this as we try to educate students for the future in a world that is highly complex, rapidly changing, and increasingly globally interdependent? Why would we even want to?

**Dimensions of Integral Education**

**Multimodal, Valuing Different Ways of Knowing**

A place of creative tension here is to offer students opportunities for the rational, cognitive learning that is basic to higher education while also pursuing approaches that open students to new and creative awareness. Higher education by its very nature emphasizes cognitive learning and understanding expressed in words. While we increasingly recognize the prevalence of multiple forms of intelligence reflected in different learning styles, the college classroom tends to address learning from a verbal perspective and students have to be able to present their ideas in written form. Contemporary reform dialogue is framed in terms of improving learning outcomes, providing students with opportunities to enhance their learning through application, analysis and evaluation.

Classroom practice at CIIS of course includes lecture, discussion, small group work and project based experiences. In addition to all of these conventional approaches to learning that are found at any American university, one will also find meditation, movement, drama, art, and poetry used as ways to bring students into the present and open them to different kinds of learning and consciousness.

Some of these approaches to knowing now fall into the category of evidence based practice—there is effectiveness research that connects them to student learning. We know, for example, that meditation can increase learning and memory. We know that other approaches can help
people access their preconceptions and work with them in a way that opens them to new learning. These approaches can be used as techniques to achieve better learning outcomes and also as ways to support deeper awareness and learning that incorporates the ineffable. Education here seeks to help people integrate the interior and exterior dimensions of life and in doing so provides for stronger and more lasting learning and sense of personal responsibility.

A survey of 2001-2010 CIIS graduates confirmed that students experienced this dimension in their education. The percentage that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement is provided in parenthesis.

— My education included multiple ways of knowing, including experiential learning, collaborative learning, and the use of media and art. (92.4%)
— My education expanded my approaches to learning and helped me appreciate the approaches of others. (91.3%)
— My education facilitated the integration of body, mind and spirit in a significant way. (88.1%)

**Integration of Intellectual Rigor and Personal (including Spiritual) Growth**

Higher education is explicit in its expectation that intellectually rigorous learning is an outcome; typically that goal for rigorous learning is articulated in cognitive and rational terms. There is usually also an implicit expectation that students will grow in other ways during their years in college.

As part of integral education, we see the two as being inextricably tied together not just as occurring on parallel tracks. Academic work is seen as fostering personal growth and personal growth is seen as fostering academic work and growth. Self-reflective papers and contemplative, experiential and participatory experiences within the classroom all connect personal growth with growth in understanding, knowledge and thinking. Learning is supported by helping students make explicit their beginning understandings and frameworks and by helping them reflect on their own understanding and the connections they make. The theory of education is a holistic one that integrates the personal and the intellectual and seeking to go to deeper levels of understanding and transformation. As bell hooks (1994) has written,

> Our work [as teachers] is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

Many students come to CIIS as a step in a perceived journey toward increased self-discovery and awareness. These transpersonal goals are important in connecting faculty and students as co-creators. Our challenge as an educational institution is to keep personal growth and intellectual rigor in balance; in this we are different from more traditional educational institutions in which the intellectual is abstracted from the personal.
Here our tension is that in seeking to make room for personal and spiritual growth we need to also be attentive to ensuring that our students are offered rigorous intellectual work and are encouraged to think critically. It is in the balance of the two that we are at our very best as each strengthens and deepens the other.

The techniques that access multiple ways of knowing typically also support personal growth and development. In utilizing them in a context of rigorous academic learning they also support the latter. Thus much of what we do out of transpersonal understandings also act to enhance learning and better prepare students for the contemporary world.

Returning again to the graduation survey data, there was very strong support for statements specifying that graduates had experienced this dimension.

- My education facilitated my personal growth. (95.9%)
- My education facilitated by intellectual growth. (93.6%)

Transdisciplinarity and Integrative

Education at CIIS seeks to be integrative across disciplines and educational experiences. Just as the problems and key questions of the contemporary world do not fall into neat disciplinary boxes, inquiry does not fall into neat boxes created by courses and semesters. We want our students to be able to pursue questions that transgress boundaries and to seek new ways to bring ideas together. The focus comes to be more on the inquiry than on the discipline. Such a focus on inquiry and integration is one way to address the fragmentation of knowledge that has been created by the division into disciplines and subdisciplines. At the same time, it is vital that students go deeply enough into some area of study that they have the conceptual frameworks with which to organize their ideas. Of CIIS recent graduates, 83.5% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: My education prepared me to engage in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary inquiry.

Social Relevance and Interface with the World

According to Haridas Chauduri (1977), integral education is “education which is based upon the concept of the total man [person] and education which is based on the total human situation, the global situation” (p. 78). The integral, holistic tradition at CIIS supports an approach that does not separate learning from preparation for action in the world. Increasingly, students come to CIIS who want to make a difference and seek the tools to be able to do so. Course material connected to meaningful action in the world, group work and opportunities to apply learning to real-world settings also build knowledge and understanding that goes beyond preparation for a particular task at a particular time. Action is framed by theory and imagination.

To give one example: last fall we opened our Clinic Without Walls, an attempt to bring psychological services into housing projects in San Francisco. Unlike our other clinics, this one does not wait until people decide they need/want to come for therapy and make an appointment. In this clinic, students build relationships and community within public housing to open people to the possibility of therapy and to provide it within the community. Graduates indicated
agreement or strong agreement with the statement: My education made meaningful connections between theory and practice (89.4%). A still significant, but smaller percentage agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, CIIS activities and events beyond the formal classes added value to my education and helped me to see it relevance (65.8%).

**Space is provided for difference to live in the curriculum and classes**

Difference is not something that we can ignore in the world today. Again as Haridas Chauduri wrote:

Mankind can no longer be divided into exclusive segments so that the fortune of one will not affect the fortune of the other. We live in a world of shrinking dimensions with people of different cultural, religious and racial backgrounds coming together. As it is commonly phrased, either we swim together or we sink together. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 77)

If we are to be able to live together we need to be able to better understand each other and to bridge our differences.

Difference is also about different frameworks, ideas, experiences, and ways of understanding. We want to support paradox and different kinds of inquiry as well as respect for cultural, social and economic difference. This work requires inclusion of the personal. The combination of personal and intellectual work can facilitate understanding of difference and the development of skills to work with responsibility in an increasingly diverse world. Without that we run the risk of bringing people physically together and making them more aware of difference without supporting them in learning to feel comfortable with, or understand, difference. However, engaging in this way is not without its challenges.

What happens when ideas, backgrounds, beliefs are in conflict? In an environment that seeks to affirm the individual there is some pressure to maintain an atmosphere that is not conflictual or angry, to smooth over difference in support of feelings of safety and harmony that can actually undercut building understanding. We struggle to see conflict as an opportunity for learning and to develop the skills to deal with and hold difference. Difference may be the most challenging dimension in relation to spiritual worldviews found at CIIS. As Marianne Williamson (1997) has emphasized, “It is our unity and our diversity that matter, and their relationship to each other reflects a philosophical and political truth outside of which we cannot thrive.” (p. 72). And yet, the universality that is emphasized out of our spiritual worldviews at times seems to lead to a downplaying of the importance of difference, especially in terms of considering the dynamics of race, class, gender, and sexuality. It is not uncommon to hear a CIIS student say, I am spiritual, I have moved beyond diversity, not recognizing that worldview does not negate power and class dynamics. At the same time, 83.4% of the graduates indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement: My education helped me to respond to cultural and ideological diversity by giving me the opportunity to reflect on my own positions (class, gender, sexual orientation, age) and to build connections with others who are differently positioned.
The Higher Education Context

All of American higher education is asking itself questions about how students learn and how to help them learn better. That concern has led to new attention to university teaching and to considerable attention on access, graduation, job preparation, accountability and the measurement of learning. I contend that it is going to take more than reform and increased accountability to prepare our graduates for the demands of this century. It is going to require transformative practice that situates the individual in his/her education.

The concerns have led to demands on universities to demonstrate that their students have learned and to demonstrate what they have learned. At a time when we need people who can think critically, creatively and integratively, the pressure is to show what our graduates know rather than how effectively they can think, or how imaginatively they can apply. While college faculty members generally believe they address the key learning areas and college students generally believe they have acquired some proficiency in these areas, the limited actual outcome data do not support these perceptions.

The data indicate that students are graduating college without high level proficiency in such areas as writing, mathematics, and critical thinking. Such data are compelling and are driving a lot of the accountability and testing momentum currently at work in the US.

However, the needs of this century go much further than that. When we start considering complex learning outcomes such as integration of learning, inquiry, critical and creative thinking, and individual and social responsibility, innovative practices and thinking are needed. We know that it is not enough for people to be able to repeat information; they need to be able to formulate questions, find information and organize and apply it in new ways.

In educating for resilience and resourcefulness, we have to consider the holistic development of our students. While there are many lists of what people are going to need to be able to thrive in this century, a higher education is needed that provides students with the basis for future learning and action and helps them reflect on their own actions, responses, knowledge, relationships and culture. These are exciting challenges and fit well with the strengths of an integral approach to education.

References

Trans-Dance:
Disciplinary Cross-Dressing and Integral Education in a Language and Sexuality Course

Matthew C. Bronson

Abstract: This article showcases an integral approach to education through the lens of a transdisciplinary graduate-level class on Sexuality and Language. The graduate-level class was co-taught by two CIIS faculty whose backgrounds span the fields of social and cultural anthropology, psychology, sociology, social policy, linguistics, education and drama-centered expressive arts therapy. The class brought together students from six separate academic programs and drew from a wide array of performative and arts-based modes of inquiry to create a deep context through which to unpack the complex relationship(s) between language and sexuality. These practices were interwoven with theoretical exposition and discussion in a hermeneutic spiral leading up to students' planned research projects. This "disciplinary cross-dressing," where diverse students and faculty engaged each others' points of view rigorously in a common inquiry, created powerful teachable moments and served as the foundation for a transgressive mode of scholarship and advocacy.

Keywords: Assessment, educational reform, experiential education, higher education, identity, integral education, interdisciplin(arity), language and sexuality, learning, linguistics, transdisciplin(arity),

“My girlfriend is teaching me how to talk like a lesbian.”
- student in Language and Sexuality course

Introduction and History of the Course

Humans are sexual beings, even politicians and priests, if the headlines of recent years are any indication. We are also intensely social, and language is the primary medium in which we negotiate our joint construction of identity and reality itself. We are what we speak (including gestures, embodied language, etc.), and this includes our presentation as gendered and sexual

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beings. The intersection between these two domains, language/communication and sexuality, is a rich and generative area of inquiry that has garnered interest at universities throughout the U.S. and internationally (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 2006).

Gender studies and allied fields such as queer studies (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003) are experiencing expansion relative to the general contraction of academic fields and departments now under way. Also, as my Chair pointed out, “any course title with ‘sex’ in it will tend to fill” and so it is no surprise that dozens of courses are now being taught with titles such as “Gender and Communication.” This was not meant to be just another course, however; the case is especially relevant for this audience because it also aspired to incorporate the principles of integral education. It was designed to truly engage students in deep learning by connecting critical reflection on their own stories as sexual beings with the formal material of the course.

I will briefly summarize some relevant strands from ongoing conversations about integral education and how it has been framed at my university and elsewhere. I report here on the course with the main intention of claiming some lessons in the praxis of integral education (Bronson, 2006, 2005)—that is how some key ideas from integral education as it is currently understood at my university have been translated into specific classroom practices and relations. Finally, I present a sketch of a framework for assessing such implementations and suggest some avenues for further discussion and research.

The Dimensions of Integral Education

The term “integral” is contested and claimed by different lineages and perspectives. Among them, three are most prominently represented in public discourse: that of Wilber/Gebser (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2010), the Aurobindo/The Mother-Chaudhuri line (Ryan, 2010) and, in education, a more broadly construed approach perhaps most closely associated with “transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1990, 1991; for a different view see Ferrer, Romero & Albereda, 2010). All of them share an emphasis on the evolutionary and transformative potentials in human consciousness and experience and an intention to expand the modes of knowing that are valued and developed in this enterprise (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008). Thus, the problematic dichotomy between “objective” and “subjective” modes is directly engaged in integral education, rather than taken as a matter of common sense:

As a university we must make sure that we provide our students with the knowledge and thinking skills central to advanced education. We cannot in good conscience do any less. In actuality we want to do more; we want to also support them in exploring their interior lives and the intersections between that and their academic work. There is a creative tension here as we try to hold the paradoxes that arise out of competing paradigms (Wexler, 2010, p. 2).

The “creative tension” to which Wexler (The Dean and Academic Vice-President of California Institute of Integral Studies.) refers, presents itself in what my colleagues and I have identified as the key dimensions for integral education as we understand them at CIIS. After several years of inquiry, publication, and discussion, we came to see it would not be useful to thematize “integral education” as necessarily separate from the best in liberal (AACU, 2011) or
emancipatory (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003) education or to think of it as a single ideology and closed set of necessary and sufficient conditions.

We came to our dimensions via a “grounded theory” approach of asking our colleagues and students for examples of what would count as integral education in practice and then inferred the underlying commonalities over many years of iterative dialogues. We were comfortable with articulating integral education (in practice) as a nexus of related dimensions or values with a “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein, 1953) where not every implementation would implement all the features but more robust implementations would. We wanted to identify these dimensions so that we might enhance them through reflection and assessment, where appropriate.

The five dimensions of integral education we identified were:

- Multimodal, valuing different ways of knowing
- Integration of personal growth and intellectual rigor
- Transdisciplinarity: (the integration of knowledge in the service of inquiry)
- Social relevance and interface with the external world
- Space for difference in the curriculum and classes (Wexler, 2010, p. 2).

C.I.I.S. is perhaps uniquely positioned as a place where the various strands of integral education can interact in conversation because there is no dominant ideology or approach. The range of integral theories and practices are rooted in a common commitment to realize more holistic, humane, and sustainable responses to the collective challenges of our day. They aim to address a hunger for alternatives to “business-as-usual” in a world in crisis, to the fragmentation and alienation inherent in the “dominant” paradigm (Bronson & Fields, 2009a, 2009b; Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer and Sherman, 2008).

The dimensions above represent the core common values of our community-of-practice at C.I.I.S., yet are broadly enough construed that others who identify with the overall vision can enter into the conversation, regardless of their affiliation. In education more generally, “integral” has been applied to a range of topics, approaches, methods and interventions (Bronson, 2005; Bronson & Gangadean, 2006; Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, & Gunnlaugson, 2010). These represent (at least in some measure) different levels of embodiment of a common underlying worldview, one in which the spiritual is not disparate from the practical or intellectual and lived experience and creativity are central in the construction of knowledge (Gangadean & Bronson, 2004; Bronson & Gray, 2010; Bronson, 2004).

I have been a linguist teaching courses at the intersections of language, culture and consciousness at a variety of universities, most prominently in a graduate program in anthropology where I currently serve as faculty. Inspired by a colleague (Gregory Ward), who had been reporting for years about a course on language and sexuality that he had been teaching at Northwestern University, I decided to design a course that would address each of these elements. I enlisted the support of another colleague, Shoshana Simon, who is the Chair of the Expressive Arts Program at C.I.I.S. In the pages that follow, I will share some of the struggles and learning that emerged from the attempt to teach our version of the course with these dimensions as central.
Multi-modal

From the outset, we wanted to include direct experience wherever possible as the foundation for subsequent reflection on the academic content. We were committed to following the hermeneutic spiral from the more concrete to the more abstract. Both of us felt that this was more congruent with how people learn naturally and would give them more robust as opposed to superficial outcomes. We also sought to establish a climate of safety and sharing and knew from past experience that these could be established by the use of ritual and other exercises. In this spirit, our opening experience involved asking students to listen to some soothing music and draw who they were as sexual beings. They subsequently shared with the class whatever they wanted to about the labels and stories that had shaped their identities. We used the introduction of the exercise to evoke confidentiality and to let people know that they should only say what they felt comfortable saying.

This experience became a jumping off point for an extended discussion of the construction of categories (see Whorf, 1956; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999 for extended discussions). We shared with them how humans construct cultural categories from experience and then use them in place of gathering new information about an environment that is always in flux (Alford, 2002; Whorf, 1956). This was an opportunity to integrate some basic cognitive linguistics into the discussion.

At the end of the first evening of the weekend workshop, we continued on the same note: we asked them to go home and look around their homes and personal spaces for objects that touched on some aspect of their sexual and romantic lives. They were to bring these objects, ready to share them with the class as they reflected on their own sexual identity socialization in light of the class material. We told them we would assemble the objects in an “altar.”

I started the altar that night and modeled the activity by sharing three artifacts of my own. I began with a small lavendar plastic figure of Tinky-Winky (see picture), the famous Tele-Tubby with the triangle on his head who was “outed” as gay by Christian Fundamentalists. Tinky was a gift from a friend and immediately gained a place of honor on my personal altar at home. I told the class that he represented for me the power of queerness to bring the dominant into an obviously irrational frenzy simply by the tiniest hint of refusing to conform to heteronormativity. I loved the irony—a television program for 2 year-olds was now being seriously presented as a means of recruiting homosexuals.

This tiny little figure ignited a firestorm among Evangelicals and yet continued to show up each week to
“work” in his bucolic green meadow under a smiling sun unscathed by the controversy swirling around him. I explained that Tinky was a model for me as a gay man in his perseverance and power, and even if he were only “questioning”—understandable given his missing genitalia—I would count him as a queer little brother and fellow sacred clown. You might imagine what I shared about a picture of my mother and father as two beautiful young people in love (my mother a virgin), embracing just after taking their vows and years before their subsequent divorce when I was two. A picture of me and a former Brazilian lover dressed as Carmen Miranda was fodder for reflection on gender as performance. I enjoyed showing up as a teacher and a whole person with a history and felt that this in and of itself was a kind of intervention in the business-as-usual of college teaching.

We began with the activity on a Saturday morning with twelve students and two instructors in a small windowless room with the chairs arranged in a circle. One young woman brought a condom and shared what it had cost her to be prepared for safe sex. Many men she dated had been doubly surprised when she had whipped out a Trojan Magnum condom at the critical moment—first that she was apparently ready for sex and secondly owing to the “Magnum” extra-large size of the prophylactic in question. This was enough to end the encounter in some instances. She spoke of the contradictions inherent in being socialized as a sexually active woman who was not “supposed” to want sex.

A young gay man brought a gold wedding band and explained how he had at one point intended to give it to his partner as part of a commitment ceremony. Then, gay weddings were legal for a while and it became a “real” wedding ring. Before they could consecrate the marriage, the law changed and it was no longer “real.” He then broke up with his partner. He asked us to look at the ring: “It’s a wedding ring, it’s not a wedding ring, it’s a wedding ring. This is the story of my life as a gay man.” A woman in her thirties who had only recently committed to a relationship with a woman brought photos showing various aspects of her “butch” and “femme” personas. She shared her struggle as someone who was learning how to talk and behave like a “good lesbian.”

Each story and object shared had a tremendous impact on the group and the effect of the ensemble was truly remarkable. We arranged the objects in a corner of the room and left them there for the duration of the workshop. We would dip into them from time to time for a new story, providing a thread of coherence throughout our time together. I found that the possibility of going deep was fully present for us as a group after the initial round of sharing. There were many additional benefits: people introduced themselves and bonded without the usual delay; there were many ready examples to draw from as we explicated the theoretical approaches in the class; the material presence of the objects reminded us of what we had been talking about and energetically charged the room with their storied presence.
I had a similar experience conducting the exercise with colleagues in a Teaching and Learning Group of colleagues at C.I.I.S. I asked them to bring objects that represented their personal relationship with teaching. We each presented our object then observed the assembled altar, wrote about what we saw and heard and de-briefed as to what we had learned about teaching and learning. We witnessed: a family picture book with pages ripped out, a farmer doll, a pair of eyeglasses, a stone with the word “nothing” engraved in it (“nothing is written in stone.”) My colleagues reported that it was particularly helpful to have been looking for the objects in the two weeks prior to the meeting. It caused them to think deeply about their work and sort through what was really important to them as teachers and learners. They remarked afterwards on the moving quality of the stories and the glimpses into each other’s intimate worlds that would not otherwise have been afforded.

This activity could be adapted to a wide variety of audiences and purposes as a way of getting beyond superficial classroom routines. It has the potential to establish a more intimate rapport among members of any learning community and a more personal and critical engagement with virtually any academic content. To be fair, this is nothing other than “show-and-tell in the 17th grade.” Some of the best teaching still seems to come from the elementary level, in my experience. Our colleagues in Kindergarten can remind those of us in higher education how to enroll the storied things of daily life as our co-teachers.
An epilogue will highlight the relevance of these points for this audience. In a recent workshop I conducted with linguist Gregory Ward of Northwestern University (Bronson & Ward, 2011), I was reminded of the “integral” character of the exercise. When I asked Gregory if he would be able to explore such intimate stories in his upper division Language and Sexuality course, he said that he would not, nor would he be inclined to do so in a mainstream university environment. He wanted students to make direct personal connections to the material, but did not feel that he could directly incorporate an experience of this kind into the curriculum. At C.I.I.S., faculty have the freedom to, indeed are invited and encouraged to interweave the materials and experiences of everyday life into the formal curriculum.

Integration of Personal Growth and Intellectual Rigor

My colleague Gregory Ward meets his students on an informal field trip to an LGBT venue as part of his course. I chose to do a “cyber-field trip,” where the students were asked to review a web site on gender images in advertising (www.genderimages.com). We discussed the problematic content and the explicit and implicit messages regarding the prototypical gender identities being appealed to. They were then instructed to go to the Craig’s list personals, to a sexual orientation different from the one they identified with today (I was aware of the recent embrace of gender fluidity) and to review the language used there for evidence of the underlying values and indices of that corner of the sexual/romantic marketplace.

The students were amazed with what they found. The men-for-men sex ads were a bit shocking for some of them in their explicit description of anatomy and acts. “What is Tina?” asked one student, referring to a coded term for methamphetamine, “What does VGL MM on the downlow mean?” asked another (Very good looking married man looking for discrete sex with another man). In our discussion, we reflected on the roots of the narratives from which each orientation was drawing. We connected with our readings and the complex interplay between biology and culture that lies at the root of sexual identity and desire (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, 2006).

The intellectual work was accompanied by an expansion of the students’ capacity to respond with empathy to sub-cultures that were quite different from their own, not unlike what an anthropologist has to go through in the field. We discussed some of the pre-formed judgments that they had, even some distaste at what they saw depicted. Since these were all students in a graduate-level course centered on an exploration of sexual diversity, this seemed an appropriate teaching moment for combining intellectual content and personal growth.

Such “critical moments” (Bronson & Watson-Gegeo, 2008; Bronson, 2009) were woven throughout the intensive weekend portion of the course. For example, a half-day presentation by Willie Wilkinson, a health educator specializing in sensitizing health care workers to the trans-issues, focused on acknowledging existing stereotypes and uncomfortable questions that students had about people with these diverse gender identities. They learned about how to respectfully approach people who were in various stages of transitioning and the importance of separating social identity from biology. The students were deeply moved by the film clips that complexified issues of class, gender and race as the subsequent discussion revealed. As these vignettes have illustrated, the integration of personal subjectivity and intellectual growth, is not a descent into
narcissism (Montuori, 2006). It is actually an important part of a more general move toward the “higher ground” of transdisciplinarity (Bronson and Watson-Gegeo, in preparation).

Trans-disciplinarity

*Interdisciplinary* work is interactive, combining theory, methods and practices to address questions difficult to tackle with the tools of a single discipline (Klein, 1996, Frodeman & Mitcham, 2007). Interdisciplinary work adapts but does not challenge existing boundaries. In contrast, *transdisciplinary* inquiry problematizes disciplinary compartmentalization as imposing limits in creating useful knowledge to address complex issues (Nicolescu, 2002, 2003; Klein, 1998; Stokols, 2006). Centrality of the research questions and the need to reconcile seemingly incommensurable methods for constructing knowledge require greater rigor than is typical of interdisciplinary inquiry, including a nuanced engagement with the researcher’s positionality (Montuori, 2006; Alcott & Potter, 1993). Transdisciplinarity has been a hallmark of C.I.I.S programs since its inception. The majority of programs are organized around central themes and inquiries that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and require deep, ongoing and critical self-reflection on the part of faculty and students by design.

In practical terms, how was a trans-disciplinary orientation embedded into this course on language and sexuality? It began as so many creative projects do with a conversation I had with colleague Shoshana Simons, the Chair of the Expressive Arts Therapy program. She had worked as a community organizer, organizational consultant and expressive arts therapy educator for many years and had been trained in psychology, performing arts and social science research. She was also an out lesbian who had grown up in the early stages of the feminist movement. We decided to make the course a collaborative effort in which she would specifically attend to our prime directive: that the discussion of academic content should be grounded in some kind of experiential activity where possible.

In the spirit of transdisciplinary inquiry, we specifically wanted to harness materials and perspectives from linguistics, psychology, feminist and criticalist thought, and anthropology to focus on the intersections of language and sexuality. The main texts in the course (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 2006) prepared the field for us by providing both a coherent, if somewhat polemic master narrative, and ample source material for students’ independent research in an area of interest.

I saw my job as a linguist to use the opportunity to introduce the idea of “linguistic mindfulness” (Bronson and Gangadean, 2010) as a key learning outcome. Since there would be little time to take students into the intricacies of linguistic research, I was challenged to distill this outcome into specific moments of learning that would connect with students where they were, while indicating the complexity that further study would elucidate. My effort centered on two areas: the construction of categories, and the genealogy and performance of gender identity in online and face-to-face discourse.

The discussion of categories emerged naturally from the first night’s discussion as the students themselves provided the raw material. I wrote down the terms they used to describe their own sexual identities and then proceeded to ask how one knew what each category was.
relayed some basic research about our natural reliance on prototypes (Rosch, 1978) as more central members of each category, with more marginal members not activating the category as fully. I went on to point out the social and historical construction of the categories they used (Foucault, 1995). My colleague Shoshana was able to connect with the tradition of narrative psychology where clients reflect on the structural sources of the stories in which they are embedded as part of the healing process.

Our linguistic “fieldwork” was already described above in the “personal growth” section. Students had a first hand opportunity to journey to other corners of the sexual landscape and to report and reflect on what they found. They could connect this with articles and chapters on the language of personal ads, which had been widely studied. We also experimented with embodied language by asking students to walk around the room as though they were walking in various parts of the city, some more LGBTQ-friendly than others. Surprisingly (for some in the class), two young gay men reported that they actually felt less comfortable in the gay-friendly Castro District of San Francisco. They said that in that part of the exercise, they became aware of being on display as sexual commodities in a cutthroat marketplace full of judgments about their appearance and desirability. We used this to discuss Foucault’s (1995) development of the “Panopticon” as the internalized observer who embodied social control in the individual.

In the culminating exercise of the unit led by health educator Willie Wilkinson, students were asked to come up with interventions appropriate for diverse trans-clients who were struggling with substance abuse and other issues. Students had moved through an initial discussion of terms and stereotypes to the application of their newfound knowledge for an imperiled population. This cycle exemplified our original commitment to base our work in experience and to return to application and significance at the appropriate point in each unit.

The small lessons I would add to the burgeoning discourse on transdisciplinarity from this one case are these. True transdisciplinary work requires that departments and institutions actually recognize and reward cooperation across disciplines and departments. Since so many great ideas start in informal salon settings, more purposeful “intellectual matchmaking” (maybe starting with better food) could help such inquiry to become vital and central rather than marginal (as it is currently on most college campuses). So many of the great questions of our day require this kind of cooperation—students are not typically drawn to Philosophy 1A or Psychology 1A per se, but they do care about what it means to be human and what their work is in a collective response to a world in crisis—and so do many faculty.

Students’ inherent concern with the big questions should be amplified in the forge of transdisciplinary inquiry, ongoing among faculty on a healthy campus, and not dampened by departmental and disciplinary turf wars. This course holds some clues as to how this imperative can be realized as a matter of increasing, rather than decreasing intellectual rigor, while more responsibly preparing the next generation of scholars and practitioners to work in and with the disciplines as we have known them. Moreover, the image of the lone trans-disciplinary scholar or practitioner is an oxymoron in addition to being an archaic vestige of an earlier social, technological and economic era in higher education.
Social Relevance and Space for Difference

By now, my major points about the organization and aims of the course and how these were realized in practice have been made. Also, the numerous references to the same activities and materials in different sections indicate that there are many synergies across the dimensions that have organized this article thus far. Integral education in its most robust embodiments is not simply an exercise in self-development or of transcending disciplinary boundaries as a way of claiming new, albeit transdisciplinary turf. It shines when students are actually prepared to work professionally in areas of their choosing, to apply what they have learned to real-world concerns and people in the contemporary world. The translation into practice has been more straightforward for the clinical psychology programs at C.I.I.S.: the MFT (Marriage Family Therapist) Community Mental Health program is the most recent example of attempts to benefit underserved communities. Opportunities to connect integral perspectives with problems in the world are available to all students in the form or internships and service learning projects supported by work-study funds.

Nevertheless, this area that requires much greater emphasis, especially if the larger purpose of integral education is to remain relevant in a time of scarce resources in the academy. Integral theory per se has been developed extensively and entire academic programs have been devoted to it. But these are not sustainable without a built-in connection to larger communities and worlds outside the few who can take the time to devote years of study to a particular language and framework. The integral education movement must keep its eye on the prize if it is not to go the way of so many attempts to rethink education and become simply another footnote. If it is not preparing the next generation so that they are capable of doing more relevant work in multiple communities-of-practice, what good is it, anyway?

Attention to difference was built into every aspect of the language and sexuality course, although I would not yet hold it up as a model since it is still such a new course to me. The initial reviews from students were very positive. One said in a class evaluation: “Attention to these issues (difference) was woven seamlessly into the class.” The work with trans populations was mentioned as pivotal in de-centering students’ hetero-normative prototypes, widening their acceptance of variation and deepening their respect for sexual and gender diversity. The altar exercises and the numerous opportunities to de-brief, allowed students’ individual difference to emerge so that their stories became a source of insight for others. Owing to the climate of intimacy and complexity that evolved, differences could be explored respectfully without, for example, anyone being put on the spot or interrogated as the “token bisexual.”

Integral education in all its manifestations has been characterized by an attempt to widen the lens of what is acceptable as a way of knowing and learning. It requires unflinching and ongoing inquiry about self and world. In the contemporary world integral education must, like its cousin, integral theory, be critiqued as a relevant source of responses to the problems of our day, chief among them as a space for dialogue that respects difference and paradox as sources of new knowledge (Parry & Duran, 2009), rather than as a struggle for supremacy between competing views (see Puhakka, this issue). In this sense, the lens must be widened and the gaze extended to include not only a critical perspective on race, class, gender and other forms of difference, but the gazer herself (see Bronson & Fields, 2009b regarding “positionality” for a recent discussion).
Integral education must include an ongoing critique of access (who gets to be integral?) and its adherents’ inevitable complicity in a post-colonial, racist, sexist and classist system. Otherwise, the movement will not achieve its promise as a source of relevant knowledge in a diverse and globalizing world. The problem of translating across cultures, nations, frames and viewpoints is certainly central in 21st century collective life. Integral education has its part to play as a source of interventions, but only if it mindfully accounts for how its ideas translate into practice in multiple and variegated settings (where difference in many forms is present).

Conclusion: Toward an Integral Praxis

As an educator of teachers at UC Davis, I often hear versions of the following: “That sounds great in theory,...but what am I going to do tomorrow?” This article has provided a few snapshots of what a class looks like that is designed to embody some key dimensions of integral education. I will close by making some preliminary suggestions about how integral educators might begin to assess their own and each others’ practice in these dimensions. Without conceptual tools for assessment and some process for collective accountability, how will anyone know whether any particular class is effective as integral education? Without a framework for evaluation, how will we know that we are actually doing integral education rather than simply talking about it or “putting old mind in new bottles” (Bronson and Gangadean, 2010, p. 149)?

“Integral assessment” is a new frontier (Davis, 2010) that deserves much more attention than I can give to here. I do want to say that we can we assess what is essential in integral learning without putting it back into the same old boxes or limiting spontaneity unduly. Articulation of clear integral learning outcomes is basic if still challenging for most educators. We and our students need to know what we expect of them and how we will know they have achieved it. Assessment beyond this is complex enough in traditional settings. Moreover, it is a particularly tricky proposition where issues of personal growth and development are concerned, which needs much fuller exploration outside the scope of this essay. How does one decide if a student has adequately integrated personal and intellectual growth in an “assignment” or discussion, or is that even the right kind of question? At the very least, student work will need to be read by faculty from a different perspective if integral goals are in mind.

In another context, we offered the framework of topic, approach, method, and intervention (Bronson & Watson-Gegeo, 2008) as a means of sorting through various research programs and propose that the same be done with integral education. The idea is that there are at least these levels of embodiment for the dimensions, not that they are mutually exclusive categories in practice. At the most basic level, integral content can be included as a topic imply by being included on the reading list or being discussed in class. Thus, students might read transdisciplinary thinkers like Gebser or Wilber, but not actually go much deeper into the possibilities of the ideas in practice. Checklist approaches to integral education risk falling into the topic category inasmuch as they select an activity from each “quadrant” but do not attend to the integration of knowledge across modes or quadrants or the actual impact on learners (see Ferrer & Sherman, 2008; Bronson & Gangadean, 2010, 2006 for critiques).

Integral education as approach involves a purposeful interaction with the content or material that brings the ideas and dimensions alive and integrates deep and generative learning in
students, regardless of the mode of delivery (Palmer, 2004). Even a great lecture can be truly integral in this sense, the emphasis on multiple ways of knowing notwithstanding. In the non-dogmatic view being presented here, what matters is the result. It is important not to fetishize the method per se—a method is no guarantee of educational success (as the track record of the fad-crazy educational industrial complex attests).

Approaches to disciplinary material can always be more or less trans-disciplinary in practice, leaving open multiple viewpoints and acknowledging the contributions of diverse scholars from other traditions outside the canon. Educators already engage difference with varying levels of concern and skill in the way they present any content or respond to students, even when they are not consciously choosing a particular curricular or pedagogical goal related to “diversity.” Courses of study as lived experiences can be assessed in terms of the extent to which they actually evoke and “lean toward” the integral dimensions in the hidden as well as the formal curriculum.

As a *method* integral education may involve many explicit practices such as visualization, role play, working with materials, dialogue, personal reflective and scholarly writing, and field trips as discussed above. *Methods* represent particular pedagogical or other practices designed to generate deep, integral learning in students. They are part of the formal or informal curriculum and depend on the mindful embrace of the educator of the available palette of options appropriate for her setting and goals. Since so much of assessment is centered on the quick fix or next round of test results, the evaluation of the methods of integral education are especially complex and merit further study by scholars of teaching and learning.

Integral education as *intervention* can be evaluated in terms of how well it actually impacts the students and communities it is designed to serve. Thus, transdisciplinarity is valued in integral education not because it is in vogue, but because it is a responsible stance in a world where the old boundaries are being dissolved. Learning how to learn from differently positioned colleagues in work teams is much more important that knowing a fixed canon that will be outdated by the latest internet posting by the time the next article is printed. By assessing integral education efforts as *intervention*, one can highlight how well the desired shifts have been achieved and can do so in a setting of collaborative inquiry with the learners. In this, integral education finds common cause with educators everywhere who seek to create the deep learning and build the capacities that are required for the next generation to respond more artfully and humanely to the challenges they will face.

**Conclusion: Trans-dancing under the Big Tent**

As the new series by SUNY Press indicates (Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, & Gunnlaugsson, 2010 is the first),” integral education” is on the map as a potential force within the general rethinking of education now underway. A major challenge is to develop the theme from being something more than just a “big tent” concept (for disparate and even contradictory content and forms of pedagogy) into a practical program for a collective move to “higher” educational “ground” (Bronson and Watson-Gegeo, in press). As with so many grand projects, the proof lies in the details of practice, in the intimate step-by-step embodiments in multiple sites and settings that critical practitioners from many disciplines can review and learn from. I have offered this report
in the spirit of clarifying some lessons from my own case and opening the way a bit for those who might follow.

We ended the workshop part of the class with the following vignette:

The papers have all announced it, it is on the radio and t.v. and everyone has heard it and is in the streets because they believe it: All difference is now respected and all peoples emancipated. There will be no more institutional or collective discrimination. Everyone will have guaranteed health care, education, a safe and clean environment, healthy food and housing. All people are welcome everywhere and are safe and protected, regardless of whom they love…

The students then enacted role plays in which they showed their responses the moment they heard the news. We ended with a celebratory dance, a trans-dance, of psychologists, anthropologists and social scientists, lesbians and gay men, bisexuals, straights, and gender-queer to a compelling disco world beat. One of my students slipped a pink boa around my neck as we continued our now raucous dance—it holds a place of honor (right next to Tinky) in my office to this day. I already have my first piece for the next altar and, more importantly, the story and enduring hope that goes with it.

References


Becoming World Becoming: 
Embodied Practice in Psychology and Education

Ian J. Grand¹

Abstract: In the Integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri, consciousness and knowing do not suffice. What is crucial is actual participation in the making of the world. Beyond transcendence, there is a creative emergence in historical time of new possibilities of being and becoming. When we meditate, or act in the world, or engage in other kinds of spiritual practices, we directly, concretely, change the ground of our being. We are changed in our bodies and we are changed in our interactions in the world. There is a creative spiral: changes in breath, changes in activity, become changes in consciousness. How we interact, do work, have feeling, changes us, as does our reflection upon them. The conditions, practices and tools of the historical era in which we live shape us as we shape them. What becomes important in practice is to learn tools and perspectives that expand our ability to participate in the making of the world.

Keywords: Creative, emergence, integral, ontology, spiritual practice, somatic psychology, world becoming.

Introduction

What is intriguing to me about the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri is that in it, being becomes. Birthings, histories and multiple realizations in time matter. For both Aurobindo and Chaudhuri there is an image of World Spirit becoming. Identification with the creative is central to their practice.

In this philosophy, consciousness and knowing do not suffice. What is crucial is participation and presence. We come to realize ourselves as world becoming itself as we participate in the multiple, intersecting, and radiating worlds with which we create and manifest realities. This world making is central to the integral enterprise; and it is this aspect of integral thought that I will develop here.

I begin by turning to language from Haridas Chaudhuri, founder of CIIS, who came to San Francisco from India after a request by several local scholars to the Aurobindo Ashram to send a teacher of integral philosophy and yoga. In his book The Evolution of Integral Consciousness Chaudhuri (1977) notes:

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An individual may experience the joy of boundless self-expansion by realizing his oneness with the cosmic whole, but transcendence must be further transcended. For wholeness of being one must appreciate the unique value of his individuality as a creative spark, as a set of dynamic potentials to be actualized for the good of society. (p. 64)

“Transcendence itself must be transcended” means that there is real work to be done in time and space, in the immanent becoming of the world. Aurobindo, it will be remembered, was initially involved in the Indian liberation movement.

In this there is, as Chaudhuri notes in other places, the work of both the conscious and the unconscious aspects of our experience. There is the often-chaotic clash of disparate and contradictory elements as well as transcendent calm.

When we meditate, or act in the world, or engage in other kinds of spiritual practices, we directly, concretely, change the ground of our being. We are changed in the flesh and energetic and fluid substance that we are.

There is a creative spiral. Changes in breath, changes in activity, become changes in consciousness. How we interact, do work, have feeling, changes us, as does our reflection upon them. According to Chaudhuri (1977),

When we understand this, another thing follows. Another feature of creative meditation is what I may call transformation. If your goal is dynamic union with Being in the sphere of human relations and social transactions, then your entire being becomes very precious. Your body, your sense, your ‘I-sense’, even the unconscious impulses, instinctual drives. All these become important. They are the means of action. (p. 123)

Our craft becomes the working of a triad of function that includes consciousness, the unconscious, and practice in the world in which world spirit becomes manifest in its cosmic play. The making of the world is an art in which there is a continual round of being/practice/ knowing/becoming.

As Mauro Ceruti (2008) notes with regard to the philosophies of Charles Hartshorne and Freeman Dyson, “…what unifies cosmologies of this type is an ontological reversal; the only possible “essence” of the universe is its history, in its entirety (including its stases, discontinuities, forms, and processes)” (p. 56).

The world is moving and I am moving. We constantly change, and change each other. I meet particular people and am immersed in specific milieus. I create myself daily in my organizations of self and in my responses to the stimulations and attractions of the surround around me. I absorb and practice or resist and refuse the gestures and tones and ideas of the people and media images I encounter.

The conditions, practices and tools of the historical era in which we live also shape us. Each epoch has kinds of work and means of travel, specific ways to find out about and interact with the world. In our contemporary world, we can in short order go to Rome or India or go to the
Internet to find out about Pliny or Aeschylus or D.J. Spooky or Rapso. My fate is intertwined with the people of Iraq and Egypt and North Korea, the possibilities for speech or action or privacy negotiated continually in changing sets of ideas and feelings, fears and aspirations.

As I write this, we have just witnessed the change of regime in Egypt. Tweet by tweet, email by email, television coverage and massings of people in the street organizing themselves changing with the changing situation.

I am not the same me and you are not the same you as when we last talked or since our last sentence. This is not a trivial matter.

**Integral Education and Therapy**

I now turn to some images of how we might incorporate, literally, this integral perspective in education and therapy. What might a psychology based on what we are talking about look like? How might it describe the difficulties of people and sketch means for changed engagement with self, other, and the world? What educational means would be important to foster imagination, creativity, and participation in the creative emergence in the world? What tools can be given that would be useful to this daily practice of self and world becoming.

In an integral Psychology as outlined here one might first come to valorize all aspects of one’s experience and explore their meanings experientially. In several passages in *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness* Chaudhuri (1977) follows this line in suggesting that body, psyche, emotion, interaction, and the formation of institutional practice are all sites of integral practice:

...the physical, the instinctual and the mental are no less important components of the total self than the spiritual and the transcendental. Transcendental consciousness may be more fundamental, more luminous, more revelatory of the structure of reality, but it certainly is not the only reality or the only value that counts. Physical consciousness or body awareness, instinctual drives, reason, and the I-sense (i.e., the sense of individuality), freedom of choice, participation in the creativity of life, etc., are equally real constituents of the total self. There can be no perfect self-realization without the actualization of the physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual potentialities of man[kind]. (p. 62)

He goes on to say that “The methodology of integral psychology can best be described as integral experientialism” (p. 70). He elaborates what he means in another set of statements.

Integral experientialism is therefore a blueprint for thorough investigation of all forms and phases of human experience. It includes in its scope dream experiences as well as waking experiences, drug-induced hallucinatory experiences as well as meditatively acquired ontological insights, dreamless sleep experience as well as transcendental experiences. (p. 71)

Integral psychology is based upon experiences and insights affirming the multi-dimensional richness and indivisible wholeness of the human personality. It is founded
upon the concept of man's total self as the integral unity of uniqueness, relatedness, and transcendence, as the indivisible unity of the experiential and the transcendental. (p. 58)

Integral practice here does not mean striving for a consciousness that excludes not knowing, confusion, difficulty, and the creative, and problematic, workings of the unconscious. There is a creative magma of living experience in which we embody together with other bodies a polylectic of qualities, shapes, meanings and outpourings. We create embodied textures and contours of experience and the possibility of experience. Ideas, images, sounds are tools then for our embodied becoming. Architecture, music, modes of work, and beliefs all shape us and create the experience of our ongoing humanity.

In *Modes of Thought*, Alfred North Whitehead (1938/1958) writes:

There is no reason to hold that confusion is less fundamental than order. Our task is to evolve a general concept that allows room for both… My suggestion is that we start from the notion of two aspects of the Universe. It includes a factor of unity, involving in its essence the connexity [sic] of things, unity of purpose, and unity of enjoyment. …There is also equally fundamental in the Universe, a factor of multiplicity. There are many actualities, each with its own experience, enjoying individually, and yet requiring each other. (p. 70)

The Caribbean notions of “I and I” and “All of We is one” echoes this double vision. “I and I” is a Rastafarian name of Jah, the Supreme Deity. It is a place of two subjectivities coming together. “All of We is One,” a phrase from C.L.R. James’ novel Minty Alley (1997) points to the connected aspect of Universe that Whitehead talks about.

This leads to a couple of other grounds for an integral psychology and education. First, Aurobindo and Chaudhuri both valorized the social, the political, the sense of Institutions and Institutional change. They were concerned with the cultural and cultural variation in experience seeing this diversity as crucial in world becoming. Through cultural exchange the enrichment of creative tools occurs. Chaudhuri (1977) says:

We are living in the twentieth century and we are citizens of the world. It is for us to be able to draw on the limitless wisdom of east and West and North and South. That is the great privilege of modern man. The cultural heritage of the entire human race is open to him. Wherever there is truth, wherever there is wisdom, we can freely draw upon it and bring it together in a grand synthesis. (p. 43)

Chaudhuri (1977, p. 84) also suggests that there is a need for a global education that would include the following points:

1. Promotion of intercultural, interracial, and interreligious understanding;
2. Acceptance of ideological diversity within the global unity of humankind;
3. Affirmation of the intrinsic dignity of all individuals, men and women, everywhere in the world;
4. The essential equality of all races, and peoples, and nations of the world;
5. Interdisciplinary coordination and synthesis;
6. Education for the whole person in his/her multidimensional richness;
7. Comparative studies East and West;
8. Physical fitness and sports;

In a possible integral psychology and education, then, it could be recognized that the primary difficulties from which we suffer are:

- Our inability to be part of the process of creative emergence; our getting stuck in old patterns;
- Our inability to navigate between and with inner and outer realities;
- Our devaluations of aspects of our experience, our desire, and our meaning-making;
- Our fixations of self enactment, alone and with others;
- Our inability to form patterns of embodied self-reflection; our snarly responses to individual, cultural difference;
- Our lack of training in creativity, both personal, interactive, and social; and
- Our devaluation of life, body, vitality in ourselves, others, and the world itself.

From these, images of practice flow: We need practice in loving and compassion as well as in the abilities to think and feel and act in multiple ways. We need practice in collaboration and collective action, practice in the plowing and seeding and production of the imagination. We need practice in reflecting upon our living, enacted values. So the means of promoting integral transformation both individual and cultural would be developing psychological and educational practices that directly give tools by which to address all these concerns.

Similarly, Montuori (2005) notes six kinds of learning that are crucial in this epoch: education for pluralism; education for complexity; education for media literacy and the psychology of mass manipulation; education toward co-existence; education that addresses the whole person in terms of reason, emotion, and the capacity for self-deception; education for creativity.

What is common here, and crucial, is that we shape education practices that enable us to better participate in the shaping of the world.

**Body**

*And the forces of speech give way to the language beyond speech* — Robert Duncan

As a Professor of Somatic Psychology I, of course, think that the cultivation of bodily approaches to meaning making is a crucial ground of integral psychology and education. For me, the insistence on continually naming experience ‘body’ is a way of giving emphasis to the role of the immediately felt and lived aspects of our totality. In this regard I have adopted for many years what I have called a methodological monist position that holds for a multiplicity of bodily experiences. It is ‘methodological’ in the sense that it is provisional.
In this view dreaming, thinking, sensing, passion, loving, and feeling are all part of a differentiated unity that we are. They can all be experienced as embodied. By emphasizing body, by experiencing the embodied qualities by which we construct our realities, we can come to use what we call bodily experience in an artful way. Our participation in the world changes when we ground our experience in the actual, experienced occasions of our breath, our movements, our rhythms, and our feeling.

Integral practice is practice of body whether body be considered breath or brain, movement or mantra. Becoming is the goal (a goal without an end) and conceptual knowing is station on the way. There is a continual round of knowing/becoming always embodied always imbued with that which is larger than the localization we call us but contained within it as us, as it, as well.

Whatever we practice bodily we become. In an article entitled “Increased Cortical Representation of the fingers of the left hand in string players”, Ebert et. al. (1995) demonstrated that violin practice changed brain representations of violinists’ fingers. These players use the fingers of the left hand to change the tones of the strings they are playing. The area of the motor cortex devoted to these fingers was up to five times larger in violinists that non-violinists. Through use there was a structural change in an area of the brain. Similarly, of course, yoga, weight lifting, and martial arts change tissue state, hormonal function and neural structure.

In psychology and education we can learn about how to explore what we have become as body in action in the world. We practice and become kinds of emotional bodies, feeling bodies, acting and moving bodies. We make meaning of loving, of feeling, of music and dance as bodies becoming. We enact ways of being together and being alone, create values of affect and sexuality, kinds of work and kinds of play—all bodily.

From a somatic psychology point of view, we can look at how various aspects of the psyche talked about in say, drive theory, or object relations theory, or relational, Jungian, and transpersonal approaches, can be experienced in their bodily manifestations. We see that the organization of self, and self-with-other, occur through bodily means. We look at how culture and social institutions value, encourage, and reward or punish particular forms of embodied expression, and certain strivings for embodied meaning. We hold that the lived body is both symbol of the past and the making of the future. It is the place where values and meanings are lived.

Chaudhuri (1977) says:

An insight of modern psychology as well as ancient sages is that we are in for trouble if we set up a civil war between the different aspects of our nature. The intelligent thing to do is get to know our own nature—the basic drives, motivations, and fundamental impulses—and have a program of organized fulfillment of them. (p. 117)

In somatic psychology we explore all this and explore it by looking at how it is organized bodily. In doing this we look at the histories of emotion making in the family as the negotiation and creation of shapes of initiation and response. We each get angry, feel loving, feel nothing even through bodily means. As you are reading this text, you can begin to explore literally how
you are doing the listening and from that develop a history of your coming to pay attention in this particular way.

In the clinical work I practice, we look at our embodied past and how we live it currently. I also look at how we can begin to make new worlds, leave old habits behind, and make new possibilities. One practice that I use in teaching psychotherapy praxis is called “body-felt reflection.” In this practice we feel how we have come to enact various values, interactions, interchanges. We literally explore the way breath, movement, tissue state have been and are continuing to be shaped in the moment. We look at, and name the values we have embodied as we feel how we are doing them.

The hope of this practice is learning both what we have done so we can alter it and finding ways to begin the liberation processes by which we can both explore and change what we have done. We can learn here to return to the process of self and other creation and find how we make meaning and values in the practice of the flesh. We can here include the learning from various psychodynamic understandings of the unconscious, cognitive understandings, and spiritual learning about the organization of aspects of consciousness.

We use the means of body-felt reflection to explore how we have structured ourselves in the past and to begin to discern the creative practices we have practiced all our lives in the making and co-creating of the human world. We can also practice new ways of being with others or our selves in our movements, gestures, feelings and expressions. It is like being in art school. Here it is the art of embodied living that is being practiced. Qualities of self-becoming and becoming-with-others are practiced. We use language, poetry song, movement, and mantra. We dream and use our dreams to create the ground of dreaming.

In the education of future therapists in the Somatic Psychology program at CIIS, these same means are used to ground students in their experience of themselves. The idea of art school is even more applicable. Students learn to work the ground of their own being so that they are enabled to be with another or others in practiced and help them come to deep embodied exploration as well. They do embodied dream work, embodied work with representations from the past, work with the embodied creation of new possibility in movement, breath, and emotional interactive range. Theory becomes practice and practice, theory. They learn to sit with, feel, and be compassionate toward the pain, conflict, and ecstasy of human life.

Our experiential work becomes guide and question. What are we doing and how is it being done? What kinds of humanity are we creating in our practice and in what we encourage in our clinical and social practices? What kinds of emotional, interpersonal, creative practices are we encouraging in our clients and why are we encouraging them?

And finally, we teach that the body is the place of creation, of the making of humanity, of the enactment of actual lived values. It is here that the franticness or ease of daily life is practiced, here that the actual qualities of loving, creation, and world becoming are lived.
Creative Emergence

In a collection of papers published by Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederick Spiegelberg (1960) titled *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: A Commemorative Symposium*, N.A. Nikam wrote a now obscure paper “The Problem of Creation: Concepts of Maya and Lila in Sri Aurobindo.” Nikam says: “It is the merit of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy to treat the problem of 'creation' as a problem of the nature of existence. Why is there ‘creation’? is a question which is a question about: what is the nature of reality, of existence?” (Nikam, 1960, p. 143).

In this Nikam seems to echo the question Heidegger and others raised: “Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?” (Heidegger, 1961, p. 1). But Nikam, from an integral perspective, shifts the question.

In Sri Aurobindo's treatment of the problem there are two points to be noted: a) Why the Infinite becomes the finite is a wrong question because we do not understand the true meaning of the word “infinite.” The Infinite is that in which “all possibilities are inherent in its Infinity,” as Sri Aurobindo says, and so, the “delight” of its existence “lies precisely in the variable realization of its possibilities.” b) The variable realization of its possibilities is a movement in which the Infinite “looses” itself as Sri Aurobindo says, by “concealment” in that which seems to be its opposite; so in another sense, "creation" is a process of evolution in which the absoluteness of conscious existence, or Saccidanada, has to “emerge.” All creation or Becoming is nothing but this self-manifestation. (Nikam, 1960, p. 146)

He goes on to say that:

…the world, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not *maya* but *lila*: i.e., a play, a and joy of play, wherever this is found: “the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanician's joy…;” the cause and purpose of play is: being ever busy with its own innumerable self-representations. When the discovery of self-delight of being is really made—this is possible for everyone—then we have mastered the great art of living. (p. 147)

In the integral practice Chaudhuri outlines, we align ourselves with the creative aspect of World Spirit becoming. We live from, act toward a creative emergence in which valorization, meaning, and, above all, delight in world play continually manifest. We come to know ourselves as World Spirit in its imaginal becomings. We create, in history, social worlds, material worlds, and even the natural worlds as well.

In our practice we can come to identify with the creative outflow into the world: the making of world becoming. It is like the prescription in the alchemical treatise *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus*:

Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross,
It ascends from the earth to the heaven, and again descends to the earth,
And thereby gathers the strength of all things above, and of
All things below,
Thus was the world created and
Hence shall wonderful adaptations be achieved, of which the means is here.
(quoted in Smith, 1997, p. 7)

In the alchemical work described in the Emerald Tablet there is a rising up, a separation of Spirit and Matter, and a being born again. This is followed by a descent back into the world, a third birth in which Spirit and Matter are again seen and experienced as whole and creatively potent. We then, as it is said, hold the power of all things.

In another alchemical text, *Atalanta Fugiens*, written by Michael Maier (1617/1989), there are pictures, epigrams, and poems that indicate aspects of the alchemical process. One image shows the Philosopher’s stone as existing everywhere to be developed. Others show the process of pain, dissolution, and joy accompanying the work of making the world.

Chaudhuri says:

The imperative of life is to focus on the living present, to concentrate on a reasonable span in the present life with all its challenges and opportunities, with all its glories and frustrations, with all its rights and responsibilities, with all its dark nights of despair and bright days of creative achievement. Active participation in the living present creatively advances into a glorious future. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 58)

Aurobindo’s integral vision was born in the struggle to go past colonialism, past the split between the spiritual and the material, and past varying traditional senses of self. It de-centers the self and the other and inherited histories as well. Integral practice includes working with the sick and the poor, working with the dispossessed, working in history toward change. It is ongoing manifestation and creation in immediate and transcendent presence.

We practice embodied manifestations. I think here of the Jewish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1976) whose practice was the combination of the names of God. In integral practice each thing of the world, as in the alchemical image from Atalanta Fugiens talked about earlier, comes to be seen in its divine manifestation. These multifarious manifestations are combined in embodied thought, practice, art, and interactions with others. In this creative dance we join with, become, world becoming.

I end here with several lines from the poet Robert Duncan:

First there is the power; and in the power
Is the tone or tune,
So that all of creation moves with a music;
the sound having its open doors in the mind;
but in the heart lieth its fountain.
(Duncan, 1977, p. 127)
References


Daring to Step into the Open: Moving Beyond Perspectives in Education and Life

Kaisa Puhakka

Abstract: Evolution in all spheres—cosmos, culture, and consciousness—is explored as a dynamic, creative process of shifting and settling, where shifting breaks out of existing structures and conceptual moorings and settling solidifies the movement of evolution into structures. Both are seen as essential aspects of the evolutionary process, but a bias for settling is noted among living creatures. For humans in particular, shifting arouses anxiety whereas settling promises security. The correction of this bias in the educational process to help realign human consciousness and culture with the rest of nature and cosmos is explored. Such a realignment may be necessary for meeting the unprecedented challenges of our world today, and an open, perspective-free inquiry can serve as a vehicle for it. But this inquiry calls for a new way of relating to the inherent uncertainty of shifting and to the anxiety this arouses in teachers and students alike.

Keywords: Absolutism, awareness, constructivism, consciousness, cosmos, courage, creative, dialectical, education, epistemology, evolution, heart, inquiry, nature, perspective, pluralism, settling, shifting, Shiva.

Introduction

During my first year in college as a foreign student from Europe, I was told by my American fellow students that they had dissected frogs to learn anatomy in high school. Some of them even caught and killed the frogs themselves (the latter claim may have been inspired by the horrified look on my face and was probably not true). I found such learning practices utterly amazing; nothing like that had been part of my high school education. We had read anatomy text books, painstakingly absorbing a lot of detailed information about bones and muscles and such.

Later, I came to appreciate that the difference between the European and American educational approaches went much deeper: In Europe, education had much to do with passing on the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of tradition as this had flowered in the arts and the sciences and the cultural practices of civilization (which in the early sixties still largely meant Western, Greek and Latin based culture, though signs of nascent interest in Nonwestern cultures were starting to be there). In the U.S., by contrast, the emphasis was not on transmission of culture and tradition as much as it was on personal experience and individual discovery.

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Both approaches seemed to have their own problems: European students seemed to be passive recipients of a stagnant tradition. American students seemed to be re-inventing the wheel over and over again. But it was not as simple as that. To be sure, critique of tradition and established knowledge was not part of the European high school education I had been exposed to. Yet we did criticize, under our breaths, outside the classroom, and later in all sorts of anarchist and other radical political movements. And we had learned well and knew the depths and details of what we were criticizing.

On the other hand, in the U.S. I listened to my fellow college students readily questioning and criticizing, which, I discovered, they were expected to do—it was even part of the formula for writing term papers. And the yardstick for their criticisms was mostly their own personal experience. But they seemed less knowledgeable about what it was they were criticizing, and their critiques often rang shallow to my ears.

Another thing that struck me as strange about my American fellow students was that most were voting Democrat or Republican simply because their parents were. My parents rarely agreed on which political candidate to vote for, and there were lively and often heated discussions preceding elections at home. I drew the youthfully sweeping conclusion that American students' critique conformed to, rather than seriously questioned, the establishment they were criticizing—until I got swept up in the counterculture which was gaining momentum in those years, and I felt the power of real criticism swell within the ranks of my fellow students such as I had not seen in my lifetime.

I was observing a fundamental dynamic of consciousness at work in two different cultural and educational settings. Same dynamic, taking different twists and turns in each case. The words “shifting” and “settling” later came to mind (other words like “in-breathing” and “out-breathing,” “contracting” and “expanding” also came) to describe the two poles of a dialectical tension that propelled this dynamic. In shifting, consciousness sheds its moorings and moves out but is also pulled to find a place to settle in, an anchor to hang onto whether in the form of a belief about what's real or what's good, or a goal to be accomplished, a product built. Even the ideas of change and growth, which the above sketch of the American educational vision emphasizes, can, and eventually do, become part of the settling of that vision. And yet never for long: once safe and settled in a resting place provided by tradition, ideas, and approaches, consciousness sooner or later tears loose from its resting place to shift again.

Is this shifting and settling something that can be shaped by cultural or educational influences? It seems to me that the forms of settling indeed can, but the dialectical movement of consciousness itself cannot. For this reason, no individual accomplishment, no cultural or educational practice can ever be the last word on the evolutionary process. Indeed, those educational, artistic, or other creative endeavors that do not purport to capture this process in theory or description but to actively participate in it find themselves constantly examining their existing practices and exploring new horizons. This is certainly true of educational institutions like the California institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), which endeavors to bring its practice of integral education into resonance with the nature of consciousness and of culture and cosmos at large. The envisioning and implementing of what CIIS does is a process always in the making, never complete. And this is as it should be.
Even so, it is not easy. In particular, the aspect of the evolutionary process I refer to as “shifting” is not easy. As academics and educators, shifting tends to unravel our achievements, unsettle us just when we thought we “got it” and perhaps even staked our reputation on an article about it in print. So how do we align ourselves with, not just describe or theorize about, the evolutionary process that moves in and through us and the rest of the universe? This question is at the heart of education which strives to be truly integral.

In this article I invite my reader to take a look at how the evolutionary movement can get stuck in the forms of settling prevalent in our culture, consciousness, and education, and how it can get unstuck from these. Constructivism and pluralism are the favored forms into which liberal culture and education have settled—and in which we appear to be stuck—today. An inquiry which is prior to, and goes into, any foundational epistemological stand we might adopt is called for to get us unstuck. In the last sections, we will explore such a perspective-free inquiry and how it can function as vehicle for a genuinely transformative education which aligns us with the evolutionary shifts in the making.

Images of Evolution

There is an image of evolution inspired by the shifting and settling movement of consciousness. This image comes from Hindu mythology and is embodied in a small bronze statue depicting Shiva Natarajan, the four-armed God who dances the cosmos into existence moment by moment. It is a spontaneous dance which creates its steps as it goes, without forethought, without plan. The absence of plan or forethought underscores the creativity of the process. One can imagine Shiva's feet shifting and settling in unexpected ways, creating all the forms of the manifest world—and the creation is still going on, we are reminded. This image calls attention to what is missed in the Darwinist vision of evolution in which there is a plan—at least a direction—which moves from primitive to advanced, from simple to complex. The direction is supposed to be toward better (the “fittest” who survives), if not bigger things, materially and spiritually.

The Darwinist belief that there will be something better just around the corner can be comforting in challenging times, yet it takes attention away from the present where, Shiva suggests, creation and change happen. I once asked my mentor from India, why does Shiva dance? He replied, “for no reason, just for the sheer hell of it,” meaning that Shiva dances simply because he can. Life is inherently creative, which means that creation is an end in itself, not a means to realizing some other end via a pre-existing plan. Nature proliferates forms as much as she can “get away with.” What an exalted, joyous, life-affirming understanding of nature and cosmos!

Yes, but unsettling as well. For no preference or ontological priority is given to settling over shifting in this dance. Forms of life and consciousness appear—and disappear just as readily. There is no foundation already in place before the dance commences; all foundations are created and destroyed in the dance itself. Shiva seems to gently mock one of the most basic of human aspirations, which is to settle into something permanent, something that gives us lasting comfort and security.
The painful irony of our times is that, just when that prosperity and lasting security would seem within reach for the globalized economy of our technologically advanced world, the ephemeral and illusory nature of such security is most apparent. There is no foundation before one is created by an act of settling, and there really is nothing more to the foundation than the act that creates it. This is what Shiva's dance conveys about the cosmos at large and about consciousness itself, and this is what our postmodern world enacts in its forms of culture, arts, and politics.

The task for education today is to prepare students to live and enhance the lives of others in a world without foundations. It would seem to me that an educational practice fully aligned with Shiva’s dance in the three spheres—cosmos, culture, and consciousness—is required to do the job.

A vision which encompasses all three informs the educational practices at CIIS. It was inspired by Sri Aurobindo and first implemented by Haridas Chauduri in the 1960's. Both were inspired by their heritage of Indian spirituality as well as their exposure to Darwin's evolutionary theory. The original focus on the Indian subcontinent has since expanded to include spiritual and cultural practices from across the globe. Similarly, the methods of inquiry have expanded beyond those provided by science to include other ways of knowing. The thread that connects the current vision and practice at CIIS to the original vision is the quest for connectedness in all spheres of life pursued by rigorous inquiry (Bronson & Gangadean, 2006; Wexler, 2005).

Darwin's theory has had a profound influence on educational philosophy and practice in America. The complementary view of evolution as entirely creative, captured in Shiva's dance has remained in the shadows, though some contemporary biologists have offered a fascinating scientific version of it (Maturana & Varela, 1987; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Now may be an opportune moment to bring it out of the shadows and let it guide our contemporary educational practices.

In the view of evolution captured by Shiva's dance, settling and shifting are both integral to the evolutionary process, and neither is better or more fundamental than the other. The same dynamic of settling and shifting is present in human consciousness as is in nature and the cosmos at large. Nature settles by stabilizing and solidifying its forms of life, just as cultures settle by building and securing their institutions, and individuals settle by formulating and adhering to their values, beliefs and positions. And in all three spheres, upheavals and shifts great and small, occur often unexpectedly and bring disintegration and renewal in their wake.

The Pluralistic Cocoon

Pluralism and constructivism provide the foundational beliefs for integral thought in education today (e.g., Palmer, 2009; Palmer, Zajonc, Schribner, & Nepo, 2010). At CIIS as well, the educational practices promote multiple perspectives and dialogue among diverse values and beliefs. Students are encouraged to become aware of their own perspectives and to engage those of others in a constructive dialogue. They are also encouraged to expand their perspectives to become more inclusive of other perspectives and to think in “both/and” rather than “either/or” terms.
The underlying premise of pluralism and constructivism is the belief that all truths and knowings are relative to perspectives and that we cannot but come from some perspective or other. But this belief is seldom itself subjected to serious inquiry, and even with thoughtful proposals to mitigate the looming danger of crass relativism available in the literature; for example, that our subjective perspectives and the world beyond these have a participatory relationship (Ferrer, 2002), most educators remain convinced that all knowing and inquiry are bound to and hence relative to some perspective or other.

We are not accustomed to thinking of pluralism or multi-perspectivism as being rigid or extreme. Yet they are, in their own way which is different from the rigidity of fundamentalists and others who endorse extreme and absolutist positions in religion or politics. The rigidity of pluralists is evident in their difficulty speaking with clarity and conviction because they believe that anything they say must be qualified by “it's just one perspective among many.” It is also evident in their belief that ultimately, there is no distinction between truth and opinion (and what counts as “informed” opinion is endlessly debatable) and therefore, their truths are really just opinions—a conclusion fundamentalists today happily accept and turn around to their own advantage, for the latter have no doubt that their own opinions are “the truth.” Nothing one can say from a pluralistic standpoint seems effective in opening up the dialogue past this point.

The constructivist belief that we cannot touch the world directly but are always ensconced in some perspective or other, if carried to its logical conclusion, lands one in nihilism. Some flee from there back to absolutism, and I suspect the fear of nihilism may fuel the rising fundamentalist trends today. But I suspect it is this same threat which keeps the liberal pluralists in a juggling act on the edge of the nihilistic abyss, appreciating all positions (more or less) equally rather than subjecting any of them to a thorough scrutiny for fear of falling into the abyss. Absolutists have their “solutions” which shield them from the prospect of nihilism. But pluralism and constructivism fail to offer a viable alternative to the absolutism in our social and political life today, and this is because they have become absolutists in their own beliefs.

The notion that pluralists are “absolutists” in their own beliefs may be hard to swallow for those who not only acknowledge but celebrate diversity of viewpoints and places of settling. But the paucity of substantial dialogue across the great divides in our society today speaks to both sides being locked into their respective positions. In our liberal-leaning educational institutions we find ourselves surrounded by people whose beliefs and values, at least regarding pluralism and diversity, tend to agree with our own. We all like to explore different viewpoints and engage in discovering new ones. But were we to step back from this for a moment, we might wonder whether this is just stirring the same old pot.

The viewpoints may be new, but they are still just viewpoints. Within the cocoon established by this belief, it is safe and self-affirming to exchange viewpoints. Thus like absolutists of fundamentalist persuasions who live in their own cocoons, we find ourselves settling not only into our shared beliefs and values but also into a social comfort-zone of like-minded folks. As educators, we should wonder every day how much our institution is a crucible for evolutionary change and transformation and how much it is a cocoon in which we abide safe and affirmed. In nature, all cocoons are meant to burst. If they don't, the life in them decays and dies. If our educational communities are to become relevant and potent contributors to the social and
political process, they need to break out of their cocoons to once again move with the natural
dynamism of shifting and settling.

**Settling, Shifting, and the Pro-Settling Bias**

Let us now take a closer look at settling and shifting, their interplay in nature and in our own
consciousness. This helps us appreciate the enormous challenge for an integral education which
envisions itself a participant in this play.

Turning to settling first: One moment we listen with an open heart and open mind. We feel
resonance with what is being said and in the next moment exclaim, “Yes, that's true!” A position,
a belief is being formed and affirmed. With this, we feel affirmed in who we feel we are. This is
settling. We now have a point of reference for making sense of our world and of ourselves, and
anchoring ourselves in it, we feel safe and secure.

As a dynamic activity, settling resists shifting. It not only freezes life and consciousness into
forms but tends to reinforce and seek their confirmation from experience and from agreements
with like-minded folks. With my of points of reference in place, listening half-heartedly, absent-
mindedly seems enough, because I already know what is being said and agree with it and feel
safe and affirmed in hearing it. With the freezing of life and consciousness into beliefs and
positions, genuine learning comes to a halt. The evolutionary movement comes to a halt. To be
sure, we can still tinker with our positions, re-arrange them some, and accumulate them. For
many people, this counts as learning. But we are cut off from the unknown, unchartered, not-yet-
formed immediacy of life.

I now turn to shifting. Unlike our experiences of settling, shifting tends to be extremely subtle
and short-lived. Most of us have experienced “unsettling” moments when something we had
taken for granted turns out not so. It is as if the bottom gives way and the world as we know it
falls apart. Such moments can feel unnerving, embarrassing, even frightening. No wonder we
resist them, often with elaborate defenses. But they can also be amazingly enlivening and
exhilarating. Recall the last time you had a real “aha!” moment, perhaps in a classroom, or in a
therapy session, or just while taking a walk in a park. Not a lukewarm “yeah, I buy that” moment
but one in which everything you had bought into until then suddenly fell apart. There you stood,
naked, exposed to the elements—the “you” you had known blown to smithereens. Yet in that
moment you were in contact with life itself, knowing nothing yet connected to all with pure
awareness not mediated by any interpretations.

In the next moment, you became aware of something new, an “insight” which you could grasp
hold of because it had found its place within what you had previously known. This is when that
peculiar smile of recognition that goes with the “aha!” experience spread on your face.

Many people equate “insight” with what is being recognized. Yet by the time something is re-
cognized settling has already taken place. Just before the recognition, shifting happened which
shook and perhaps momentarily dissolved all anchors and reference points. There was literally
“no-thing” there, which is why if you just dropped into that space of nothingness, those watching
your face may have witnessed, for a fraction of a second perhaps, a slackened jaw and a vacant
stare. Such a situation might indeed be radically unsettling and unnerving were it to last. But it usually does not, and in the next moment, recognition and settling took place. The smile spreading on your face may speak of unspeakable bliss you just experienced, or it may speak of the relief in finding your anchors and points of reference you now experience, or perhaps a little bit of both. You are now settled, but perhaps not quite the same way as before, for you had entered the spontaneous movement of evolution for just a moment.

Shifting is indeed subtle and fleeting. But this does not diminish its potentially profound effect which can, and sometimes does, change the course of history. The spontaneous movement of evolution loosens frozen positions and allows shifting. Shifting can wreak death and destruction, yet it brings forth tremendous aliveness, exhilaration, and bliss as well. Nature is full of examples of this, small and subtle, like the dissolving of the caterpillar in its cocoon or the dehiscence of a flower bud. Or they can be large and spectacular, like earthquakes or volcanic eruptions.

Nature and cosmos have no bias for settling over shifting. Everything that comes into the manifest universe eventually goes out, sometimes the coming and going is subtle and drawn out, other times an instantaneous, loud bang. As a dynamic process, settling and shifting are both happening everywhere all the time.

Even though nature has no bias for settling over shifting, all its creatures who are invested in their own survival and longevity do. All life forms manifest a pro-settling bias in their striving for survival, security, and comfort. It is important to appreciate this same bias at work in our innermost psyche as in the cultural practices and institutions of our civilization. Thus disintegration and death, however much part of nature, are an anathema to us. Civilization was to shield us from that, and for a long time in the Western world, civilization was built and celebrated as a human triumph over nature. Today, we are facing the prospect of disintegration and death along with the rest of nature—a prospect that more than anything else has helped us recognize that we are part of nature and subject to its dynamic of shifting and settling. Still, the bias against shifting and for settling lives on in our culture and it is what provides stability and continuity to society and its institutions.

In subtle but powerful ways, the pro-settling bias pervades our intellectual and psychological lives. Earlier, we examined this in terms of the foundational beliefs of pluralism. But not only do our intellectual beliefs manifest this bias; it is evident in all aspects of our personal, professional and institutional lives. We value (or feel pressure to prioritize) products over process, safety over vulnerability, security and control over openness. We think of ourselves as pragmatists who are open and flexible, yet our pragmatism inclines us to regard shifting as being at best a means by which the fruits of settling are achieved. Shifting is a threat to what we have and who we take ourselves to be, and so we have a strong tendency to cling to ideas or practices we have settled into—even ideas and practices designed to promote change, growth, and openness! In other words, we feel more secure and comfortable with a tried and true “method” or “approach” for change and growth than if we had to step into uncharted terrains without maps or methods and surrender to the unknown.
Today we face unprecedented threats to our collective survival as species of this earth. With “threats,” I am, of course, referring to things like climate change, overpopulation, depletion of and ever more desperate competition for resources, and a global economic engine that depends on further depletion of resources and growth of population. Our pro-settling bias has us clinging to beliefs and positions that ensure continuance of the path we are currently on even if it is headed for disaster, at best allowing for superficial changes and band-aid solutions that may provide short-term gratification psychologically but without changing humanity's course substantially.

Thus the very technological-scientific-capitalistic society we have built to ensure our survival and thriving and in which our educational institutions are embedded are now threatening our survival and thriving. Put differently, the pro-settling bias which has us protecting ourselves against shifting is pushing us toward a shift of unprecedented magnitude. Confronting and resolving this bias seems necessary for the survival of nature and human civilization as we know it. But this involves confronting and resolving the very insistence we have on survival which is at the root of our pro-settling bias!

This is the ultimate paradox of our predicament. It calls for nothing less than transcending of ourselves as a species and our settled beliefs and values. Only a radically transformative education can offer a meaningful response to this challenge. The idea that education transforms consciousness is not new, but the specific kind of transformation our contemporary predicament as outlined above calls for is new. This transformation takes us from self-awareness of perspectives and the appreciation of a diversity of perspectives to freedom from perspectives altogether. The idea of such freedom is not itself new. It was envisioned by Jean Gebser (1985) in his notion of “aperspectival consciousness” which is not only aware of its own and others' perspectives but which sees through them and is thus not bound by them. Wilber (1995), inspired by Gebser's vision, incorporated “aperspectival” consciousness in his developmental schema as a stage which initiates genuine spiritual development beyond the “egoic” stages.

I want to suggest that consciousness or awareness free of perspective need not remain an abstract concept in a developmental theory but can be actualized and developed in a process of inquiry which shifts from awareness of perspective to awareness free of perspective. That is, instead of immediately pulling back to its own “givens” or settling into another perspective or set of “givens,” consciousness shifts into openness and remains in a state of openness—not, of course forever, but at least a few moments longer than it would have before the shift. In a manner of speaking, it develops tolerance for true openness which is different from a state of suspension between alternative perspectives or of integration of multiple perspectives into a more inclusive perspective. The vehicle for such development is what I call “perspective free inquiry.”

**Perspective-Free Inquiry**

We must begin with the foundational belief of pluralism, namely that inquiry always depends on a perspective or belief. This belief, of course, denies the possibility of perspective-free inquiry, stalling it *on a priori* grounds before it even got started. Now is it possible to inquire into this foundational belief afresh, without prejudice or bias? Recognizing the belief as just that—a belief—frees up the movement of consciousness for inquiry. But just as important is to refrain
from affirming the opposite belief, that inquiry is possible, lest the movement freezes again into an a priori stance.

A genuine inquiry begins with “not knowing” and proceeds in an openness which does not affirm or reject anything. So, we don't know whether perspective-free inquiry is possible. But we can inquire into it. This would be a reversal of the usual way we approach education: we bring inquiry from the background, the context of the particular content areas, into the foreground. In the usual way, primacy is given to the content areas and skills to be mastered, and inquiry is limited by the givens of the latter; whereas, when inquiry is the starting point and the very heart of the endeavor, it can be open and not limited by the assumptions of the contents and methods of an area of theory or research. It may be important to emphasize that I am not suggesting that acquiring knowledge competence or developing skills in research methods or therapy or teaching techniques is to be replaced by perspective-free inquiry, only that their order of epistemological priority be reversed. I am not the first to suggest such a reversal in education. For example, Montuori (2010, 2009, 2006) has called for it. There are interesting parallels and points of connection between his transdisciplinary inquiry and perspective-free inquiry as I am discussing here; for example, both transform the inquirer as the inquiry proceeds, and both are inherently creative. A full exploration of these parallels, however, must wait for another occasion.

Perspective-free inquiry is spontaneous and rigorous. Yet it has no agenda or objectives, and no end point or conclusion. In other words, it is not a method and it is not undertaken to get results. As noted earlier, we tend to feel more comfortable and affirmed in our professional identities with methods than with inquiry. For the latter is an undefined, open process which continually moves into the unknown and unravels the places of settling we cling to, including our methods.

This process, when engaged wholeheartedly and with complete attentiveness (Krishnamurti, 1969) fosters a mode of consciousness distinct from the perspectival consciousness involved thinking, whether conceptual, associative, or imaginal. Unlike the latter, which involve directional activity of the mind, the attentiveness in perspective-free inquiry is nondirectional or, rather, “all-directional” at once. It begins by moving into the “givens” of the situation—the various understandings and beliefs of the inquirer which, inevitably and often unconsciously, shape the inquiry and direct it, as if “from behind.” The inquiry thus proceeds backward as much as it proceeds forward, and it may spread out in all directions at once. Spaciousness is the distinctive quality of this mode of consciousness. It does not interpret or make meaning but renders transparent all meanings and interpretations and the perspectives from which they arise.

Such a spacious awareness is available to us, and we can dimly sense its presence in the horizon of consciousness as the space that holds and at the same time has the capacity to “see through” or make transparent the contents of consciousness. Usually, though, our attention is absorbed by the contents—the incessant stream of ideas, images, interpretations that fill up the space of our awareness. The power of this absorption puts us under a kind of a spell (Puhakka, 2003) which has us take the contents of our minds to be real and the awareness that holds and sees through them as unreal or nonexistent.
Both modes of consciousness, the mode of conceptual and imaginal thinking absorbed in its contents and the mode of spacious awareness that holds and sees through these, are recognized as sources of knowing in traditional Hindu and Buddhist spiritual psychologies. They are considered functions of the “lower mind” and of the “higher mind” respectively (Puligandla, 1975). The knowing function of spacious awareness is generally not recognized in Western mainstream psychology, though the beginnings of such a recognition are in evidence in the burgeoning research on mindfulness-based meditation practices which develop the capacity to “see” thoughts “as thoughts” rather than be absorbed in their contents, and to relax into a spacious, choice-less awareness. (Williams, et al. 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). However, so far the research has been concerned with the mental health benefits of such practices, for example, in reducing anxiety, depression or the suffering from chronic pain. Such an agenda imposes a limit on the knowing function of spacious awareness, for the inquiry goes only as far as is required for its objectives (symptom reduction, increased comfort and sense of wellbeing) to be achieved.

However, there is no limit as to how far or deep the knowing function of spacious awareness can be developed by an open inquiry which has no pre-given objectives. Because it is not a method, it can be extended from the meditation cushion out into the world of ideas and knowledge and into the world of other people. It can be undertaken by oneself or with others, as David Bohm (1987) explored in his group. However, while I appreciate the spirit of Bohm's approach, to fashion the inquiry after any model, even his, runs the risk of settling around a formula that will stymie a truly open inquiry. Perspective-free inquiry can start by simply attending to what arises in the moment. When attention is alert yet not shaped by agenda or objective, it naturally expands and feels its way through the ”givens” of consciousness, my own and my partner's in the inquiry, as well as those embedded in the domains of knowledge we study.

An inquiry carried out in this way does not freeze into a “position” or viewpoint which might contradict or oppose another position, nor does it accommodate other viewpoints or positions in the way that larger positions accommodate smaller or narrower ones. Thus, it does not dominate or totalize. Clearly, perspective-free inquiry is integral, yet very different from approaches such as Wilber's (2001). It tends to open up positions large and small into spacious awareness that renders the positions transparent without accepting or rejecting them and without privileging one over the other. The spacious awareness within which it moves allows for a more intimate way of relating and communicating across differences, even the deep ones that now separate pluralists and absolutists. This spacious awareness—it should be clear by now—is not an over-arching meta-perspective. Rather, it is freedom from perspectives; and herein lies its potential for healing our fragmented world without reducing its myriad ways and colorful differences into a dreary blend of sameness.

I hope that it is clear from the exposition of perspective-free inquiry above that awareness of perspective is a necessary starting point for it. We can thus say that pluralism and its celebration of diversity help open the windows of our separate perspectival worlds into other such worlds. Perspective-free inquiry then takes the next step and calls us out of those worlds into a creative play in the spaces within and around them.
Confronting Existential Anxiety

There is a great yearning for connection and for healing our fragmented selves and relationships today. So why don't we just drop the beliefs and perspectives that divide us? We probably would, were it not for the great existential anxiety which the prospect of dropping all beliefs and perspectives and opening ourselves to the unknown stirs within us. Such anxiety is the power behind our pro-settling bias and resistance to shifting.

Anxiety tends to divert energy and attention to efforts to cope, and as long as safety and security are an issue, change and growth tend not to happen. As Winnicott (1974) said (I am paraphrasing here), when the needs for safety, security, and nurturance remain an ongoing concern, the person can at best maintain “mere sanity” but not manifest his or her full psychological health and creativity. The caterpillar's metamorphosis requires the safety of the cocoon, and we imagine that the caterpillar is spared of the need to give any of its energy or attention to maintaining that safety.

How to deal with anxiety is a challenge for education in general when development and growth are the objectives. But it is an exponentially greater challenge for the kind of inquiry and transformation we are exploring here. For the existential anxiety evoked by the prospect of having no beliefs and perspectives—therefore, knowing nothing, even being nothing—is such that no safety and security measures we as teachers or as students can take will spare the inquirer of having to face it.

So we must face it. Facing anxiety takes courage. We don't talk much about courage in education these days, perhaps because we tend to be more concerned with accommodating our students' safety and security needs. But great visionaries of integral education such as Parker Palmer (2009) talk about courage. It takes courage and integrity to discover something one can truly believe in and have passion about, which is what Palmer's “courage work”, is concerned with. He works within a pluralistic framework, however, and so talks about the courage to stand up for one's deepest beliefs and convictions.

It takes a different kind of courage to stand up without belief or conviction, wholly open and vulnerable, exposed to the unknown both within and without. It is important to not confuse this kind of standing up with refusal to affirm a belief or conviction or with joining in affirming whatever beliefs or convictions others may voice. These can be, and often are, ways in which we withdraw and fail to stand up, fail to manifest courage.

To stand up and enter into an inquiry without any protection such as beliefs and convictions provide takes great courage. This is courage of the heart. In contemporary spiritual discourse we talk of the heart as the seat of compassion, caring, and love. Yet it seems to me that courage is what gives depth and transformative power to these qualities. How do we foster courage which is not separate from compassion and love in our students? The answer, it seems to me, has much to do with how we as educators awaken it in ourselves and embody it in our work. There is no formula or method for training ourselves or our students in courage of the heart. But we can inquire into it. When undertaken without belief or perspective but with open attentiveness, such inquiry may be all that is needed.
References


Connecting Thought and Action for Beginners: A Meditation on Integral Philosophy and Experiments in the Yoga of Love, Action, Knowledge

Maureen Dolan

Abstract: This paper has a two-fold purpose: to examine some of the main precepts in chosen works of Sri Aurobindo and Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri regarding the philosophical basis for integral understanding and to describe concrete ways to introduce the integral paradigm into practice in the U.S. within a particular undergraduate course titled Body, Mind, Spirit: Yoga and Meditation at DePaul University in Chicago. The introduction includes a brief description of the cultural milieu of 21st century American realities for adult students, identifying some of the conditions which can serve as impetuses to integral thought and action. The main text contains certain basic tenets of integral wisdom, which combine Eastern and Western thought in revolutionary ways, and examples from an introduction of integral yoga into higher education for adult learners. This can serve those who are just beginning to explore integral being and evolutionary action through intellectual, psychological, physical, and spiritual pursuits and those who already teach the integration of love-action-knowledge.

Keywords: Haridas Chaudhuri, integral yoga, integral education, integral philosophy, Sri Aurobindo.

Introduction

The true and full object and utility of Yoga can only be accomplished when the conscious Yoga...becomes, like the subconscious Yoga in Nature, outwardly conterminous with life itself and we can once more, looking out both on the path and the achievement, say in a more perfect and luminous sense: ‘All life is yoga.’” (Ghose, 1990a, p. 4)

We are presently living through some of the greatest transitions on the planet. These include: large ecosystem alterations of the earth (climate change and its effects); enormous societal changes (increased corporate globalization, resource wars, grassroots democratization, cross-
cultural exchanges); and transformations of individuals (in all aspects of thinking, doing, being). These systems changes are interdependent.

Modern complex conditions demand of us an unparalleled paradigm shift. The urgency rings clear for spiritual leadership and philosophical direction during these times and the task of educators is to prepare the ground for creative emergence of more integrated thought and action. The integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri can provide leadership for academic areas such as contemplative studies, consciousness studies, and transformative adult education.

The U.S. is characterized by a dominant culture steeped in strong individualism, dualistic thinking, reductionist approaches, consumerist materialism, hierarchical power structures, and propaganda which promotes violence as a solution to problems. The present worldwide economic, energy, and ecological crises have exposed the necessity for more holistic approaches to the problems of life. Agitations from the larger systems’ schismogenesis have increased the tensions in individual lives. People search for ways to make sense of their lives, feeling great hunger for spiritual renewal but still trapped in old ideas and conditioned habits.

Many people are coping with enormous changes by returning to school. Adults are returning to higher education to widen their economic opportunities but this action is also an invitation to expand philosophical understandings. Rarely do students at the initial stages recognize the transformational nature of the education process itself. However, the body of literature on adult transformative education is expanding rapidly to include more spiritual and multicultural perspectives (O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor, 2002; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Tisdell, 2003). In addition, a new body of literature regarding contemplative practices within education has emerged (Altobello, 2007; Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Rockefeller, 2006; Roth, 2006). Scientific studies also point to a more holistic approach to the development of consciousness and cognition (Maturana & Varela, 1991; Varela, 1999).

Filled with family obligations, stresses from work and unemployment, and unaccustomed intellectual challenges, the circumstances of adult student lives can present difficulties. In addition, lack of health insurance for millions of Americans and detrimental U.S. lifestyle habits contribute to unhealthy, “dis-eased” students. Students have largely been trained to: hurriedly multi-task rather than concentrate; employ subject/object dichotomy in dualistic framing of themselves, the world, and knowledge; obey in hierarchical work structures rather than freely create; and separate body from mind from spirit. People are taught a distinctly undemocratic, fragmented way to be with their own entities and within society. These proclivities, combined with other obstacles, make learning in higher education settings problematic.

Restless bodies, agitated minds, and forgotten spirits need to be addressed in the process of education. Intellectual progress can no longer be separated from psychological, physical, and spiritual realities. Direct facing of the fragmentation problem can be turned into lessons for real self-finding (and world-finding) for students when combined with new learning through yoga. Yoga is an entranceway into necessary epistemological and philosophical shifts. Yoga is a metaphor for life’s unity. Yoga is life and life is yoga.
Even though integral yoga goes beyond the hatha yoga of India and the popular westernized versions, physical yoga sets the conditions for quieting the minds of students. This prepares the ground for the planting of integral philosophy seeds. A few stretches, some breathing techniques, and meditation methods can open up possibilities for a wider acceptance of integral yoga concepts.

**Philosophical Principles**

It is when we are guided from the very beginning with an integral view of Being to its multidimensional fullness that we can hope to understand philosophically the total truth as the identity of change and permanence, of the temporal and the eternal.” (Chaudhuri, 1974, pp. 86-87)

Before illustrating applications of integral yoga, some basics of integral philosophy require exploration. The philosophical principles addressed here include: the nature of being and unity with the divine; non-dualistic thinking in the heart of yoga; emergence of the feminine principle; and evolution in love-action-knowledge.

**The Nature of Being and Unity with the Divine**

Being is on the one hand cosmic energy and on the other formless eternity, self luminosity, formless being, cosmic consciousness, unitive consciousness, creative void, unfathomable mystery, self-light of the eternal, mysterious self-light of Being, evolutionary urge of Being ...Whereas consciousness is an emergent value, the self-light of the eternal is the primordial reality. (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 41)

In his writings, Sri Aurobindo elucidated the unity of Shankara’s *transcendent being* with the Buddha’s *non-being*. The nature of beingness, described in philosophical discourse by Western writers, is similar to Sri Aurobindo’s yogic unity with the Divine (Ghose, 1990a). The conceptions of the divine as transcendent, as immanent in all of that exists, and as a personal God are three ways to experience the multi-dimensional beingness. While Chaudhuri employs the western philosophers’ language of “Being” and “the Absolute,” Sri Aurobindo explicitly and continuously used the word “Divine.”

The integral notion of being/divine goes beyond what the ancients had proclaimed because not only the ultimate ground of all being is realized, but also its dynamic nature is accented. Integral yoga provides the steps for a more perfect unity with life. The aspiration for knowing our essential nature must first be in the heart of the seeker and surrender to the divine or truth is a prerequisite to this knowledge. Practices can develop the full surrender of ego in order to bring about the bliss of this mystical knowledge. Purely intellectual approaches for understanding ontological reality are insufficient. Both Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri have written with many references to the development of ontological ideas and metaphors in both the eastern and

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2 Editors’ note: These terms are not capitalized in the remainder of the essay to be consistent with the journal’s publishing style.
western traditions. However, the fullness of the experience is a spiritual, not an intellectual realization.

Spiritual experiential learning promotes the dissolving of separative ego consciousness when enhanced by a call to participate in the infinite. This connection to enlarged beingness also diminishes fear and insecurities. It is a way to become familiar with immortality in the present (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 139). The thrill of experiencing the impermanence of being is not the goal of integral yoga, however. This non-temporal understanding needs to be combined with the fullest flowering of the psychic, intellectual, and other potentialities of human existence for the purpose of participating in co-creation of a better world, for cooperation in the divine unfolding through history.

Non-Dualistic Thinking in the Heart of Yoga

The fundamental requirement of our present age is to enlarge and enrich the nondualistic outlooks with a creative sense of history. A harmonious blending of eastern nondualism and western historicism can provide a comprehensive philosophy of life such as can inspire the future progress of civilization. (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 22)

One of the greatest gifts that the culture of India has bestowed upon the world is the philosophical concept of non-dualism. In integral philosophy, this non-dualism reaches a new height. The heart of this is the unity of eternal beingness with an evolutionary unfolding. Under the huge umbrella of integral thought, we find the dialectical combinations of idealism and pragmatism, spirituality and science, mysticism and evolutionism, formless being and forms, essence and existence, the ultimate ground and multidimensional reality, change and permanence, the temporal and the eternal, subject and object, the knower and the known.

Non-dualistic thinking is a particularly difficult concept for Westerners to accept. A big part of this comes from the orientation of Eurocentric culture and the depth in which we are all trained to think in “either/or” rather than “both/and” categories. Another reason is the artificial division between means and ends. To fully grasp both distinctions and their unities, one needs to experience an embodiment of non-dualistic thinking. Chaudhuri refers to this as a “spiritual breakthrough” (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 30). Without non-dualistic thinking it is difficult, if not impossible to grasp the full nature of being in pure eternal, dynamic universal, and individual manifestations.

The Emergence of the Feminine Principle

*There are four fundamental principles of creative existence: aspiration, action, meditation, and love* (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 89).

One of the most profound contributions that Sri Aurobindo made in his philosophy was the importance that he gave to the feminine principle (Ghose, 1990b, pp. 724-753; Ghose, 1995a). His spiritual knowledge allowed him to see a future unfolding where there would be a rise in: women’s greater participation in all aspects of life; incorporation of feminine qualities into all
humans in a more balanced way than had been seen in thousands of years; and spiritual renewal across cultures stressing devotion to the Goddess as Divine.

During the later part of the 20th century, the recognitions of feminine qualities such as feeling, receptivity, subjectivity, multiplicity, nurturing, cooperation, intuition, relatedness and social responsibility have come alive in practically all academic disciplines, in all aspects of life, and across cultures. That is not to say that their full power has been unleashed or that there is not great resistance to this evolutionary move, but the signs of a huge cultural transformation are underway (Eisler, 1987; Schiebinger, 1999; Shepherd, 1993; Shiva, 1989). Sri Aurobindo’s partnership with the Mother (as embodied in Mirra Alfassa) and as the name for the Divine Feminine, his writings on the spiritual reality of Shakti energy, his sadhana work (spiritual discipline) to bring the descent of the unity of Shakti (feminine God-consciousness) and Shiva (masculine God-consciousness) power paved the way.

The thinking and practices of our human society have been hampered by gendered domination with overemphasis on rationalistic, mechanistic, and reductionist thinking. Sri Aurobindo has referred to the zig zag of our evolution prior to the 20th century as evolution in Ignorance, characterized by separation, but now humanity has the possibility of evolution through Knowledge, characterized by yoga or union.

The growing strength of the feminine principle creates the conditions for a wider surrender to the infinite, as well as real progress on a number of fronts, including a leap in our evolutionary development. But there still exists a great understimation of how the absence of the feminine has distorted knowledge acquisition on many fronts. Where the masculine bias goes unrecognized (within both men and women), the truth of nature and humanity’s essence are clouded over in ignorance and the impact is wide and deep. Dominator bias forms the basis for an inability to view the “other” as connected to self, promotes dualistic thinking, blocks the appreciation of the vast diversity of beingness in nature, and hampers receptivity to the divine. Ignorance of the feminine principle holds back our ecological sustenance and our evolutionary potential.

The entrance of many women into different walks of life during the 20th and 21st centuries and their needed participation in the move toward emancipatory evolution appear to have been premonitions in siddhis (spiritual gifts) that Sri Aurobindo brought forth in his decades-long spiritual practices. Sri Aurobindo’s appeal to women spiritual seekers can in large part be attributed to his explicit elucidation of the importance of the divine feminine, the embrace of the Mother, and the incorporation of qualities that we attribute to the feminine side of humanity (Ghose, 1995a). For example, he wrote on human intuition and how this quality opens the possibilities for the divine force to enter (Ghose, 1990a, pp. 769-780).

The advances that have been made in human knowledge by use of the feminine principles are now being recognized across disciplines. Both men and women are seeing the world with new eyes in biology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and other knowledge bases by employing a greater reflexivity; a sensitivity to context and cultural bias; respect for the ethic of cooperation with nature; promotion of humanitarian values; and the embrace of diversity and equality in varied communities. For the first time, women constitute the majority of undergraduates now in
the U.S., a sign of Shakti energy moving within us (Ghose, 1990a). The shift from domination to partnership is taking on more urgency (Eisler, 2002). The unity of masculine and feminine qualities opens a new window for evolutionary development with wide ramifications for how we move forward in the 21st century.

Evolution in Love-Action-Knowledge

The ancient idea of evolution was the fruit of a philosophical intuition, the modern is an effort of scientific observation. Each as enounced misses something, but the ancient got at the spirit the movement where the modern is content with a form and the most external machinery. (McDermott, 1987, p. 70)

The marriage of eastern mystical gnosis of the divine with western advances in understanding evolution was a world-historic transformation in philosophical thought. Sri Aurobindo successfully combined these in the beginning of the 20th century.

The nontemporal is without doubt the most fundamental aspect of reality. It is the ultimate ground of existence...It is no doubt the foundation of existence. But existence has also its superstructure of ever-emergent values in the historical medium. The absolute can therefore be no less than the unity of the non-temporal and the historical. It is Being in its multidimensional fullness. (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 104)

This recognition opened the gateway toward a more profound understanding of unity with the divine and the participation of humanity in conscious evolution.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Chaudhuri explained the reconciliation of inner spiritual truth with human outer action. Drawing on the knowledge from the Bhagavad-Gita and Vedanta, his own investigations into modern advances in science and psychology, and the sadhana union with the divine, Sri Aurobindo formulated the love-knowledge-action integration in a unique way and Chaudhuri found ways to apply it to late 20th century thought and action (Ghose, 1990a, 1990b, 1995b; Chaudhuri, 1965, 1974, 1977; McDermott, 1987). Combining the yogas of *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotional love), and *karma* (work and action), Sri Aurobindo offered an amalgamation which far surpassed what had been taught in the East or West on the spirit of humanity, the nature of the absolute, and the evolution of consciousness.

The whole point of self-transcendence is not just seen for individual liberation but for the transformation of humanity through new consciousness and the use of divine love in evolution. This revolutionary worldview is about universalizing ourselves with divinity/being in order to bring forth more love, more knowledge and more action in the service of all. Integral yoga is an invitation for greater freedom and greater responsibility because we become co-creators with the divine. In this sense, the integral philosophy opens us not only to individual spiritual transition but also to species transformation.

The understandings which Sri Aurobindo articulated on evolution of the mind stand as examples of that very evolution as well as pathways for others to follow Chaudhuri’s leadership...
in both philosophy and education illustrate that collective progress and individual progress are interdependent in the field of love-action-knowledge.

**Beginning Applications of Integral Yoga**

Integral yoga may be defined as the art of harmonious and creative living. It stresses the need for the balanced growth of personality; for constructive development of the latent possibilities of one’s nature; and for their employment in the service of mankind and such higher values as truth, justice, freedom, peace and progress. (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 37)

I teach at DePaul University which has as part of its mission the intention to educate urban, immigrant, and historically excluded populations. Many students are in the first generation of their families to attend college. While there are some economically privileged students, quite a few students come from war-torn countries and from the U.S. working class. Many older students have endured and/or resisted sexist and racist societal practices. Some students are recovering from addiction abuse and some are rebuilding lives after war service in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Two-thirds of students are women and several classes have been, in majority, people of color. They come from diverse faith traditions and many with no religious affiliation. All are weary from the present economic shocks and want to make sense of their life experiences. They hunger for spiritual sustenance. Integral yoga can feed this hunger: “… integrating body, mind, spirit for the greater participation of the Spirit in terrestrial life becomes an important objective of Integral Yoga. To manifest the Divine in humanity…is the whole point of Yoga (Singh, 2008, p. 52).

Since the course teaches both science and spirituality, we discuss how western culture has compartmentalized knowledge. Students also make distinctions on what is culturally learned and what is natural to humans. Talks in class bring forth the differentiation between religion and spirituality and the key unity underlying all spiritualities is explored.

Of all yogas, hatha is the most popular in the U.S., largely due to its appeal to the physical in a society so steeped in materialist aspects. Hatha yoga consists of a growing number of styles with varying use of meditation, and with teachers who span a wide spectrum from barely knowledgeable to very educated teachers imbued with a spiritually integral base. About sixteen million Americans have taken up yoga; its acceptance of its followers as a subculture in this country is a given. In the hundred years of its development within the U.S. and its increased availability in all sectors, yoga has served to break down some cultural barriers.

In Americans, well-schooled in ethnocentric and xenophobic ideologies, participation in hatha yoga proves that there are bodies of knowledge that come from other cultures and times. The limitations of this particular yoga, however, include: overemphasis on the physical; overemphasis on individual liberation; and separation from the other yogas and its spiritual base.

The *Body, Mind, Spirit* course consists of ten three-hour classes. The first hour takes place in a chapel with practice of yoga postures, breathing techniques, meditation methods, and journal writing. I read portions of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* as students rest in *savasana* (relaxation).
(Shearer, 2002). In each class, our actions are offered up to the infinite — in whatever form that holds meaning for participants. Some people give their intentions to Jesus or to God, Buddha, Allah, Goddess, Yahweh, truth, healing, or peace. Throughout Chapel sessions, I remind students to: practice non-violence; unite with the Infinite; yoke together body, mind, spirit; breathe deeply; act in order to know; engage in self-healing; be present in the moment; hold an image of divine within; experience the unity of flexibility and strength, relaxation and tension, change and permanence; and open the heart.

After a break, students resume work in the classroom for group discussions and presentations. Course objectives include the development of proficiencies in: exploration of a model of spiritual development and its application; understanding the interrelationships among intellectual, psychological, spiritual, and physical health in one’s life; descriptions, categorizations, and explanations of change within human biological systems; and assessment of health care practices based on an understanding of the biological and social factors that contribute to health.

Each student reads a short inspirational passage or prayer of peace to open and close the classroom portions. These “inspirations” demonstrate the vast diversity of human insights and cultural meaning-making which can open the heart to fuller embrace of the Divine and serve to concretize what Haridas Chaudhuri expressed:

The different peoples of the world do indeed exist by being closely related to one another…essentially interdependent. They are inseparably associated members of the cosmic whole. They live, move and have their being in one indivisible cosmic medium. An active realization of this truth produces cosmic integration. (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 87)

Small groups work on presentations which educate on the systems of the body/mind/spirit complex and the ways yoga can contribute to health and connect to the Infinite. Final papers serve to consolidate the learning in both reflection and research.

“There are three essential ingredients in the realization of complete self-integration: psychic integration, cosmic integration, and existential integration” (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 83). Psychic integration includes recognition of the vastness of the unconscious and discovering ways to bring the unexamined shadow sides of ourselves forth in order to integrate the human personality (Shirazi, 2010). To that end, journal writing is encouraged (both in specific time periods within class and also at home on a regular basis) to draw out observations of the self after the experience of yoga postures, breathing, meditations, studying, and participating in group projects.

For those who are just beginning to come to some understanding of integral knowledge, the discovery of unconscious limitations and biases is of utmost importance. Most Americans do not understand how their ideas and behaviors have been shaped in social construction by cultural models. Experiential yoga learning and self-study reflections reveal unconscious patterns and uncover what has been covered. I collect the journals to read and meditate upon each one before providing a reflective commentary. The unconscious is addressed by providing a sacred space for the beginning half of the class in the Chapel where the practices of yogic postures, breathing, and meditation take place. In particular, there are certain practices which appeal to the unconscious.
For example, *The Healing Journey*, has proven to be very effective as an experiential exploration (Shraddhananda, 2003).

The classroom portion includes a circle of chairs. The environmental structure of the learning venue can have a powerful impact on the unconscious, as well as the consciousness in individuals, as Chaudhuri pointed out: “The truth is that consciousness is a much wider category than rational thinking” (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 37).

Cosmic consciousness, which links the individual with all of nature and the divine, is a difficult concept for those so ingrained by American individualism. Therefore, partnership exercises are of utmost importance, an essential component to get a feel for unity of all and beginning notions of our essential interdependence. Incorporation of yoga partner poses allows students to embody trust and negotiation skills necessary for partnering on projects in class. In a society where distrust is rampant under the domination model, the creation of partner poses gives the opportunity for a completely different experience of “the other.”

Cooperative work in research assignments for presentations also underscores the necessary reliance on each other for knowledge creation. Interdependence is necessary for balance in body/mind/spirit. The course work provides constant reminders of interconnectedness within systems: tying together love for oneself, others, devotion to the infinite; individual intellectual pursuits in research combined with cooperative sharing of knowledge; and importance of taking action and seeing how one’s actions have impact on others through partnership poses, small group work, and community involvement.

Cosmic recognitions also come in the form of two particular healing meditations. One is the chakra meditation done in pairs where one person gently places fingers on the spine of another person. The person sitting in back slowly, gently moves the fingers up the spine through the seven major chakras (energy centers) while meditating on healing energy. The person in front meditates on receiving healing energies. It takes about 10-15 minutes and then the students switch places.

Another healing meditation is the “Sound Bath” where one person is situated comfortably in savasana in the middle of a close circle of other students. The person in the center meditates on receiving the group’s healing energies. The group chants vowel sounds in a continual flow of *aaah, eee, iii, oo, uu* which grows in strength, diversity, and fluidity. Members of the circle meditate on sending healing energies through sound to the person in the center.

While these particular meditation techniques are designed to enhance partnership practice and cosmic realization, they also serve to cultivate individual mindfulness and loving attention.

Given the dominant culture’s recursively reinforced attitudes and behaviors of individualism, competition, disjunctive learning, reductionist thought, these practices provide embodiment of alternative views. The strength of the dominator paradigm, with its accompanying Eurocentric focus, in American society requires intense opportunities for immersion in partnership skill-building.
Without adequate stillness of mind, unity with the ground of existence remains elusive. This existential reality cannot be approached through the intellect or the senses but requires a transcendent experience. First, there must be a desire to unite with that larger beingness and then there must be the conditions set for this unity. Spiritual practices come in many shapes and forms to allow for this opening. Chaudhuri outlined several methods of meditation (Chaudhuri, 1965, pp. 117-155).

Integral philosophers point to what has to be healed: “Consequently, the divide that exists between spirit and matter, between spirituality and science, between arts and spirituality, between philosophical and practical life, between religious and mundane, between sacred and profane, needs to be healed” (Singh, p. 74). The first steps in the spiritualization process are not only possible but in evidence from many of the over 600 students engaged in this learning thus far and hatha yoga proves to be a good entranceway. As Dr. Chaudhuri pointed out body consciousness is the foundation for our evolving spiritual life (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 188).

Each class can be roughly viewed in thirds of varying numbers. Perhaps, a third of the people have already made progress on spiritualizing their lives and seek refined teachings as they prepare for a leap in their own evolutionary progress. These students take hold of integral concepts and embrace participation in evolution through the unity of love, action, knowledge. They already embody a more integral approach to life with an understanding of the transcendental, immanent, and personal experience of the divine and see themselves as vehicles for dynamic creative energy.

A middle third have been conscious of their spiritual searches but not yet disciplined enough to make steady progress. Their work may lift them to the level of those who entered at a higher level. The combinations of learning styles through body work, intellectual research, reflective self-observation contribute to deep practice immersion. The final third begin with relatively closed minds/hearts but gain some benefits at the physical or intellectual levels. These students, depending on adherence to practices, may open their hearts.

For each student, the awakening experienced through meditative practices, intellectual research, and collaborative work is quite unique. For each, the seeds of an integral view take root in different ways and at an individualized pace. The duty of the teacher is to be attentive to the particular journey of each seeker. This includes dialogic discussions in class; guidance during the yoga portions; personalized feedback on journals, presentations, papers; individualized correspondence through emails and phone calls; and mindfulness of the teacher’s own practices as example and as instrument for transformation. As Sri Aurobindo said: “All teaching is a revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process” (quoted in McDermott, 1987, p. 142).

Students learn by placing their own subjective experiences into wider contexts, becoming their own experiments in evolutionary consciousness. The goals of integral yoga include integration and transformative experience within the context of an evolving “embodied consciousness” (Shirazi, 2010). It is not just new experience through yoga but also the reflexivity on the process which leads to learning. Action and reflection on action helps dissolve the constructed personality and illuminate the spirit (McDermott, 1987, p. 66).
The advent of unity in subjective/objective reality and the increasing accent on reflexivity in higher education sets the stage for greater changes. As Sri Aurobindo so aptly said:

…the most important element…is the unpreparedness, the unfitness of the society or of the common mind…which is always the chief stumbling block…for even if the condition of society and the principle and rule that govern society are opposed to the spiritual change, even if these belong almost wholly to the vital, to the external, the economic, the mechanical order…yet if the common human mind has begun to admit the ideas proper to the higher order…and the heart of man has begun to be stirred by aspirations born of these ideas, then there is hope of some advance in the not distant future. And here the first essential sign must be the growth of the subjective idea of life, - the idea of the soul, the inner being, its powers, its possibilities, its growth, its expression and the creation of a true, beautiful and helpful environment for it. (quoted in McDermott, 1987, p. 194)

The diverse cultural mix of the class and the varying levels illustrate the multiplicity inherent in our human condition and in our search for meaning. This helps call forth in each student a love for the multidimensional nature of our existence and promotes a way of seeing “both/and” rather than “either/or.” The course combines affective, cognitive, and physical approaches to learning because the intellectual level alone cannot grasp these deep concepts.

**Conclusion**

The aim of the yoga is to open consciousness to the divine and to live in the inner consciousness more and more while acting from it on the external life, to bring the inmost psychic into the front and by the power of the psychic to purify and change the being so that it may become ready for transformation and be in union with the Divine Knowledge, Will and Love. (McDermott, 1987, p.91)

The resolution to organize one’s life around spiritual values, spontaneous outpouring of freedom in acts that promote the evolution of humankind, cultivation of meditative practices, and embodiment of cosmic love form the core principles of integral work. This is a tall task but it is our road to freedom, as Chaudhuri explained: “Spiritual freedom in its fullness is neither an abstraction nor a transcendent flight…It is the unity of knowledge, love and fruitful action…Action, love, wisdom, and peace are equally important elements in such self-integration” (Chaudhuri, 1965, pp. 76-77). Combining meditation and action leads to compassion and illumination (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 141).

The works of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri stand as glowing advances in philosophical analysis and spiritual experience. With poetic phrasing Sri Aurobindo gave profound expositions of the integral view which provide a deep feeling-state with each reading. Each chapter can provoke intellectual challenge and spiritual awakening. Using excerpts from books such as *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine* can help inspire and guide teachers on the integral path. Chaudhuri’s works built on Sri Aurobindo’s integral views and are especially helpful to those schooled in western philosophical thought.
Sri Aurobindo did not want to promote dogmatic following; he knew diverse methods can lead to the goals of integral understanding. Both Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri wrote very explicitly on the benefits and limitations of the various yogas (Ghose, 1990a; Chaudhuri, 1965). My experiments with integral yoga are just one way to introduce integral concepts in a learning environment. We can charge ourselves with the task of contributing innovations and expansions in integral knowledge in accordance with Sri Aurobindo:

An integral…yoga needs especially not to be bound…for while it embraces the knowledge received from the past, it seeks to organize it anew for the present and the future. An absolute liberty of experience and of restatement of knowledge in new terms and new combinations is the condition of its self-formation. (McDermott, 1987, p.144)

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Integral Intelligence: A 21 Century Necessity

Anne Adams

Abstract: This article explores the critical role education plays in the attitudes, behaviors, results produced, and ultimately our every day experiences of our world. Integral education is introduced as a catalyst for transformation, moving our emphasis in education from gathering knowledge to growing consciousness. Expanding awareness provides a paradigm shift from epistemology to ontology, which would fundamentally alter where our attention is focused, from having and doing to being—providing an opening to directly experience ourselves as the creators of our reality.

Keywords: complexity, epistemology, inquiry, integral education, integral intelligence, integral worldview, ontology, paradigm, transformation, wisdom, vicious cycle, virtuous cycle.

Introduction

The intent of this article is to utilize an integral viewpoint to look at our world and bring a quality of awareness that has yet to be fully distinguished. An integral perspective is committed to weave together the seemingly isolated, fragmented and disconnected phenomena that take place in our world, in a manner that allows for seeing with new eyes. It encircles horizontally and is at the same time deeply rooted vertically. When people experience and understand how different occurrences connect together to create a full picture, it changes the way they think, act, speak, and listen, and the way they view the world—a larger picture becomes apparent and their relationship to that image is made clearer.

A number of areas will be addressed in the following pages regarding the current educational approach in the United States and the quality of the world it creates and perpetuates, as seen from various vantage points, e.g., scholars, educators, students. Integral Education is presented as a model of our future education with its commitment to educating for an integral worldview.
Quality of Education = Quality of World

The premise of this paper is: we get what we educate. The world we live in, feel, and observe around us is directly correlated to our educational experiences. What is happening in our world and our responses to it, whether it is close—as in family, friends, school, community or city—or farther away—as in state, nation, region or globe—reflects the context, content and practices of our education. The focus of this article is an inquiry into the nature of our world and the impact our way of educating has on that world. The United States and its approach to education are highlighted and extrapolations can be made to other countries.

This article is an invitation to its readers to an inquiry of the highest order: to engage in questions around the quality of world being created by the kind of education we are providing ourselves and our young people. If our education is the foundation for our future, what is the quality of future we are living into given our current approach to education? What is going on in our world, in business, in our communities, in our religious institutions, and throughout our educational institutions... in our collective consciousness, how we think, the quality of that thinking, how we feel, about ourselves and each other, the way we relate to one another, what we think is important, our values, etc.?

There is an active conversation among educators, scientists, policy makers, the media, parents, government, and business people about the role education should play in preparing people to live successfully in a complex world. Practitioners in many disciplines are divided over this role, and offer an either/or approach; e.g., either “we must produce more graduates in science, math and technology,” or “simply adding analytical skills to traditional curricula would be wholly insufficient to convey a general understanding of complex phenomena;” or “modern sciences fail to acknowledge the complexity of the real world, and foster a misleading certainty of expectations that leads people to pursue simple solutions for complex problems, and to discount contrarian ideas and ‘inconvenient truths’” (Abeles, 2010, pp. 2-3).

Our world is increasing in complexity exponentially. It involves many intricate parts that require an ability to make linkages; e.g., bringing the seemingly unrelated to a place of relationship and connection. This complexity of new technologies, diverse cultures/belief systems intermingling, internet/information access, media proliferation, international economic and political interdependencies; globalization of businesses, cultures, awareness, connections; the reinvention of the family constellation, education, politics, religions, and so on, has multifaceted everything. “Our culture is in a constant state of change and evolution” (Robinson, 2001, p.176).

The 21st century complex world demands an integral approach, one that encompasses seeming paradoxes with a both/and viewpoint—a complete transformation of our established epistemology. A new paradigm is required now which is gradually emerging, representing the beginnings of a true transformation in the way we think and act. Susanne Langer, an American scholar of the philosophy of mind, captures it with this imagery:
A new idea is a light that illuminates things that simply had no form for us before the light fell on them and gave them meaning. We turn the light here, there, and everywhere the limits of thought recede before it” (as cited in Robinson, 2001, p. 73).

The intent of this paper is to shine that quality of light on our world today.

The Void in Education

Sri Aurbindo, the Indian spiritual philosopher, educator, and activist saw the evolutionary turmoil humankind was undergoing in the 20th century. In his writings and teachings he spoke about the quality of society being manifest: “Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage” (Ghose, 1976, pp. 1053-1055).

Three decades later he is echoed by Ervin Laszlo, a philosopher of science, a systems and evolution theorist, and integral thinker. “We are in a spiritual crisis at the moment. We need to upgrade and update our consciousness. Our technology has evolved faster than our spirits have; we need a spiritual revolution” (Laszlo, 2005).

Peter Senge (2004), an MIT professor, system theorist, and consultant to businesses, adds his agreement in his most recent book, Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future, “…the industrial age school continues to expand, largely unaffected by the realities of children growing up in the present day” (p. 7). The task of encouraging thoughtful, knowledgeable, compassionate global citizens in the twenty-first century is not being addressed consistently with the world we are living into. These educator/scholars are joined by many other voices.

Robert J. Sternberg, professor of psychology and education at Yale University and director of its Center for the Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise, is committed to educating for wisdom:

I do believe that we need to rethink our goals in education. Increased academic skills may be necessary for many kinds of success, but they are not sufficient. Students need something more. We need to teach students not only knowledge but also how to use that knowledge well, e.g., thinking wisely and encouraging students to develop their own values while understanding multiple points of view. Teaching for wisdom recognizes that there are certain values—honesty, sincerity, doing toward others as you would have them do toward you—that are shared the world over by the great ethical systems of many cultures. (Sternberg, 2002, pp. 1-3)

Sternberg also stresses balance: “students learn to include their own interests with those of others and those of larger entities, like their school, their community, their country, even God” (p. 2).

Sir Ken Robinson, author, speaker, and international advisor on education, also “challenges the way we're educating our children and champions a radical rethink of our school systems, to cultivate creativity and acknowledge multiple types of intelligence” (Robinson, 2010). One of his major contributions is continuing to explore the importance of creativity in the educational
system and its link to the economy of a country. To the question, “Why don't we get the best out of people?” he retorts:

It’s because we've been educated to become good workers, rather than creative thinkers. Students with restless minds and bodies—far from being cultivated for their energy and curiosity—are ignored or even stigmatized, with terrible consequences. We are educating people out of their creativity. (Robinson, 2010, Ted Talks).

**Uncovering Vicious Cycles**

A vicious cycle is a complex series of events, which reinforces itself through feedback loops. Each iteration of the cycle reinforces the previous sequence, ultimately leading to detrimental results. It is a situation in which the solution to one problem creates a chain of problems, each making it more difficult to solve the original one. The cycle will continue in the direction of its momentum until an external factor intervenes and breaks the series. Our current way of educating has created many vicious cycles. Inquiring into our system of education is about shining a bright enough light so the unseen can be given the quality of form necessary to illuminate the meaning sufficiently to unravel the vicious cycle.

In 2011, the world we live in is no longer rooted in the economic model of industrialism and the intellectual model of academicism. Both are outdated and inadequate to what is needed today (Robinson, 2001, p. 23). This leads to an education curriculum that is separated from the real world and less relevant to being successful in the real world. And, everything inside this vicious cycle, e.g., the teachers, administrators, parents, students and the public, more often than not, continues to reinforce one another.

Teachers teach inside of, and are assessed using criteria within, this outmoded paradigm; parents want their children to succeed inside this outmoded paradigm, schools and universities want funding inside this outmoded paradigm, students either want to achieve and continue in the outmoded paradigm, or they drop out in many different forms, which is becoming more often the case, e.g., from 23% in 1969, to 31% in 2007—46% of black students, 44% Latinos, and 49% Native American did not graduate in recent years (Khadaroo, 2010).

The public often continues the cycle with ignorance, denial, confusion, complacency, reactivity and/or righteousness. As Mahler puts it:

…false dichotomies seem to have replaced fruitful conversation.
If you support the teachers union, you don’t care about the students.
If you are critical of the teachers union, you don’t care about the teachers.
If you are in favor of charter schools, you are opposed to public schools.
If you believe in increased testing, you are on board with the corruption of our liberal society’s most cherished values.
If you are against increased testing, you are against accountability.
It goes on and on. Neither side seems capable of listening to the other. (Mahler, 2011, p. 9)
Trying to change things inside of a disintegrating paradigm provides nothing; the system needs to be reinvented (Robinson, 2001).

Because of its nature, the vicious cycle is very difficult to see or grasp. There are so many “feedback loops, with each iteration of the cycle reinforcing the previous,” it acts like a haze that covers what is there …it seems impossible to really get one’s hands around it sufficiently to get the traction to take definitive action, e.g., “academics gets confused with education and qualifications with abilities” (Robinson, 2001, p. 57). “The high-stakes testing movement, for example, seems to emphasize knowledge acquisition much more than the socially desirable use of that knowledge” (Sternberg, 2002, p. 2).

There are very deeply seated beliefs, assumptions, and values, which stem from before the Renaissance about what it means to be educated and which we continue to take for granted—we come to think of our views of this reality as, “the way it is” or “common sense.” “The relationships between our education and the world we actually live in are being stretched to breaking point and they need now to be entirely rethought” (Robinson, 2001, p. 93).

Vicious cycles also show up in how we value our education, the amount of money we are willing to pay our key influencers of our children’s educational experiences; we allow mediocrity to go unaccounted for, e.g., the lack of interest in creating mutual accountability throughout our educational institutions. We spend more money on prisons than schools, “six times the amount” (Lehrer, 2011) and we compensate our professional sports players abundantly more (between 3 and 20 times) than the keepers of the keys to our future. We fund weaponry and wars before excellence in education. At least 200 billion dollars more is spent on war than education (Conetta, 2010) & (US Department of Education, 2010). These examples all indicate a way of thinking that is worthy of our inquiry.

How do we relate to our media and the role it plays in creating our educational experience of our world? Watching television, entertainment, sports and music events, advertising, listening to radio…what is the quality of the communications to people? What “world” are they creating? How well do these mediums continue the vicious cycle? Where does the cycle start …and end, or does it ever? Is it our education which brings us to thinking in a particular way, or is it our culture, our families, our government, politics, religious affiliations, the media, …”the way everyone else thinks,” that has us believe that this is the way is should be? Is this a great example of the vicious cycle in action? Our education and our culture continually reinforce each other without external intervening factors that break the cycle.

Current US Education Approach

Tony Wagner, past Director of the Change Leadership Group at Harvard University’s graduate school of education and author of the seminal book, The Global Achievement Gap, addresses many vicious cycles in education. His book is filled with data from interviews with teachers, students, parents, and business people, and observations of schools and university teacher education classrooms. He spent time in the "best" schools with the highest SAT scores and found students more focused on a “right answer” than creative reflection and serious inquiry. J. King, an MIT professor remarked about students who have top scores in Advanced Placement
courses, “They don’t know how to observe.” When asked to describe what they see, “They want to know what they should be looking for—what the right answer is” (Wagner, 2008, p. 7).

Deborah Meier, professor at NYU’s Steinhardt School of Education agrees: “We’ve also left precious little space in school for our youngsters to ask serious questions that have no "right" or "wrong" answers” (Meier, 2010). The mood in the classrooms Wagner observed was mechanical, students unreflective and rigid in their responses to questions. Teachers were teaching to a “core curriculum,” (standardized tests) with much memorization, methods that “are quickly becoming an epidemic in our nation’s schools” (Wagner, 2008, p. 59).

Students’ relationship with learning felt stilted, linear, and detached. Diane Ravitch, Research Professor in Education at NYU and educational historian adds her agreement to that of Wagner, Meier, Sternberg, and Robinson cited above, “The schools will surely be failures if students graduate knowing how to choose the right option from four bubbles on a test, but unprepared to lead fulfilling lives, to be responsible citizens, and to make good choices for themselves, their families, and our society” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 1).

Stephanie Pace Marshall, internationally acknowledged educator, in her book The Power to Transform, critiques the current approach to education in the United States by asserting that our current patterns, processes, and structures of schooling are not designed to ignite our children’s joy, intellectual energy, and imagination. She believes that this is because they are conceived and framed within a context of scarcity, deficiency, and fragmentation, rather than a dynamic or integrative approach that would enable our children to engage with passion in exploring their real questions about life (Marshal, 2006).

Teacher education is another major contributor to the vicious cycle. Arthur Levine, the former president of Columbia University Teachers’ College, in two highly influential studies of teacher education, found many students graduate without the skills and knowledge they need to be effective teachers. Sixty-two percent of responses, (alumni and students) report schools of education do not prepare their graduates to cope with the realities of today’s classrooms. According to Levine,

…education school faculty’s lack understanding of the current challenges in schools and classrooms….the experience of faculty were not recent or long enough,… lessons are often out of date, are more theoretical than practical, thin in content. The curriculum is often fractured, with a lack of continuity from one course to the next, and [there is] insufficient integration between course work and field work. The schools foster docility with too many lecture courses and too few opportunities for problem solving and original thinking. (Levine, as cited in Wagner, 2008, pp. 145-146)

Students in our schools are taught by people who are educated in a “teacher-education curriculum that is a confusing patchwork, with academic instruction and everyday issues disconnected” (Wagner, 2008, p. 148). This is the ultimate of the vicious cycle. “Take a disjoined collection of course of uneven quality and then pass tests that rarely measure the skills that matter the most” (p. 148). Add to that, “close to fifty percent of the teachers in the United
States come from the bottom third of college classes and teacher compensation is much lower than other professions graduates can choose” (Jones, 2011, p. 33).

Levine also looked into the educating of school principals, including those programs at Harvard and Columbia, and concluded that …

The core curricula of the nation’s principals are a random collection of courses. …a grab bag of courses… If one removed the class on the principalship from the list, it would be a real challenge to guess the purpose of the program. (as cited in Wagner, 2008, pp. 147-148)

Wagner (2001), in his research of education in the United States, distinguished four major themes, which provide more powerful examples of the vicious cycle and how it manifests, often subtlety, in our educational institutions and ultimately in our “educated” populace. The culture of our education creates and perpetuates reactivity, compliance, isolation, and no real sense of accountability. Educators have to react to a cacophony of urgent needs and demands.

Every day. We can’t say no, and everything is a priority. Most of us haven’t developed the discipline of reflection as a way to remain focused on the truly important. The education culture has tended to reward compliance to authority at all levels over active questioning or genuine discussion of issues. School district leadership rewards compliance rather than creativity and initiative.

Educators work alone more than any other professionals in modern America. Most professions have come to recognize the value of teamwork as a better way to understand and solve ‘problems of practice.’ Groups are far more likely to come to a deeper understanding, and to better solutions, than are individuals working alone, no matter how talented…. Broad ‘ownership’ of the problem a school or district needs to solve is rare in compliance-driven change efforts, where concern for positive PR trumps true public engagement and unfavorable data are downplayed…. To be effective, however, accountability has to be two-way and horizontal as well as vertical. What is our reciprocal and relational accountability to one another. (Wagner, 2001, pp. 1-6)

**A New Educational Paradigm: Creating Virtuous Cycles**

That intelligence plays an epistemological role in our education is a universally accepted premise. The idea that intelligence plays an ontological role as well represents a transformation in the purpose of education. Ontology is the study of the nature of being, i.e., one’s essential nature, the nature of reality. Acknowledging the importance of an ontological framework for education shifts its primary intention and attention from knowing to being. If accepted, this expanded interpretation qualitatively alters how we relate to education.

Emphasis transfers from knowing first, to being first—recognizing that who one is being in the process of knowing, is senior to what one knows in the process of being. What is suggested in this thinking is that including the nature of being and reality at the beginning of the process of
knowing would substantially alter the quality of knowing occurring and the subsequent actions taken as a result of that knowing.

An example might be that when one brings a sense of wholeness and integration of one’s experiences of the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental intelligences, the learning occurs inside of a worldview that is capable of generating a paradigm of connection, relatedness and integration, i.e., both/and, rather than separateness and isolation, i.e., either/or. This way of viewing the world provides a very different learning context than that of dichotomizing, competing, winning, losing, e.g., either you or me… either them or us. Both the philosophical and pragmatic aspects of education represent the creation of our essential nature and our relationship with reality. Integral education has the potential to transform our essential natures and our experience of what is real.

Integral Education

Integral education is an approach to education that provides a powerful foundation for living life and preparing people to live in a complex and ever changing world. In this model, the first 18 years of a person’s life are focused on developing and integrating the physical, spiritual, emotional and mental intelligences. From a very early age, young people learn to relate to the world with an integral worldview. Thus, the introduction to the adult phase of their life is grounded in educational experiences which have interwoven these powerful expressions of human consciousness. The focus is foremost on the ontological aspects of intelligence, i.e., the being of the human being, which in turn provides a life altering context in which learning occurs.

The living of one’s life is viewed through the lens of wholeness and relationship: connection to oneself, others and all of nature as an embodied phenomenon. This is an education for wholeness in a human being. Wholeness does not mean perfection. It means “becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am” (Palmer, 1998, p. 13).

Physical intelligence is seen as fundamental to an integral education experience. There is an acknowledgement of the essential relationship between biology (earth), chemistry (foods, substances), and physics (energy) at the core of this approach to education. There is “groundedness,” consciousness, and connection with the natural elements. There is a tacit form of knowledge in bodily knowledge (Adams, 2006). “The clues that allow us to know anything come from our relatedness to reality—a relatedness as deep as the atoms our bodies share with everything that is, ever has been, or ever will be” (Palmer, 1998, p. 98).

This embodiment of the physical has ontological implications. It communicates a particular reality and way of being that introduces students to what is real for them; what is real for them is in their body, in their experiences, and senses. It also has epistemological connotations. What and how these students know as a grounded embodied individual influences the way they relate to knowledge; it is relevant to them on a very basic level. It is learning that is connected on many layers—energetic, cellular, muscular, sensory, and kinesthetic (Adams, 2006).

The emotional intelligence plays a relational role in integral education. Connections are seen throughout. People are in community; they are in communication, with themselves and each
other; they are caring and cared for; they are learning the skills to remain in community and communication, e.g., conflict resolution, dialogue, and mediation. Focus is placed on the experiences of safety, belonging, relationship, love, being known, self-expressed, responsible, service and mentorship of others to support the development of emotional intelligence in everyone, e.g., students, teachers, parents, etc.

This relational pattern in the emotional domain has ontological implications. It communicates a particular reality and way of being that introduces students to what is “real” for them; they are related. It also has epistemological connotations. What and how these students know as relational individuals influences the way they interact with what they are learning. What they are learning is connected to them. What is being learned is not separate or disjointed; it is related to them (Adams, 2006).

At a conference hosted by The Mind Life Institute, and attended by close to 4,000 participants from around the globe, with scholars, educators and a number of deans from major American schools of education (e.g., Harvard University, University of Michigan, Stanford, Pennsylvania State University, Rice University, University of Wisconsin, Carnegie Foundation), the major conference theme was developing emotional intelligence in our populace, e.g., “the education of hearts as well as minds; socio-emotional development; compassion and empathy; and generating authentic relationships. Experience based learning; belonging, caring, community, sense of mastery, responsibility, owning one’s own power, generosity etc...” (Mind Life Institute, 2009).

The natural role of the mental domain is respected in the integral curriculum. Mental intelligence is known to expand in an environment in which students are encouraged to love learning, be curious, and follow their passion. When the learner is respected, trusted, and honored as an individual and educated to think and learn for him/herself, given choices and responsibility for what is studied, the natural quality of learning is activated.

Students exposed to curriculum that is experiential and relevant can embody the content and the context. The growth of mental acumen is equated with trusting the human being in his/her natural quest of learning. There is a recognition that the purpose of education is to provide an environment in which the inherent attributes of the individual can naturally grow and take root. If the context is known and the learning is relevant, the learner can also be at choice and responsible for her/his education.

The inferences from these interpretations are valuable when considered from an ontological perspective. The reality is—humans have a natural love of learning and curiosity that only requires room to express and grow; children can be responsible and trusted with their own education. Who we are as human beings at the most fundamental level are natural learners. Epistemologically, these interpretations offer an essential shift away from current educational practices. They suggest the natural aspects of learning - learning belongs to the individual (Adams, 2006).

Modern brain research shows clearly that children are natural learners. They are born wanting to learn and would continue being voracious learners if they were in an environment that is truly learner centered. They need the kind of learning environment that
is not a system, but which enables them to find the help and information THEY need and ask for. They need adults around them who respect them as individuals, know how to listen to them and can help guide them to the resources they need. (Mintz, 2011, p. 1, emphasis in the original)

Spiritual intelligence plays a contextual role in integral education. It gives a sense of congruency to life. Students are educated in ways that their sense of “spirit” can show up in their lives, i.e., seeing themselves in relation to a larger world, feeling connected to themselves, others, and nature. The holistic approach provides practices to support individuals getting more related to themselves and others through internal experiences such as contemplation, self-reflection, journaling, silent time, meditation, yoga, exercises, etc. The integral curriculum includes understanding and honoring the world’s religions, learning the distinction between spirituality and religion and having clarifying conversations that bring people together and promote interfaith inclusion rather than exclusion and derisiveness. In addition, key to developing an integral point of view is discovering the connection of science and spirituality—to experience the awe in both expressions of “spirit” (Adams, 2006).

The ontological inferences from addressing the spiritual intelligence in an integral education are immense. Reality takes on an inclusive nature, a both/and quality as opposed to the either/or dualism that has been engrained in our current educational reality, that we so often take for granted as the way it is. How students relate to one another is more from appreciative inquiry and understanding throughout their education. Epistemologically, knowledge is recognized for its multifaceted quality. All sides are presented. Students are educated to take multiple points of view and experience what it is like to be in the shoes of the other. The whole and the parts are seen in relationship with one another. Analysis and synthesis and the subjective and objective brought together yield a different quality of knowledge and understanding and an opening for wisdom to appear. “Wisdom is a quality of ‘seeing’ and relating to life that reflects an ability to synthesize its disparate aspects. Wisdom mirrors wholeness—as it reveals all sides” (Adams, 2006, p. 353).

Conclusion

What kind of world do you want to live in? When you listen to the news and read papers and magazines, what kind of narratives do you want to represent you and the world you are creating? The world we live in and the future we are living into are up to us. How might your worldview shift to move from ways of being that are separating, isolating and fragmenting yourself and others, to ways of being that are connecting, relating and integrating for yourself and others. What can you do or say or who can you “be” that will begin unraveling the existing vicious cycles and start creating many more virtuous cycles. Let’s own our future together.

References

Teachings From the Deep South:  
North-South Contributions to Integral Education

Adrian Villasenor-Galarza

Abstract: The present paper addresses the need to incorporate often ignored perspectives and formulations derived from what I refer to as the “deep south” into the field of integral education as currently practiced at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), in San Francisco, CA. The deep south, or the metaphorical conglomerate of wisdom ascribed to the global south and associated epistemologies, is used as a broad framework from which I propose, through the exploration of shamanic practices and symbols, the creation of an organizing vertical metaphor, a North–South axis of dialogue. I start with a brief exposition of the one of the main challenges that integral education faces, a cognicentric focus, and proceed to explore alternatives to it by addressing some repressed aspects of the field, the notion of multidimensionality, and the symbol of the axis mundi. The paper ends with an invitation for a marriage to take place between the East–West and North–South axes of knowing and learning as an adequate and necessary development for integral education.

Keywords: Axis mundi, indigenous wisdom, integral education, multidimensionality, North–South axis.

Introduction

Nowadays, the value of transformative, holistic, and integral approaches to education is slowly being recognized. However, in a society whose standards are dictated largely by the mechanistic paradigm of modernity, it is no mystery that our educational institutions still perpetuate recalcitrant biases based on fragmentary conceptions of self and world. In many spheres of our world—be it political, religious, environmental, or social—the detrimental effects of a fragmentary paradigm are deeply felt, but it’s in our educational systems that it’s actively passed on to future generations.

The concept of the “hidden curriculum,” advanced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970/2007), sheds light into the functioning of mainstream education. The concept posits that there is no such thing as partial education, meaning there are a number of deep structures guiding and informing the explicit curriculum. Students, mainly unconsciously, pick up a paradigmatic attitude from which their learning is navigated—a habit that spills over to their lives as a whole.

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affecting their relations with their bodies, their loved ones, other species, society, and ultimately, the world itself.

The linear demarcation between teacher and student and the mechanistic, flattened, purely objective understanding of the world, dwell at the core of the main challenges that integral education aims at correcting. As Mexican holistic educator Ramon Gallegos Nava (2001) succinctly puts it, “it is not possible anymore to educate human beings with a XVII century industrial scientific paradigm for a sustainable society of the XXI century” (p. 1). Yet, the issue of the kind of hidden values, habits, and ways of being that are implicitly perpetuated by more integral pedagogies, remains. Are there some subtle ways in which unfavorable ways of being are still reproduced in an integral educational setting? If so, what can we do to correct them, to heal them?

Cognicentrism and the Underworld

We can say that integral education is a balancing force that aims at bringing to the surface the wholeness of our humanity. Yet, given the different lineages at work in the integral education community (derived from the work of influential thinkers such as Steiner, Aurobindo, Gebser, Krishnamurti, Montessori, Wilber), a considerable variation and diversity is to be expected, enlarging the range of pedagogical options available and contributing to the resilience of the field. As such, although integral education as a whole agrees on the need to invite all human dimensions into the learning experience, there are at least three broad categories that serve to characterize the efforts of integral educators: mind-centered/intellectualist, bricolage/eclectic, and participatory (Ferrer, Romero & Albareda, 2005). Perhaps rather loosely and in spite of the nuances pertaining to each of the categories, one could say that the determining factor in this classification is the extent to which the pedagogical efforts champion the primacy of the mind and its associated rational-analytical faculties.

The tendency for inflating the role of the rational-analytical mind is widespread in Western education and is intimately connected to the extent to which the holistic nature of integral education can flourish. Often, the powers of the rational mind obscure and ultimately obstruct the exploration and refinement of the variety of intelligences (Gardner, 1983/1993) or developmental lines (Wilber, 2000) that constitute our being (e.g., emotional, somatic, spiritual, imaginal, sexual). As Thartang Tulku (1987) puts it, “Knowledge is not a matter for the head alone, but for the heart and spirit, the body and mind; an adventure for the whole of our human being” (p. 80).

The biased and cognicentric approach present in integral education potentially wounds and cripples the spectrum of our human potential. It’s no wonder why it has been considered one of the most challenging obstacles for engaging in a more genuine integral pedagogical experience (Ferrer, 2003).

Ferrer goes on to say that the cognicentric bias creates a vicious, self-perpetuating circle, since participation of the non-rational dimensions commonly occurs through and is facilitated by the mind. As such, “these human dimensions cannot mature autonomously, and thus the need for their mental or external direction becomes permanently justified” (Ferrer, 2003, p. 26).
A way to tackle the aforementioned cognicentric vicious circle is to resort to the use of a spatial metaphor. For many of us in post-Enlightenment industrialized societies, the seat of rationality sits “up north” somewhere in our brains—Descartes’ res cogitans or thinking substance, carrying a deep seated assumption that this substance is directly associated with terms such as “real,” “truth,” and “objective.” Alternatively, other ways of knowing—loosely associated with everything the neck down and our creative organs “down south”—are considered non-reliable sources of acquiring knowledge.

At a socio-economic level, “the north” is associated with (over) developed countries and their predominant Eurocentric perspective that enables the distribution of corporate capitalism to the “the south” where economically poorer and marginalized populations are made dependent upon the north. In the south awaits the unconscious shadow of modernity in need of being emancipated, it becomes the mythical underworld. One can say that the first step to take in order to loosen the cognicentric grip in our educational efforts is to journey south to the underworld.

The journey southward is not an adventure to be taken lightly. Different sages and teachers throughout time have associated the downward movement with a process termed by Saint John of the Cross as the “dark night of the soul” (Bache, 2000; May, 2005; Underhill, 1974). Isolation and loneliness pervade the dark night and a sense of disillusionment and lack of direction abounds. Yet, it is deemed as a crucial and necessary journey into wholeness: “[hu]man’s task is…to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious” (Jung, 1989, p. 326). Hillman (1979) explicitly makes of the underworld (Hades) a cornerstone for his approach to all psychological endeavor, alluding to it as “a movement downward and inward, psychologizing ever further into Hades” (p. 208), for it is in Hades where humans find depth and meaning. In relation to education and the cognicentric approach to integral education, it is in the underworld that we find, as long-lost treasures, the repressed dimensions of our being and the possibility of including them in our endeavors.

The journey into the underworld of integral education may certainly be considered an initiation. From a cognicentric approach, the genuine opening to the diversity of knowing present in the “south” appears as an initiatory process in which the ordinary functioning of the mind undergoes a deep transformation. The direct encounter with previously repressed dimensions of non-Eurocentric epistemologies and alternative ways of knowing threatens the very survival of a cognicentric approach. The journey south presents a great heuristic and healing potential that diminishes the great strain that has been allocated to the rational-analytical qualities of the mind, enabling the appearance of a fresh configuration in which all of the human dimensions participate in the acquisition of knowledge.

The focus on the “south” by no means implies that the cognicentric north is evil or wrong. But is in the excess and abuse of one side of the North–South axis that potentially dissociative dynamics are perpetuated in our educational settings.

A dynamic balance and reunion of north and south is needed to gain a fuller access to the gifts that integral education has to offer, as represented in the ancient Incan prophecy of the eagle and the condor. The Incan prophecy beautifully conveys a long awaited reunion of the eagle—the
modern, materialistic, technological world of the north—and the condor—the world of the heart, of depth, and connection with nature and spirit.

We have been waiting five hundred years...now, in this age, when the eagle of the North and the condor of the South fly together, the Earth will awaken. The eagles of the North cannot be free without the condors of the South. Now it's happening...We belong to the evolution of nature in our physical bodies. But we also have a spiritual body that comes from the Sun...a Golden Sun burning with the fire of spiritual light. (Huayta quoted in Monacheshi, 2008, pp. 122-123)

The condor and the eagle, soaring free, cruising the skies, blessing both air and land, represent the heights of the human potential to which the native peoples of the Americas strive for—heart and mind collaborating in the service of integral education.

**Multidimensional Education and the *Axis Mundi***

Central to our exploration lies the multiplicity of dimensions of the human learning experience. It follows that a key aspect of an integral education is to foster the activation of our various capacities of knowing and learning without the control and regulation of the mind. This activation resembles an act of surrendering to the flows and rhythms native to the non-rational dimensions. We can learn this surrendering from one of the most ancient and widespread human traditions, shamanism.

The shamans’ engagement with the so-called “spirit world” made them, as historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1972) puts it, “technicians of the sacred” and masters of “ecstasy.” Entering into ecstasy (Gr. *ekstasis*), shamans, commonly aided by a trance inducing techniques, are able to somehow project their consciousness and traverse mysterious realms of divine and human significance. Through time and direct experience, their journeying, commonly referred to as “shamanic journeying” (Harner, 1990; Ingerman, 2006) made the shamans invaluable repositories of the wisdom to navigate the multiple dimensions of existence.

Shamanic journeying is characterized by a recurrent symbol widely represented as the *axis mundi*: the axis of the cosmos or the world tree. The symbol, known since pre-historical times and found in most of the religious traditions of the world, signifies a passageway for the soul to travel beyond the material dimension as well as for pouring divine energies into existence. It is often depicted as a vertical link and connecting thread between heaven, earth, and the underworld. It takes various shapes including that of a ladder, a column, a mountain, a tree, a staff or a vine.

For the ancient Mayas (as for other Mesoamerican cultures), the *axis mundi* was represented by a cosmic tree named *Yaxkin* from which all life flows, generating the four directions of the cosmos out of its sacred center. In Norse mythology, the cosmic tree goes by the name of *Yggdrasil*, and in the Hindu tradition, the sacred tree *Asvattha* is equated with the Absolute or Brahman. Shamans perceive it as a roadmap, an organizing structure that allows them to move through the different layers of reality, making their travels to celestial and obscure realms possible.
We can see the value of the *axis mundi* for integral education if we invoke again a spatial metaphor. Judie Wexler (2004) proposed that in order to better understand integral education, it was useful to divide it in a horizontal and vertical dimension. The horizontal dimension deals with the “the way we integrate knowledge” (i.e., content, training, and mental inquiry) and the vertical dimension to “the way we integrate multiple ways of knowing” (i.e., special trainings and multidimensional inquiry)” (Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2005, p. 309). It’s difficult to make a clear-cut demarcation between these dimensions, since it’s possible that they inform and enrich each other through their own strengths and weaknesses. One thing we can say is that the horizontal dimension is still guided by a cognicentric approach, whereas in the vertical dimension, our different intelligences emerge to the foreground, endowing it with a particular importance. For Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda (2005), “the greatest challenge of integral education lies in the facilitation of the vertical dimension of learning: multidimensional inquiry or integration of multiple ways of knowing” (p. 310).

As we have seen, the horizontal dimension of integral education does not deal directly with the multidimensionality of knowing. This dimension in turn promotes a horizontal mode of consciousness in which the ability to integrate different bodies of knowledge is advanced, bypassing the transformative potential of education that stems from being in contact with different dimensions of knowledge. Even more so, it could potentially lead to a disenchanted, fragmented, and flattened perspective of the educational process. As Jung (1955) tells us, “the irresistible tendency to explain everything on physical grounds corresponds to the horizontal development of consciousness in the last four centuries” (p. 177).

This reminds me of Edwin Abbot’s classic novel *Flatland*, in which the main character, the “square,” a two-dimensional being, struggles of making sense of the world after peeking into different orders of reality. It wasn’t until the square undergoes deep transformation that he was able to consciously see that his everyday life was a fragment of a more comprehensive world. He then realized, through his journeys to other dimensions, that he had the ability to enter into contact with those other aspects of reality and participate in them.

The vertical dimension of integral education is, I believe, appropriately represented by the *axis mundi*. As a universal representation of a vertical passage through which the human soul is able to journey and acquire divine knowledge, the *axis mundi* provides an understanding of multidimensionality and the possibility of accessing multiple ways of knowing. Shamans are considered “psychopomps” or soul guides due to their journeying up and down the world tree. The expertise gained through their multiple encounters with the numinous endows them with the ability to serve as mediators and guides between the subtle dimensions of the rich shamanic geography and that of everyday awareness. In our quest for honoring and enacting the different layers of our humanness in our education, we are in need of not only becoming aware of the multiple layers of our existence—as we have seen—but of learning how to access them.

The shaman considers each of the worlds that he or she visits as complete and full of mystery and value in and of themselves. Accordingly, he or she is required to make use of alternative ways of knowing in tune with the nature of the realm in question. The key to learn to access different dimensions of knowledge, as is the case in integral education and shamanism, is to
acknowledge that each and every dimension is endowed with its own logic, wisdom, and validity. This multidimensional approach would not only include

…the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and empathic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings (Ferrer, 2002, p. 121)

Shamanic journeying understood as the navigation through, and participation in, the different dimensions of existence, is intimately connected with integral education. The sensibility and expertise that shamanic traditions have developed over thousands of years around their ecstatic capabilities can be of great value for teachers and students alike in search of eliciting multiple ways of knowing and inviting different dimensions to the pedagogical experience. For our purposes, the mysterious realms that the shaman visits can be equated with the multiple “worlds” of our being (i.e., emotional, somatic, spiritual, imaginal, sexual), creating a conscious conduit between, for example, the “somatic world” and its intelligence, and the rest of our being. Because our primary adherence commonly remains with “the cognicentric world,” the journey into the somatic world would create a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Thus, we can say that the skillful surrendering of the cognicentric approach in education can be done by means of shamanic journeying and its central symbol, the axis mundi.

The last key insight I would like to derive from the vertical metaphor of the axis mundi is that of the “center of the world.” According to Eliade (1961), the axis mundi is always found in the center of the world, a “place that is sacred above all” (p. 39), where all spiritual orientation is available to us humans. It is in the center where the sacred manifests in its totality and the divine forces of the cosmos merge with the here and now of our existence. Indigenous traditions around the world refer to the cosmic center as a circle, sometimes represented as “medicine wheels” or “sacred hoops.”

For the Huichol Indians of Mexico, the center of the world, Teakata, is where it all ends and where it all begins, it is the heart of the earth and the dwelling place of Tatewari, the grandfather fire. The words of Black Elk provide us with a clear understanding of the center as a sacred circle from which the axis mundi surges, “The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop....Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle” (in Neihardt, 2008, p. 155). The center is that inconspicuous part within us that a genuine integral education ultimately aims at developing an intimate connection with, a center that mimics the sacredness and interrelatedness of the world at a microcosmic scale.

There are at least three essential ways in which the axis mundi and shamanic journeying are of essential importance for integral education. First, they point us to the knowledge of the multiplicity of worlds, their associated states of consciousness, and their accessibility via shamanic journeying. Second, they stress the importance of actively participating in our educational efforts, that is, an integral learning experience becomes fully alive through direct experience. And thirdly, they point to the sacred place or ground that we draw our sustenance from and to which we are all called to “return.” Referred to as the “god within” by the Gnostics,
we all carry within us, tattooed on our souls by ancient fires, a sacred circumference, a dwelling of gods and reconnecting principle of divine nature.

**Integral Education’s Medicine Wheel**

We have been exploring some key insights that the “deep south,” that is, the metaphorical conglomerate of wisdom ascribed to the global south and associated epistemologies, has to offer to integral education. This exploration has been done largely through the use of a vertical, North–South metaphor. Aware of the great influence that Eastern spiritual teachings have had in creating and advancing the field of integral education—as well as their pivotal role in the revival of spirituality in the West—the metaphor was chosen to lend some necessary attention to the teachings from the South. Although we have merely touched on the wisdom of indigenous and shamanic traditions, the deep south is also conformed by other embodied and earth-centered approaches such as numerous earth-based traditions from around the world and feminist spirituality. Overall, the teachings from the deep south would only aid the growth and maturation of the field of integral education by bringing to balance the East–West dialogue with a North–South one.

Indeed, balance and harmony are key organizing elements present in indigenous cosmologies. The shaman is in charge of maintaining an ongoing dialogue with different beings—plants, rocks, thunder, fire, animals, and the cosmos at large—to secure a dynamic, harmonic balance from which the wellbeing of the community depends. Similar to the Taoist unending dance between yin and yang, we find that in indigenous communities the notion of health is intimately connected to balance and harmony. For example, in Navajo, *hozho* is a word that connotes balance, harmony, and beauty. For the Q’eros people, *ayni* is a principle that is best translated as sacred reciprocity or harmonic exchange and balance. It is the main guiding principle of the Q’eros of today and of the whole ancient Andean tradition. Balance and harmony bring health, and health summons wholeness.

My brief treatment of one of the main shortcomings of integral education as currently practiced at CIIS, cognicentrism, makes it clear that there’s an imbalance in need of being addressed. If we assume that this imbalance stemmed from the initial East–West dialogue that largely precipitated the inception of the field, the North–South axis could be seen as a necessary and balancing “medicine.” I believe that the tolerance and openness necessary for seriously giving way to the deep south along with its alternative ways of knowing, embodied, feminine, and earth-based epistemologies, in the integral education discourse is present and, to some extent, already taking place. One of the best examples of a more balanced integral engagement is Ferrer’s and colleagues’ participatory proposal (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer, 2003; Ferrer, 2008; Ferrer, Romero & Albareda 2005; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008).

Not only would the confluence of the East–West, North–South axes create a more balanced and robust proposal for integral education, but it would bring about a much needed healing between traditions, cultures, and peoples, slowly moving toward actualizing the integral vision of education.
The resultant “integral education medicine wheel” would bring us closer to restore education to the status of a wisdom tradition. How amazing it would be for both students and teachers to enter together into a multidimensional, integral, tolerant, and diverse journey of learning and transformation. Imagine education as a revolutionary act in which the boundaries between school and life become blurred and, ultimately, we become students and teachers of the art of living. I strongly believe that this is possible. How amazing it would be to create and participate in a multidimensional model of education that leads us into healing and liberation, like a symphony beyond the mind.

References


No Ontological Leaps: 
A Primer on Scientific Materialism

Christian de Quincey¹

Abstract: When the issue is intelligence in nature, arguments about whether science supports neo-Darwinian theory or intelligent design miss the point. The details of evolution or the structure of the brain are irrelevant because biology and neuroscience have nothing to say about consciousness. Science informs us only about the physical world. However, consciousness/mind/intelligence is non-physical, and no amount of evolution or complexity of purely physical processes could ever produce anything non-physical. There are no ontological jumps. You don’t get something from nothing—or, more precisely, you don’t get “no-thing” from anything. How, then, do we account for the fact that consciousness exists in an otherwise physical universe? It all comes down to our basic metaphysical beliefs.

Keywords: Consciousness, dualism, emanation, emergence, idealism, interaction, materialism, ontology, panpsychism, performative contradiction, philosophy of mind.

Every truth passes through three stages before it is recognized. In the first place it is ridiculed. In the second it is opposed. In the third it is regarded as self-evident. — Arthur Schopenhauer

My focus here is whether evolutionary science—or, more accurately, its philosophical underpinnings—can account for the experiential fact that consciousness exists in an otherwise physical universe.

Looking for evidence of intelligence or intention in nature by arguing over details in the data or theory of evolution is a fool’s errand. It is an impossible dream, just like searching for the location of mind in the brain. Getting sidetracked in the minutiae of biological or paleontological evidence misses the simple fact that no amount (or lack) of physical evidence can inform us about non-physical mind or consciousness.

Promissory Materialism

The standard, almost unquestioned, belief in mainstream science and philosophy today is that materialism (i.e., neuroscience) can, or one day will, explain how mind could emerge from

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wholly mindless matter. However, despite this great faith in the explanatory power of neuroscience, the fact remains that materialism completely fails to account for such a “miracle.” This belief that mind can be reduced to, or explained by, physical events is merely a statement of faith, not science—because not the slightest trace of empirical evidence or rational argument supports or explains such emergence. I lay out the details in my book Radical Nature (de Quincey, 2010). Exposing scientific faith in the miracle of ontological emergence typically requires a return to “Metaphysics 101”—an attempt to get people to think through more carefully the implications of their basic assumptions about the fundamental nature of reality.

I’d like to make something very clear: I am no less free of basic metaphysical assumptions than anyone in the materialist camp. We all, necessarily, begin any contemplation or investigation of the world with some set of fundamental metaphysical assumptions. That’s a given. It’s unavoidable.

What good philosophy does (and good science should do), however, is lay bare those assumptions, and examine them to see (a) if they are internally coherent (rationalism), and (b) if they are consistent with the actual world revealed through experience (empiricism).

Then we ask: Which set of fundamental metaphysical assumptions best “cashes out”—which metaphysical propositions best fit what we actually know about the world? What, in short, is the most “likely story”?

I base my case for “radical naturalism” (panpsychism) on a metaphysical assumption best summed up colloquially as “nothing comes from nothing” or “you can’t get something from nothing”—no free ontological lunches. If you start with a mindless universe, then that’s all you’d ever get.

**Four Major Worldviews**

I have spent a career in philosophy focused on examining and evaluating the various alternative metaphysical starting points to see which one best accounts for the fact that we are embodied beings with consciousness. Technically, in philosophy, it’s called “the mind-body” problem. Despite multiple variations, all ontological positions on the mind-body issue resolve into just four alternatives: dualism, materialism, idealism, and panpsychism. All, except panpsychism, fail the two-part test outlined above: rational coherence, and consistency with experience.

**Dualism**

This claims that the fundamental nature of reality consists of two radically different and separate kinds of substance (extended matter and non-extended mind), and is a non-starter. Notoriously, it runs into the hoary problem of interaction. How could two radically different and separate substances ever come together and influence each other? Nobody has succeeded in explaining that. In short, it would require some kind of miracle.
Materialism

Recognizing the insuperable problem facing dualism, materialism lops off half of reality and claims that the ultimate nature of existence is purely physical (energy/matter). That’s one way to avoid the interaction problem. It’s an understandable and pragmatic strategy, and it has worked well as a foundation for exploring the physical aspects of the natural world. But it fails utterly to explain the undeniable fact of experience, of consciousness itself. Given its starting point, materialism is forced to claim that consciousness must have “emerged” from purely non-conscious precursors. But such emergence is unaccounted for (and unaccountable) either through science or philosophy.

In fact, “emergence” of mind from wholly mindless matter would also require a miracle—and miracles (supernatural interventions) are precisely what materialism rules out. This leaves materialism in an embarrassingly awkward position: in order to be true, it must be false! Unaware of this lurking logical bomb, materialists continue to believe that science can explain how consciousness emerged from purely mindless matter. Of course, science can do nothing of the sort. Neither science nor philosophy can even begin to explain how wholly physical, objective ingredients could ever produce non-physical, subjective minds.

Idealism

This is the direct opposite of materialism. It claims that the ultimate nature of reality is pure spirit (consciousness/mind) and that what we call “matter” is either (a) an illusion, or (b) something that “emanates” from pure spirit. The notion that real matter could “emanate” from pure spirit is just as incoherent as the materialist conceit that mind could “emerge” from wholly mindless matter. Such an ontological “jump” would also require a miracle. (However, the possibility of miracles is not such a problem for idealists—for whom everything is ultimately supernatural). But miracles have no place in science or philosophy because they explain nothing. Miracles are gaps in explanation.

That leaves us with the second option called “maya idealism.” Here, the reality of matter is denied, and assumed to be nothing but an “illusion,” a concoction in consciousness. This position is logically irrefutable. (It is impossible to step outside mind to know or indicate a reality beyond mind. Everything known and knowable necessarily occurs in some mind.) However, even though logically unproblematic, maya idealism runs headlong into another kind of problem—a performative contradiction. Everyone who claims that matter is illusory necessarily lives (performs, acts, behaves) in the world as though matter is real. Every idealist I have met eats food, drinks water, wears clothes, lives in houses, avoids cars on the freeway, doesn’t walk through walls . . . you get the idea. In short, maya idealists don’t (and can’t) walk their talk. That’s a pragmatic problem, even if it isn’t a logical one.

As I explored and analyzed the implications of these three ontological worldviews, they all turned out to be deeply problematic one way or another. Either they required a miracle (unacceptable if we want to explain an event) or their claim is contradicted by how they act. That leaves one final alternative . . .
Panpsychism

This worldview claims that ultimate reality is both physical and non-physical (it consists of objective matter and subjective mind) and that mind and matter are inseparable. Mind and matter always go together—all the way down.

Although acknowledging the existence of two ontological types (physical matter/energy and non-physical mind/consciousness), panpsychism differs from ontological dualism because it denies that mind and matter are separate or separable. In fact, of the four major worldviews, panpsychism alone qualifies as a form of nondual dualism or a dual-aspect monism. Here, ultimate reality consists of a single, inseparable, nature—sentient energy. However, this single ultimate has a dual-aspect interior subjectivity and external objectivity. In short, the Creative Ultimate consists of intrinsically sentient energy. Matter itself tingles with the spark of spirit.

Summarizing the central idea of panpsychism: Consciousness is the intrinsic capacity of matter/energy to feel, know, and purposefully direct itself.

This native ability of matter/energy to purposefully direct itself accounts for the inherent exploratory drive in evolution. In fact, what we call “evolution” is the grand adventure of matter/energy exploring its own potentials—giving rise to the blooming, buzzing symphony of species that grace our planet (and, no doubt, countless other planets and galaxies, too). Yes, evolution also proceeds through physical processes of unpredictable mutations and natural selection. But these physical changes are guided from within by a native “urge” or “aim” operating within nature itself at all levels.

A major problem facing this panpsychist ontology is that it seems so counterintuitive: “Are you seriously asking me to believe that even non-living things such as molecules and atoms have consciousness?” It seems incredible. But the idea of intrinsically sentient matter is boggling only to minds that have, mostly unconsciously, assumed the materialist metaphysic that matter is intrinsically “dead,” vacuous, or insentient. But why start with that assumption—given the one undeniable fact we can all be certain of: Consciousness exists. Descartes, bless his heart, at least got that one right.

Materialism simply cannot account for the fact that the universe contains sentient embodied beings (each of us knows this to be true at least in our own case).

When we realize that the “interaction” of separate mind and matter is untenable, and that there is no way to explain how mind could “emerge” from mindless matter or how real matter could “emanate” from pure mind, and if we wish to avoid a stark “performative contradiction,” we are left with a single alternative: The only foundational metaphysical assumption that “cashes out” and accounts for the world as we actually experience it is that both matter and mind are real and that neither is reducible to the other—panpsychism.
Something from Nothing?

Now I know that for many, perhaps most, people (especially scientists and philosophers) this can be a hard metaphysical nut to swallow. However, given the alternatives, panpsychism turns out to be the most “likely story.”

After all, other than a mental habit or intellectual prejudice, why would anyone automatically reject the idea that sentience or consciousness could be built into the very fabric of the universe? Think about that.

Look, as humans we experience ourselves as conscious embodied beings. How can we account for that fact? We are made of cells, molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles—that’s our embodiment. However, we also feel and experience and make choices. Given the failure of any of the other worldviews to account for these two fundamental facts, the only option is to assume that whatever we are made of (cells, molecules, atoms, etc.) must also have some form or degree of consciousness, too—all the way down. Otherwise, we face the problem of deciding where to place the “consciousness cut.” Anywhere you decide beyond this point, there’s no sentience, the same problem shows up over and over. If, for instance, you decide that consciousness could not exist in non-living things like atoms and molecules you are then at a loss to explain how living beings became conscious. How did subjectivity emerge from wholly objective things? Ontological jumps don’t happen without miracles. Quite simply: You can’t get something from nothing.

A Likely Story

Okay, that’s the general argument. Now to the specifics: Critics characterize panpsychism as an “untenable assumption.” By now, I hope it is clear that, on the contrary, panpsychism turns out to be the only tenable assumption. For example, one critic objected: “[panpsychism entails that] every particle of sand is sentient and has experience. I do not believe that that is the case. Sentience and experience, on the, by now, standard evolutionary account, have emerged gradually over millions of years, and are characteristic of complex organisms. A structural complexity of a certain kind is required for sentience or experience to exist.” (Barglow, 2010, personal communication).

Actually, panpsychism does not entail that “every particle of sand is sentient and has experience.” This objection misses a crucial distinction between “heaps” and “wholes,” between “aggregates” and “individuals.” I don’t have the space to go into that here, but suffice to say that my views entail that the individual molecules in each grain of sand have some form of sentience, even though the sand grain, or a rock, does not.

Critics who find it difficult to accept that something as small and as simple as a grain of sand could have sentience are even less likely to accept the notion of sentience in molecules. My point is that we are not made of grains of sand, but we are made of molecules and we are sentient—therefore it follows that whatever we are made of must be sentient, too (remember there can be no “consciousness cut” without an ontological jump).
Given their faith in emergence, it is understandable that materialists are not troubled by the idea of a consciousness cut—a level of reality below which (or stage in evolution before which) mind was entirely absent from nature. Therefore, they assert, mind must have emerged from wholly mindless precursors. After all, they claim, we know from numerous other physical processes that emergence happens all the time. But that belief is based on faulty assumptions about the nature of emergence. The claim that sentience and experience have “emerged gradually over millions of years” and that this is explained by the “standard evolutionary account” is simply not true. Not a single scientific paper or theory exists that even begins to explain how sentience emerged. The plain fact is that evolutionary biology has literally nothing to say about the emergence of mind or consciousness. Zero. Zilch. Evolutionary neuroscience deals only with the development of nervous systems and brains—physical systems. And then materialists assume that the evolution of complex neural systems “must have” produced minds. Not one iota of scientific evidence supports that view—for the very simple reason that science deals only with objective, physical, measurable processes.

As long as science relies on a methodology of sensory empiricism, itself rooted in the metaphysics of materialism, then science will remain utterly in the dark about consciousness. The best it can do is produce data about neural correlates of consciousness, but can say nothing about consciousness itself. When materialists dispute this, I challenge them to produce a single scientific datum about the miraculous moment when previously non-conscious molecules or cells jumped the ontological gap and became conscious. I am one-hundred percent confident this won’t happen—ever.

The claim that “structural complexity of a certain kind is required for sentience or experience to exist” is nothing more than an unfounded assumption. What is that special complexity, and how does any complex arrangement of purely physical ingredients explain the existence (or “emergence”) of non-physical consciousness or sentience?

Seemingly unaware of logical bomb ticking away in the heart of materialism, scientific materialists think that science has explained the steps in evolution that led from “dead” insentient matter to feeling, thinking, choosing beings like us. But they never provide any evidence or offer any explanation for how this miracle could have occurred (they can’t).

Instead, they try to deny any ontological difference between mind and matter. It’s the only move available to materialists who want to avoid the ontological gap. But that kind of simple ontological reductionism flies in the face of our own direct experience.

Mind the Gap

Barglow objected:

[de Quincey] speaks of “the ‘ontological gap’ between two radically different kinds of reality.” But notice that it is the author himself here who is postulating a radical conceptual dualism. “Consciousness,” he says, “is notoriously non-physical (you cannot observe or measure it).” I don’t find this radical physical/non-physical distinction tenable. There are so many ways in which consciousness and the domain of mental phenomena are bound up
with physical phenomena, and are indeed observable . . . (Barglow, 2010, personal communication)

Here, Barglow clearly misunderstands me when he says I speak of “the ontological gap between two radically different kinds of reality.” While there is a radical difference or distinction between physical and non-physical (between matter and mind), there is no “gap.” I emphasize this over and over in my work: Consciousness and energy always go together. In panpsychism, mind and matter are inseparable, while remaining ontologically distinct. The “gap” I refer to shows up in materialism when scientists or philosophers try (but fail) to explain how one kind of reality (nonphysical consciousness) emerges from a radically different kind of reality (physical matter). Barglow’s next move, typical of materialists, is to question the distinction between “physical” and “non-physical,” saying that he finds it “untenable”—implying that only what is physical is real.

Following other materialists such as Daniel Dennett, Barglow is here denying that anything non-physical exists, and, therefore, that consciousness is physical. When materialists make that move (very common), I invite them to explain how any of the qualities (or quantities or complexity) of physical objects could ever account for the qualities of consciousness (qualia) so familiar to each of us—qualities such as subjectivity, feeling, awareness, intentionality, purpose, meaning, value, etc. etc. Any attempt to characterize consciousness as physical completely misses the key experiential first-person essence of what philosopher Thomas Nagel famously referred to as “what it feels like to be.”

Unity is Not Identity

Barglow (2010, personal communication) confuses unity with identity. He says: “There are so many ways in which consciousness and the domain of mental phenomena are bound up with physical phenomena.” Yes, of course. But so what? The fact that mind is “bound up with” matter in no way implies that mind is nothing but matter. That is just sloppy thinking. Imagine holding a rubber ball in your hand. Now try to separate the shape from the substance. Of course, you can’t. However, when you twist or squeeze the ball the shape changes yet the substance remains exactly the same. Clearly if the shape changes and the substance doesn’t, they cannot be identical. Like shape and substance, mind and matter are inseparably unified but are always distinct.

From the perspective of panpsychism, mind and matter always go together—they form a unity—but they are not identical. Even though physical and non-physical are inseparable, they remain distinct. You need only pay attention to your own daily experience to confirm this. You observe (with your senses) that you and others have a body (with extension and volume in space). You also experience your own body from “within.” You have feelings, thoughts, and make choices—and none of these can be located in space or explained in terms of physical events in your body. The objective, observable, existence of your body (physical) is radically different from your subjective non-observable conscious experience (non-physical). It doesn’t take a philosophical genius to notice the “radical distinction” between body and mind, between physical and nonphysical.
When materialists deny any such distinction between objective physical existence and subjective nonphysical existence, they are simply not paying attention. They are too caught up in their own abstract thoughts about consciousness instead of actually experiencing their experience.

Barglow (2010, personal communication) had more to say; my responses are brief, as follows.

Barglow: “The scientific evolutionary hypothesis is that consciousness has emerged as organized matter. A sentient, experiencing being is one that is physically organized in a certain way.”

de Quincey: “This just begs the question: How on Earth (or anywhere else) can mere physical organization achieve this miracle and produce sentient experiencing beings? This claim is made over and over without any evidence to back it up. And what is this mysterious ‘certain way’ in which physical complexity is organized to make minds?”

Barglow: “The evolutionary process of this emergence took place over many millions of years. No ‘complete mystery’ here.”

de Quincey: “Really? Then please provide a complete (or even incomplete) step-by-step explanation—especially an account of what happened at the moment the miracle occurred.” (Barglow, 2010, personal communication).

Barglow goes on to cite the evolution of photo-sensitivity—from primitive chemical reactions to the development of the eye—as an example of emergence. But this (like the old and tired example of liquid water emerging from hydrogen and oxygen gases) is a familiar non-sequitur. Yes, physical emergence does occur in physical systems. No mystery there. However, descriptions of one physical process giving rise to some other physical process is radically different from explaining how a physical process could give rise to some non-physical product. Relying on examples of physical emergence completely misses the point, and demonstrates a profound misunderstanding about the nature of consciousness—its essential subjectivity.

**Conclusion**

Let me summarize the main points:

1. Arguing over details in evolutionary theory—about whether species developed only through mutations and natural selection or if some creative intelligence also guides the process—is pointless. No amount of biological data will ever illuminate the relationship between consciousness and the physical world.
2. The role of consciousness in evolution (biological or cosmological) is not a scientific issue, it is philosophical. As long as scientific methodology relies on sensory empiricism as the only valid way to gather data, science will forever remain in the dark about consciousness.
3. The senses can detect only physical objects. Consciousness is not a physical object—it is the non-physical subject that knows about physical objects.
4. The mind-body problem is conceptual, not empirical—both the problem and its resolution depend on how we organize our ideas.

5. Using the criteria of conceptual coherence, consistency, and adequacy, we can evaluate competing theories or metaphysical worldviews that attempt to explain the “hard problem”—how consciousness exists in an otherwise physical universe.

6. Of the four major worldviews—dualism, materialism, idealism, and panpsychism—only one satisfies the criteria of logical coherence and adequacy. Only one avoids falling into a fatal explanatory gap by not requiring some kind of supernatural miracle and does not contradict our direct experience as embodied sentient beings. No logical impasse or ontological leap, and no performative contradiction.

7. When theories involving “interaction,” “emergence,” “emanation,” or a “performative contradiction” run aground, by a process of elimination we are left with the option of “consciousness all the way down” as the most likely story—even if at first glance it strikes us as counterintuitive. The foundational metaphysical assumption that best “cashes out” by accounting for the facts of experience and embodiment is panpsychism.

I’ll end as I began with the percipient words of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer:

“Every truth passes through three stages before it is recognized. In the first place it is ridiculed. In the second, it is opposed. In the third it is regarded as self-evident.” (quoted in de Quincey, 2010)

Where are we now?

**References**


The Union of Spirit and Matter: Science, Consciousness, and a Life Divine

Lynda Lester

Abstract: The once unbridgeable chasm between spirit and matter is closing. While the scientific method and scientific materialism have brought untold benefits to humanity, quantum physics has changed our view of matter as solid, objective, and obvious to a view that is more complex and which includes the possibility that consciousness has a part in manifesting reality. This shift mirrors Sri Aurobindo’s integral philosophy, which states that the universe is a manifestation of consciousness. This manifestation occurs through a process of involution followed by evolution, the next step of which is the emergence of a suprahumanity whose native state of consciousness will be supramental. Interestingly, some of Mother Mirra Alfassa’s experiences in bringing supramental consciousness into her body bear similarities to the discoveries of quantum physics. Unlike previous spiritual realizations, the supramental realization has the power to unify spirit and matter and usher in a life divine on earth.

Keywords: Consciousness, evolution, involution, integral philosophy, integral yoga, Mother Mirra Alfassa, quantum physics, science, singularity, spirituality, Sri Aurobindo, supermind.

Introduction

Through the ages, spirit and matter have been seen as absolute opposites: spirit as ethereal, immaterial, ineffable; matter as objective, solid, and obvious. Both have been thought to be the ultimate reality, both have inspired humanity, and the chasm between them has been called unbridgeable.

But Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa (more commonly known as the Mother), two great spiritual teachers of the 20th century, thought otherwise. Their ideal was to join the heights and depths together to bring about a spiritual transformation—here, on earth, in the conditions of the material universe. This transformation wouldn’t be a change of life into something purely subtle where, e.g., evolved beings ascend into light bodies and disappear from the physical plane. It would be an integral transformation that would not cast away the energies and capacities of matter, but bring out its hidden possibilities and innate divinity so that the spiritual summits and

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the material base of existence would be united in a divine life on earth (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, p. 522).

**Spirit vs. Matter**

A long tradition exists of religious teachings that urge seekers to shun the profane world and prepare for a heavenly afterlife, or to stop reincarnating and head for Nirvana. Sri Aurobindo notes that this revolt of spirit against matter has influenced the Indian mind for the last 2,000 years:

... the general conception of existence has been permeated with the Buddhistic theory of the chain of Karma and with the consequent antimony of bondage and liberation, bondage by birth, liberation by cessation from birth. Therefore all voices are joined in one great consensus that not in this world of the dualities can there be our kingdom of heaven, but beyond, whether in the joys of the eternal Vrindavan or the high beatitude of Brahmaloka, beyond all manifestations in some ineffable Nirvana or where all separate experience is lost in the featureless unity of the indefinable Existence. And through many centuries a great army of shining witnesses, saints and teachers ... have borne always the same witness and swelled always the same lofty and distant appeal—renunciation the sole path of knowledge, acceptance of physical life the act of the ignorant, cessation from birth the right use of human birth, the call of the Spirit, the recoil from Matter. (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 26–27)

Of late the opposite tradition has dominated in the West, where a spirit-denying materialism...

insists on Matter as a reality, the relative world as the sole thing of which we can in some sort be sure and the Beyond as wholly unknowable, if not indeed non-existent, a dream of the mind, an abstraction of Thought divorcing itself from reality. (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 20)

As both a spiritual practitioner and a writer for a national science laboratory, I have experienced both sides of the divide.

**The World According to Science**

At the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), a research laboratory in Boulder, Colorado, where geoscientists study the earth, oceans, clouds, and sun using blazingly fast supercomputers, I worked for 16 years in the field of scientific computing. My colleagues, holding advanced degrees in math, physics, and computer science, exhibited bemused skepticism during lunchtime conversations that turned to “higher consciousness.” This was to be expected. Firstly, because by default, humans always associate the real with the materially perceptible. Our physical senses cannot perceive anything immaterial—though we have other senses that can (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 21). But secondly, at a research laboratory like NCAR it’s not the world within, but the world without that matters. The purpose of science is to gain knowledge about the processes of nature—in this case, atmospheric processes. What’s important here is to measure
and analyze data; to develop testable hypotheses and make accurate predictions; to conduct experiments and share results with other scientists, who replicate those results—or challenge them if they’re wrong or incomplete; and of course to use mathematical tools to quantify and solve problems.

This objective, empirical, methodical approach to knowledge is called the scientific method. It has fostered an age of rationality, brought tremendous technological progress to society, and resulted in untold benefits for humanity. It has also resulted in a materialistic way of thinking that, due to its tremendous success in widening our understanding, has spread throughout much of the world and strongly shaped the modern mind.

It is important to remember that when this way of thinking first appeared in Europe in the 1600s, it was revolutionary. Religion was the sole arbiter of truth and people were tried for heresy for saying that the earth moved around the sun.

Sri Aurobindo says that the brief period of rationalistic materialism the world has been going through has helped humanity a great deal—it has swept away irrational dogmas, perverting superstitions, and misleading imaginations. Advancing knowledge, he says, should be based on a clear, pure, and disciplined intellect—and as human consciousness evolves toward higher levels, it’s necessary sometimes to return to sensible fact, to the concrete realities of the physical world (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 12–13).

It even may be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness—to its heights we can always reach—when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. . . . And it is certainly the fact that the wider we extend and the surer we make our knowledge of the physical world, the wider and surer becomes our foundation for the higher knowledge, even for the highest, even for the Brahmavidya. (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 14)

**Anomalies and Contraindications**

It’s interesting, however, that he calls our current age a “brief” period of rationalistic materialism. If that’s true, and if the materialistic paradigm is not the sole truth of things, certain anomalies and contraindications might start to appear suggesting that this view, while valid for certain purposes, may not be the complete picture. That indeed, has been the case, starting around the end of the 19th century.

At that time, scientists had a picture of the universe they thought was nearly complete (Walker, 2000, p. 24). It was based on the Newton’s laws of motion, Maxwell’s equations for electricity and magnetism, and the laws of thermodynamics (Orzel, 2009, p. 231). In this view all things are made of matter, all things that happen are the result of physical interactions, reality is objective and “out there,” and mind and consciousness are irrelevant.

Then in 1905 Einstein revolutionized the understanding of matter, energy, space, and time with his special theory of relativity. He showed that mass, the very substance of an object, is convertible to energy, and that space and time are elastic, depending on your point of view. This
was the first scientific indication that physical reality depends in some way on the observer (Walker, 2000, pp. 37–41).

Meanwhile, Max Planck discovered that light seems to be radiated and absorbed in spurts that release packets of energy called quanta (Walker, 2000, p. 43). He found this quite perplexing, because scientists could demonstrate the opposite—that light was a spread-out wave. But Einstein liked Planck’s idea, and five years later proposed that light itself is a stream of discrete particles. This laid the groundwork for a brand new kind of physics: quantum theory.

**The New Physics**

By the 1920s, physicists realized that photons, protons, electrons, atoms, molecules, all the tiniest components of matter, behave sometimes like particles but sometimes like waves of energy. This seemed impossible: how could a photon, for example, be both a tiny particle and a spread-out electromagnetic wave? Experiments proved it, however, and as scientists developed the math to deal with the strange new problem of wave-particle duality, they saw that their solutions had created a newer and deeper mystery: the measurement problem (Walker, 2000, p. 49).

A quantum particle is mathematically described in terms of a probability wave or “wave function.” This means that the particle hovers in a sort of superposition of all possible states and doesn’t have a definite location, momentum, or even a discrete existence until it is observed or measured, at which point the wave function collapses and the particle takes on distinct, objective properties. No one has been able to figure out how this transition from probability to concrete reality takes place, but in some way the observer—the person who designs and conducts the experiment, who takes the measurement—seems to play a key role in bringing fuzzy quantum particles into structured form (Wallace, 2007, pp. vii–viii).

This would seem to suggest that mind or consciousness plays a key role in materializing reality. However, this is such an astounding idea that it’s widely rejected by physicists, who want nothing to do with consciousness, many of whom are still today striving to find alternative explanations for the collapse of the wave function.

Some decide the best course is to not spend a lot of time thinking about it—their job is physics, not metaphysics, so they simply use the equations, which work, and concentrate on pragmatic results. This approach has been called “Shut up and calculate!” (Mermin, 2004).

**A Profound Discovery**

Meanwhile, there’s yet another revelation that’s come from quantum theory, and this one is the most astonishing of all. Newtonian physics sees the world as consisting of independent, separate objects that interact with each other locally, like a pool cue and a billiard ball, through physical influences that cannot exceed the speed of light.

Early in the development of quantum theory, however, scientists became aware of something called quantum entanglement. This happens when two particles are associated or entangled with
each other so that measuring one instantly determines the state of the other. Einstein realized that if the two particles were far enough apart, they’d have to communicate faster than the speed of light. He called this “spooky action at a distance,” hated it, and thought that because it was predicted by quantum theory, there was something wrong with quantum theory (Schwartz & Begley, 2002, p. 346).

In fact, there wasn’t. In 1964 it was proven that no matter how far apart two entangled particles are, even halfway across the universe, they do influence each other instantly—in no time at all, outside of time. This nonlocal influencing is not subject to the speed of light, does not diminish with distance, and links one location to another without crossing space, without decay, without delay (Herbert, 1985).

Physicist Henry Stapp calls this “the most profound discovery of science” (Schwartz & Begley, 2002, p. 343), because it shows that the old view of a clockwork universe, where all objects are separate and interact only at the local level through material processes that obey the laws of classical physics, is not completely true. Rather, it shows that underlying the local reality of objective, separate objects and phenomena, there’s a nonlocal reality in which nothing is separate and everything is connected.

A More Intimate Knowledge of Self and World

So quantum physics has taken us from a solely materialistic view of the world in which matter is solid, forces are physical, objects are separate, reality is objective, and what we perceive with the outer senses is what’s real to a view considerably more subtle, complex, and multilayered in which matter is energy, time and space are relative, particles are waves, objects don’t exist until they are observed, entangled bits of matter communicate faster than light—and in which consciousness may just possibly have a part.

Thus science, in its search to find the reality of matter, has brought us to the door of the immaterial—a door that opens on enormous vistas of the future, for Sri Aurobindo says that since the soul of science is its search for knowledge, as it reaches the borders of the supraphysical, its very rush will carry it onward. The success it’s had with the visible world is just a hint of what it could bring to the exploration of what lies beyond (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 16).

Meanwhile, according to Sri Aurobindo, three things will remain from the centuries of scientific materialism: the truth of the physical world and its importance, the scientific method of knowledge, and the importance of earth life and the human endeavor. These will stay, he says, but be transformed in the light of a vaster and more intimate knowledge of self and world (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, p. 195).

The World According to Consciousness

We just saw that according to quantum theory, the discrete existence of particles apparently depends on observation or measurement, that is, on there being a conscious observer—which seems to imply that consciousness plays some part in creating material reality. This doesn’t make
sense if consciousness is an incidental byproduct of matter. As Nobel physicist Eugene Wigner notes, if the atoms in your brain produce your consciousness, but your consciousness somehow brings those very atoms into existence, that’s a paradox (Schwartz & Begley, 2002, p. 283).

It’s a paradox, however, that doesn’t exist for Sri Aurobindo. Drawing from the wisdom and experience of Indian yoga—which is its own kind of science—he says that behind and beyond the appearances of the universe and involved in every particle of the universe, there’s an Omnipresent Reality that is at once an unknowable, indefinable, featureless Absolute and the source of all things and determinations.

This Omnipresent Reality puts forth the universe by the power of what might be called its universal intelligence, which is basically another word for consciousness; and that consciousness is the fundamental thing in existence. It extends from the supreme spiritual heights down through the material world in a continuous spectrum that has different grades or levels. Sri Aurobindo calls these levels planes of consciousness, and they’re the infrastructure on which the universe is built. It is the gradual precipitation of consciousness through its various planes that manifests the universe.

This process starts at the summits of being with sachchidananda, a transcendent and unmanifest plane of infinite existence, infinite consciousness-force, and infinite delight. Emerging from sachchidananda is the supermind, or supramental, a vast unity consciousness that embraces both infinite oneness and infinite diversity, and which begins to physically manifest the universe.

Out of supermind comes the plane of universal mind. Mind is the power of consciousness to divide things into parts, to measure and limit; the role of mind is to translate infinity into the terms of the finite (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 173–174). Then comes life, a power of vitality and energy; and finally matter, which is the ultimate division of consciousness into tiny bits. Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, it is consciousness precipitating downward through its various planes that manifests the universe. If we accept this point of view, we see that because matter derives from life, and life derives from mind, ultimately, mind is the cause of atomic existence (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 252).

This may sound familiar, for quantum physics also indicates that somehow (and most inexplicably), mind brings quantum particles into existence. We will return to this idea shortly.

**Voluntary Involution**

First, however, let’s examine the precipitation of consciousness downward through its various modes or planes. Sri Aurobindo calls this process involution, and it’s a process by which consciousness gradually limits itself by focusing on a particular aspect of reality to the exclusion of others. This is actually a power consciousness has: the power of exclusive concentration. (We experience the same thing when we become utterly absorbed in reading a book and lose track of everything around us.) With involution, consciousness becomes more and more involved with what it is doing, until eventually it becomes so involved that it forgets itself in the oblivion of matter (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, pp. 604–610).
We might ask why consciousness would want to do that; what was it thinking? Many spiritual teachings say it was thinking delusionally—the physical world is a deception of maya, or at the very least a catastrophic fall from grace. But Sri Aurobindo says, no—without this exclusive concentration of consciousness, manifestation would be limited to the higher worlds—or to a cosmos that’s static and unchangeable.

The Purpose of the Universe

Involution was the necessary basis for individuation—to protect the individual from the largeness of infinity so that behind that defense an individuality could be worked out in time and space in order that consciousness could realize its own delight, not just in the undifferentiated, supracosmic realms, but cosmically and individually and in infinite multiplicity; so that it could experience delight to the smallest and most precise degree—fine-grained delight, objectified, intimate, infinitely varied and particular; dynamic delight of becoming that can’t be experienced in the transcendent beyond. There is a purpose to this universe, Sri Aurobindo says, and the purpose is to materialize delight (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 612).

It may not look like that to us ordinary beings in the physical world, and that is, firstly, because due to the exclusive concentration of consciousness, we are superficially unaware that in our true nature we are the infinite consciousness. Of course, the remedy for that is to become aware, which is the reason we do yoga (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 615). But secondly, this materialization of delight is a long cosmic process, an unfolding, and it’s not yet complete; we can see that just by looking at the world today. On the other hand, this very unfolding is its own kind of delight. Sri Aurobindo says there’s a joy that’s impossible in the higher planes—the joy of discovery, which is one of the greatest joys of conscious being (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 428).

Sri Aurobindo says that evolution is just such a progressive revelation, taking place in geologic time and on a cosmic scale: a progressive revelation of the consciousness that involved itself in matter and which is now awakening, step by step, to the miracle of its infinite being.

Meanwhile, we and all the many who come into this world are in essence one with that underlying consciousness and so are willing participants in that joy of self-discovery. We’re drawn into the world for the very sake of the soul’s adventure—for what Sri Aurobindo calls “the adventure of consciousness and joy” (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p 2).

A Change Beyond Imagining

Just to clarify, evolution is not the opposite of involution. If it were, as we evolved we would drop our bodies, drop our life energy, drop our mentality, and eventually return to the featureless Absolute. Evolution is something else—the gradual development in matter of material forms that increasingly express higher, more subtle, and more powerful modes of consciousness. Life is the first step of that evolution. Mind is the second step. Now nature is about to take a third great evolutionary step, developing out of humanity a supra-humanity or even a new species whose

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2 In its ultimate essence (sachchidananda), consciousness is one with existence and delight.
native mode of consciousness will be supramental. We saw this supramental consciousness before during the involution, when supermind put forth from itself the universe. Now we're seeing it from the other side of evolution. This is mind-boggling, for it means that those who make the evolutionary transition will possess that supramental consciousness while materially embodied—and possess the infinite existence and bliss of sachchidananda, the highest term of the supermind, as well.

We hear the word “singularity” a lot these days, usually in the context of a technological singularity, superhuman intelligence, the end of the Mayan calendar, the year 2012. But this is a singularity beyond singularities; this will be a change beyond imagining. Because when we pass through the barrier that separates mind from supermind, we’ll retain physical bodies but leave behind the divided, fragmented world of ordinary mental perception and regain identity with Omnipresent Reality.

Physicists are searching for a unified field theory, but this will truly be the unified field, for supermind is a unity consciousness—it unifies and embraces; e.g., the infinite and the finite; oneness and diversity; immutable silence and dynamic movement; personality and impersonality; the individual, the cosmic, and the transcendent. It is also an oceanic, global consciousness of irresistible harmony and a compelling force of truth and beauty.

It is this that will bring a life divine in the material world and the union of spirit and matter. Previous spiritual realizations didn’t reach the level of supermind and didn’t have the power to transform universal nature; but supermind is the ultimate creative force, and does have that power.

The Supramental Sense

Of course, as with any great world-changing movement, there are always early adopters; and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were early adopters of the supermind. They developed an integral yoga by which human nature can be transformed into supramental nature. They also left many books, including 13 volumes of first-hand reports (Mother’s Agenda) describing what it’s like to perceive with the supramental sense and bring the supermind into the very cells of the body.

Weirdly enough, these reports sound sometimes like descriptions of quantum particles before the collapse of the wave function—particles that exist in all positions simultaneously and behave like waves till they’re measured. The Mother says, for instance, that a supramentalized cell is no longer individual in the separate sense—it’s as if it’s omnipresent (Van Vrekhem, 2002, p. 180). Her body too feels no limits, as if it’s spread out everywhere (Satprem, 1982, p. 36). She also speaks repeatedly of a material consciousness that feels like the movement of corporeal waves (Satprem, 1982, p. 22).

We recall now how Sri Aurobindo says that mind, i.e., the consciousness of division and separation, is the cause of atomic existence, and also how quantum physics seems to indicate that observation—by someone with mental consciousness, of course—collapses the wave function.
Perhaps supermind, which differentiates without dividing and expresses multiple points within a single oneness, perceives matter as wave-like; or perhaps supramentalized matter somehow behaves differently than mentalized matter. In fact, the Mother says that as matter is permeated by the supermind, it develops new qualities of subtleness, suppleness, penetrability, plasticity, fluidity, and much less rigidity of form (Mother, 1984, p. 58).

The Mother also talks about perceiving a kind of material mesh enveloping the earth that connects events, linking them and making them interdependent; she says that if one has power over a part of this mesh, one can change a whole range of circumstances that in appearance are unrelated (Satprem, 1982, p. 211). Einstein might have called this “spooky action at a distance,” but it sounds like nonlocality and quantum entanglement to me.

**Integrating Scientific and Yogic Knowledge**

I’m making these connections between science and yoga because I think there are some interesting connections to make. The Mother once said that although the practice of science and yoga are different, what’s discovered will be the same because there aren’t two things to be found, but one—the Omnipresent Reality.

I also want to bring up again, here, Sri Aurobindo’s conviction that the more knowledge we have of the physical world, the better is our foundation for the highest spiritual knowledge:

> Nothing can be more remarkable and suggestive than the extent to which modern Science confirms in the domain of Matter the conceptions and even the very formulae of language which were arrived at, by a very different method, in the Vedanta,—the original Vedanta, not of the schools of metaphysical philosophy, but of the Upanishads. And these, on the other hand, often reveal their full significance, their richer contents only when they are viewed in the new light shed by the discoveries of modern Science . . .” (Sri Aurobindo, 2005, p. 16)

In 1961 the Mother observed that as she pursued the minute work of supramentalizing her body, she knew nothing from a chemical, biological, medical, or therapeutic point of view (Satprem, 1982, p. 70). Perhaps now in the age of widespread instant access to information, and as more people take up this work, it will be possible to integrate scientific and yogic knowledge to a greater degree than ever before.

**The Union of Spirit and Matter**

Of course, it’s long way from mind to supermind; there are many difficult passages, intervening states, and challenges to overcome. But it is a journey worth taking, for Sri Aurobindo says that the supermind will give to the body a fullness of capacity far beyond anything now possible (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, p. 25).

The Mother says that the physical realization of divinity will bring a tremendous concentration of energy, a power and reality that exists in none of the other states of...
consciousness; it will be something solid, unalterable, complete (Anonymous, n.d., p. 298), with a precision and exactness down to the atom (Satprem, 1982, p. 35).

In the supramental consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says, we will feel the divine light and power and bliss above us and descending into us, filling every strand of our nature, every cell and atom of our being, flooding our soul and mind and life and body, surrounding us like an illimitable sea and filling the world, suffusing all our feeling and sense and experience, making all our life truly and utterly divine (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, p. 563).

And the Mother says, “I saw that secret, I saw that it is in earthly matter, on earth, that the Supreme becomes perfect” (Satprem, 1982, p. 35). “Anything we can humanly feel or see is nothing compared to that,” she adds. “I have never seen or felt anything so beautiful as that . . . I’ve had hours . . . the most wonderful hours ever possible on earth” (p. 161).

I believe that’s what we can be looking forward to.

References


