

# ***The Apocalypse of The Modern World-System & Related Possibilities for Democratizing Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>***

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**Abstract:** Two narratives about the nature of our current historical moment are brought together in the interest of provoking a reconsideration of “collective enlightenment,” or what we term *the democratization of enlightenment*. World-systems analysis is a trans-disciplinary field focused on the evolution and future of the modern world. Leaders in this field have charted long-term limits and end games, placing our current era in the heart of the modern world-system’s epochal and final crises. Esoteric religion and mystical traditions have also located our era at the heart of a world-transformation. From Teilhard de Chardin to Process Theology, a divinely inspired turning point in Earth’s evolution has been argued to be immanent. The process of replacing the modern world-system involves the widespread democratization of enlightenment. Engaging in concrete utopian theorizing we suggest that tomorrow’s world will involve certain widespread “social miracles” — making enlightenment an everyday thing. Drawing on mythic and biblical imagery, we suggest the apocalypse of the modern world-system will be accompanied by widespread transformations of collective consciousness — a Planetary Awakening of Unique Self Symphonies.

## ***Introduction: On Endgames and Emergence***

For *Spanda Journal*’s special issue on “Collective Enlightenment” our goal is to offer a few thoughts toward framing collective enlightenment in terms of the current epochal crisis of geo-political and historical dynamics within the modern world-system. Understanding the present historical moment in this way has been one of the central themes of work at the Center for Integral Wisdom since its inception. In our language we have been exploring the relations between *existential risk* and the *democratization of enlightenment*.<sup>2</sup> By existential risk we mean risk to the very survival of our species, given unprecedentedly dangerous realities on multiple fronts ranging from potential infrastructure and environmental collapse, to rogue terrorism, out of control technologies and more. The only response to existential risk is a fundamental and large-scale

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<sup>1</sup> Stein, Z. & Gafni, M. (2017). The Apocalypse of the modern world system and related possibilities for democratizing enlightenment. *Spanda Journal*. 2(1) pp.93-103.

transformation of identity and worldview. As we discuss below, the “democratization of enlightenment” is a possible next step in cultural evolution and by far the most effective response to existential risk. It is only a fundamental cultural evolution—an up leveling of our Story of Self and Cosmos—that has the capacity to be the change that changes everything. The articulation of a new vision rooted in the democratization of enlightenment is part of a vital and urgent emancipatory project.

We are placing certain esoteric spiritual narratives that have long pointed to an immanent planetary awakening alongside narratives from the social, political, and historical sciences, which have long pointed to a developmental fulcrum or tipping point in human socio-cultural evolution. When humanity has entirely encircled the Earth with technology, and geographical frontiers have disappeared along with Cheap Nature and Cheap Labor, then occurs the apocalypse of the modern world-system. These two ideas—the emergence of widespread collective enlightenment and the end of the modern world-system—are related in that they both signal a near-future evolutionary leap to a radically new way of being human, an dramatic geo-historical movement that effectively closes out one era of civilization and ushers in another.

There is difference between the end of *the world* and the end of *an historical world-system*.<sup>3</sup> But the categories and rituals of apocalypse apply to both. *Eschaton*, from the Greek ἔσχατος (*éskhatos*) meaning “the last” or literally “the uncountable,” is used in theology to refer to the final events that conclude the sacred history of the world. If the apocalypse is *the end*, the final unveiling, the eschaton is *the end game*, the final climatic scene of the cosmic drama. These categories from Western theology are useful because they remind us that humans have long grappled with the idea that our being on Earth is of finite duration. While twenty-first century climatologists and geo-political strategists do not speak in theological terms they nevertheless conjure up ideas deep in the human imagination. Is humanity not, in these times, living out an *eschatological drama*? At least since the 1960s, “the end of days” has been brought from myths and prophecies into the realities of weapons science and environmental forecasting. The second

decade of the new millennium has brought a heightened sense of our species' fragilities and a new level of intensity and thought about how our world-system's end game will play out. Apocalyptic visions are reverberating through social media and across the big screen, while leading scientific minds and wise indigenous elders alike are making specific near-term predictions concerning the extinction of the species. Before anything like collective enlightenment can even be considered as possible humanity must come to terms with the mortality of the species. The shocking reality of our fragile existence has only just dawned on global culture in the wake of Hiroshima, Watson and Crick, and the immanence of The Singularity.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the end of humanity may be more likely than the emergence of a new world-system. There is a high probability that the modern world-system will simply tip into catastrophic existential failure as it wobbles and bifurcates unsustainably, out of equilibrium, beyond possibilities for self-correction. Stabilizing an emergent higher-level equilibrium for the total planetary world-system requires nothing less than making common what appears now as miraculous: *the democratization of enlightenment*.

### ***World-Systems Analysis: Prophezing the End of Profits***

Humanity is in the midst of closing out a particular historical era. The perceived legitimacy of governments will continue to decline as the number and intensity of humanitarian crises continues to crescendo. These processes will culminate in a series of ecological and economic tragedies, with related militarized political dramas and, eventually, the catastrophic emergence of a radically new kind of world-system (or systems). If humanity fails to navigate a world-system shift in the next 30 years we may well instead be involved in a more ultimate ending, as the biosphere-capital matrix of value extraction precedes unabated, undercutting the conditions that allow for human life. The modern world-system, which began to emerge during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is the largest functionally integrated social unit the human species has ever created. The ideas of "world-systems," "world-economies," and "world ecologies" are essential for any serious thinking about evolutionary futures for the human species.<sup>5</sup> The fields of world-system analysis and world-ecology

represent a growing trans-disciplinary movement, encompassing economics, geography, politics, sociology, history, and ecology.

The modern world-system has been built around the ready availability of Cheap Nature. The discovery and exploitation of new frontiers of Cheap Nature, especially of energy, food, and labor, has long allowed for resolutions to capitalism's recurring *developmental crises*. For example, take the pivotal switch in energy-commodity frontiers from wood to coal, which signaled the emergence of the so-called "second industrial revolution"—the revolution of steam engines and railroads that transformed whole continents. During the early eighteenth century in Western Europe and England, trees were becoming expensive as forests began competing for space with the agricultural land needed to feed growing city populations. Crisis was immanent until new mining techniques and labor control regimes allowed for the opening of *underground* energy frontiers. Massive veins of rich petro-fuels just there for the taking (actually, it meant taking as "free" millions of years of "work" done by natural processes). And, importantly, it was available outside the existing conflicts and scarcities of the land. New Cheap Nature. Problem solved. Of course, we all know the story of the petro-fuel industries, the results and end game of which we are seeing all around us.

It is likely that the dawning of the twenty-first century signals the modern world-system's *cumulative* or *epochal* crisis. The last frontiers of Cheap Nature are disappearing. The "taps"—resources flows, like water, oil, and soil—are running out. The "sinks"—waste dumps, like the atmosphere, oceans and human body—are filling up. There is nothing left "outside" the metabolism of the world-system. There is nowhere left to go to find new taps and sinks.

While we leverage the language of crisis here and suggest that we have reached the ecological and geographical limits of the modern world-system.<sup>6</sup> We mean only to point to the limits of nature and society as we know them now. Nature, including human nature, is more than is dreamt of by human capital theory and neo-classical economics. This is a theme that plays out

throughout our published work, including discussions of metrics, social miracles, and the future of educational technologies.<sup>7</sup>

A world-system is defined in terms of a geographical region that contains a singular division of labor, coherent political and bureaucratic apparatuses, and a distinct organization of the world-ecology. World-systems co-evolve with cultures, and there is, or has been at least since the 1970's, a truly planetary culture; or better: there is a global ideology being broadcast from a polycentric world-system that reaches every corner of the Earth. Previous world-systems were only planetary in ambition. Ultimately, they were circumscribed and competed with other world-systems on their fringes. When trade and communication took place between ancient civilizations it was, in fact, an exchange between world-systems. This differs from what we know today, which is trade and communication between different societies within a single world-system. Previous world-systems such as those along the Nile and Indus River valley were, to say the least, not organized by capitalists. They were based on economic systems, ideological formations, and personality structures vastly different from our own. The existence and continuation of our modern world-system has fundamentally changed the very frontiers of human possibility and fundamentally altered the self-regulatory processes of the biosphere itself.

The modern world-system is now close to literally encompassing all of humanity while at the same time exhausting the limits of the biosphere. This is something never achieved by any existing historical world-system. Based on an analysis of long-term global trends in economics and political history, contemporary world-systems analysts argue that we have reached a crucial moment in geo-history. When any complex system reaches its structural limits an evolutionary crisis ensues and a fundamentally new kind of system must be painfully and violently born.<sup>8</sup> It is no different with the complex dynamic systems that comprise humanity's planetary civilization. We are currently in just such an evolutionary crisis; we inhabit a transition between world-systems.

Today, we are witnessing simultaneous and interactive crises playing out amongst our broadest social structures and their biospheric corollaries. The human-biosphere relationship is

being fundamentally renegotiated. In the midst of all this *external* transformation there are, of course, related changes in human consciousness, culture, personality, and capability. Our global crises have an *interior* dimension as well. *Consciousness itself* is as important as energy, economics, or military-technology industrial complexes. Educational abundance and new forms of collaboration are needed to up-level human abilities right at the same time new structures and lifeworlds need building. The near term extinction of the species is unlikely precisely because of our latent capacities for individual and collective enlightenment.

***The Rising Psychological Temperature of the Planet:  
#Eschaton@ApocalypseNow#Who'sFuture***

Teilhard wrote about the “psychological intensities of the Earth” in terms of “the rising temperature of the Noosphere.”<sup>9</sup> He believed humanity was folding in upon itself in a divine process of planitization. Evolutionary conditions are such that they create an ever rising temperature within the noosphere, a process involving cultural convergence and conflict, proliferating technologies of communication and transportation, scientific discoveries, religious revelation and revival, all playing on upon an increasingly small and crowded global stage. Teilhard believed this would climax in an intensification of the collective consciousness of humanity so unprecedented as to be incomprehensible before its occurrence: the so-called Omega Point, beyond which are possibilities for human evolution that we cannot even conceive. That is to say, the noosphere will keep “heating up,” humanity will keep increasing its psychological temperature, until the result is essentially a state change or phase shift in the nature of consciousness itself. This is a vision of the eschaton as collective enlightenment, held in the mind and heart of a Christian evolutionary mystic.

Teilhard’s vision echoes ideas found elsewhere in Western esotericism, such as the Trans-Himalayan Tradition,<sup>10</sup> which tells of the emergence of a “6<sup>th</sup> post-Atlantean” planetary epoch, characterized as involving new forms of collective consciousness and communion between people

and the other sentient races of the Earth. Teilhard's boiling over (literally state-change) of the consciousness of the noosphere also echoes the conception of *God's evolution* found in process theology, stemming from Alfred North Whitehead. Evolution is God in motion, unfolding toward intensities and polarities, a rising of awareness and energy, an always-increasing contrast and dynamism within the prehensive scope of actual occasions.<sup>11</sup> The eschatology of process theology characterizes climax of sacred history as the evolution of a totalizing or integral consciousness in which humanity is transformed by Divine Self-Awareness and thus lifted into widespread *participation mystique*. The great Indian sage and political revolutionary Sri Aurobindo put forward a similar vision, which included the descent of the Divine Super-Mind and the ascent of human consciousness through individual and socio-political evolution, resulting in the birth of a new being following the collective enlightenment of humanity.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Jewish visionary scholar, activist and mystic, Abraham Kuk, calls forth a vision of an enlightened *polis* where human beings awaken *en masse*, incarnating in their collective personhood, as the leading edge of evolution.<sup>13</sup> More recently, the cultural leadership of Barbara Marx Hubbard and Marc Gafni has taken up this lineage; partnered at the Center for Integral Wisdom, an expanding praxis of *Conscious Evolution* explicitly takes up the vision of Teilhard, Aurobindo, and Kuk, a form of post-post-modern evolutionary mysticism, activating souls in the catalyzing of a Planetary Awakening in 2020.

These provocative esoteric ideas showcase one of several ways to understand the meaning of collective enlightenment. They characterize it as a rare historical or evolutionary event during which massive numbers of humans are simultaneously lifted into a new more enlightened state of consciousness and cooperation. Another way to understand collective enlightenment is as a state of consciousness and capacity that is always already present and immanent in the field of human relationship, which can emerge spontaneously during profound mutual understanding and interactions. While both (and other) definitions of collective enlightenment are good, we are interested in exploring a deeper understanding of the former, i.e., the world-historical-consciousness-shift definition.

This is why we are interested in “social miracles” that will catalyze both a transition beyond capitalism and the emergence of a society that is more enlightened.<sup>14</sup> So to conclude here we want to engage in some *concrete utopian theorizing*.<sup>15</sup> While the majority of speculation about the future focuses on great leaps in science and technology, the futures scenarios we are interested in instead focus on great leaps in human morality and political consciousness. Our thinking departs from the dystopian techno-scientific futures that dominate public consciousness. From sci-fi movies to the nightly news it is techno-science-gone-wrong, zombie apocalypses, and malevolent Artificial Intelligence, images and narratives consumed by the youth in particular. Pop culture visions of positive futures usually also hinge on new breakthroughs in techno-science. Sometimes it appears that our future is one in which humanity is either destroyed by techno-science or saved by it. In either case, as a culture we are starved for visions of the future that involve radically different political and moral innovations. Humanity longs for visions of breakthroughs in consciousness and culture.

Futurists like Rameez Naam and others have often pointed out that the future of humanity is dependent on innovation. Indeed, it is only innovation that will move us from dystopian futures to utopian ones. Naam, however like many other thinkers of his ilk, thinks of innovation as taking place primarily in the realm of exteriors.<sup>16</sup> The techno-optimists implicitly or explicitly claim that new technologies and even new systems of government – exterior changes in the social or technical structure of society – will bring us to a new and great future. We call this sort of thinking the Epcot fallacy. Millions of people of all ages have visited the Epcot pavilion at Disney World. It is filled with exhibits of smiling families, ensconced in the delight of myriad future technologies, which Epcott was designed to exhibit. Why is everyone smiling? The pavilion suggests they are happy because of all the new technology. Epcott does ever not raise the more basic question: *does technology make people happy?* By the Epcott fallacy we refer to the often-repeated assertion of the techno-optimists, that innovation in the realm of exteriors can make us happy. It takes more than technology to truly change the course of the world-system. The Renaissance, for example, which

climaxed in the Western Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, was a catalyst for a world-system shift. The shift however was not merely one rooted in technological advance and the emergent scientific method, as much as that is a major part of the story. Rather the shift was sourced in dramatic innovation in consciousness, the emergence of a new story of Self and Cosmos. The root of the world-system shift was interior innovations, from which the scientific method emerged, and then flowed all of the technological breakthroughs.

It is important to understand that what stops humanity from living in a world of justice and abundance—a world in which collective enlightenment is common—is not a lack of necessary technology and science. The culture of late-capitalism would have us believe that only scientific miracles will save humanity, and preferably those that will turn a profit and help maintain economic growth (so-called “disaster capitalism”). But the truth is that new technological innovations without genuine social miracles will not save us. There is no saving of humanity without social miracles. What stops humanity from living in a world of justice and abundance are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, the rules we have made up that now govern our cooperation, and the legacies of illusion and dishonesty that continue to blind us to our actual situation as a species.

A truly “collectively enlightened society” would not just find opportunities for expanding consciousness and capacity within existing systems of law, culture, and labor markets, but create whole new systems guided by the idea of maximizing educational opportunity for lifelong learning and cooperative endeavors. This is the simple concrete utopian vision we are offering here: *educational abundance* resulting from the repositioning of learning and human development as a dominant social value. To put it quite simply: most of our major social structures, such as labor markets and legal systems, are designed to promote economic growth, *period*.<sup>17</sup> We are asking: what if they were designed to promote human development and learning instead? What if the goal of society—as encoded in its very legal structures— was not endless accumulation of wealth but the endless actualization of human potential? What if we designed the basic structures of our social systems to catalyze collective enlightenment?

Economic realities and the actualization of human potentials are related. We now depend on many forms of material abundance made possible as a result of over four centuries of growth-oriented structures within the capitalist world-system. The modern world-system, like all socio-economic systems, is also a system of human capacities. Basic structures and institutions shape the skills and dispositions of the people who work and live in them. The modern world-system has shaped the very face of the Earth; it has also remade the human mind and heart. It has made possible an abundance of human creativity, skill, and intelligence along certain lines. But it has also *constrained* human development. Economic factors have dictated both what is passed on to the next generation and what resources are available for doing so. In some areas we have explored human potential magnificently while in others we have literally suppressed exploration.<sup>18</sup>

Social conditions could be created that will enable a future of educational abundance in which the frontiers of human potential are opened wide and enlightenment is democratized.<sup>19</sup> The demands of our historical moment require the re-design of social structures in all sectors so that educational configurations can be transformed in ways that assure all people get what they need. We are looking beyond the realm of what our culture tells us is possible. We are looking out beyond the limits of our current stories (or meta-theories) about what human society is and can be. The radical reforms we write about elsewhere—such as a Global Debt Jubilee and a Universal Basic Income Guarantee—are referred to as *miracles* because they appear “super-natural” to conventional consciousness. They seem impossible, almost against the laws of human nature. It seems naïve to suggest these as political ambitions. However, the simple truth is that the democratization of enlightenment, requires as a prerequisite social and economic justice, from which follow a society of educational abundance and the condition for the possibility of a collectively enlightened humanity.

When world-systems transition, as they have at several key moments in human history, collective capabilities and consciousness change profoundly. The unprecedented state of human consciousness and capability often called “collective enlightenment” is a world-historical emergent

on the horizon for us today. Two turnings in the last two millennia give a sense of what world-system transitions are like. About 2000 years ago, when the world-system pivoted around the Roman Empire (the turning of the axial-age), it was “individual enlightenment” dawning as the focus of human self-understanding and ability. This was one of the great contributions of the axial-age religions, the realization of that gnosis which leads to transformation, available through intense practice of heart, mind, and body. The individual could rise above the masses and nature to attain some level of Enlightenment. Before the axial religions the idea of individual liberation was absurd for anyone but a King (and even he was at the whim of the gods). The genuine possibility of individual transformation and liberation was a momentous leap in the evolution of consciousness, which was virtually ungraspable until it arose. This innovation in consciousness would transform the face of the planet, and set the stage for another.

A little less than a thousand years ago the nascent idea of democratic governance began to emerge. At first the notion was so subversive that to suggest it would likely get you killed. Democracy was a pejorative term for most of the history of its use, meaning basically just “mob rule.” How could anyone possibly believe that every person in a country, regardless of their background, station or rank would have an equal say in the determining the laws of a country and in choosing who would actually rule? The idea was seen as both, heretical, absurd and highly dangerous to the welfare of society. However, as we know, the idea gradually evolved until with the advent of the Western Enlightenment the democratization of governance slowly became a given. In the last hundred years democratization has been radically extended to including women and “others” previously marginalized. Today any child who grows up in the western world takes the democratization of governance as a given.

We are suggesting that one thousand years later—today—at precisely the moment when it is urgently necessary, these previous evolutions of culture must come together for the sake of the future. When the vision of classic Enlightenment merges with the vision of political democratization what is generated is the next great leap forward in cultural evolution, *the democratization of*

*enlightenment*. The first harbingers of the democratization of enlightenment are being experienced already as spontaneous moments of “collective enlightenment” in small groups. These groups at the leading edge, like always, are the potential harbingers of tomorrow’s humanity.

Many of these small group experiences can be understood as delicate and context sensitive “Unique Self-Symphonies” — a term emerging from Marc Gafni’s Unique Self Theory, pointing to the egoless and decentralized cooperative endeavors that emerge among post-conventional personalities.<sup>20</sup> Unique Self Theory is an answer the single most important question that every human being must answer: Who Am I? Unique Self emerges from the confluence the leading edges of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern insight. We will state here the basic premises of Unique Self theory in a few short sentences. From these premises naturally emerges the democratization of enlightenment, and ultimately what in Unique Self Theory is referred to as a Unique Self Symphony.

Unique Self is not another word for separate self or what is sometimes termed the ego self of western psychology. It is not the your particular talents or your personality type as it might appear on a Meyers Briggs test. Rather Unique Self appears most clearly “on the other side” of what is often referred to as True Self. True Self is the singular that has no plural. The total number of True Selves in the world is one. This True Self is only One; its realization effaces the various differences that accrue to the self commonly known and felt, the “skin encapsulated ego.” While overcoming the self and realizing the True Self is the great ambition of so much spirituality and religion, and the great offering of the axial-age religions, this alone is not enough. One the other side of True Self the personal re-emerges. This is not the personal before the impersonal True Self but the personal that transcends and includes the True Self.

The non-dual tantric traditions (out of Asia and Egypt) have long maintained that on the other side of True Self is a non-dual return to the world, as the universal shines through the concrete and signal individual. But they did not yet have a sense of the irreducible dignity of the individual that was to enter world culture first through the Hebraic traditions and ultimately through

the Renaissance and later the Western Enlightenment. Unique Self Theory integrates Western and Eastern Enlightenment in a higher integral embrace. We seek to valorize the metaphysical dignity of the individual, which emerged from the Western Enlightenment, but to source this dignity in the Unique Self, as opposed to the separate self. We also seek to incorporate the core realization of Eastern Enlightenment, which is that the individual at their core is indivisible from the larger seamless field of being, which we have been referring to as True Self.<sup>21</sup> Bringing these traditions of Enlightenment together (along with a host of related theories in psychology, sociology, evolution, etc.) opens up a rich landscape of distinctions, practices, and applications, which is the domain of Unique Self Theory.

Unique Self Theory entails the democratization of enlightenment because it points toward an enlightenment of individuation, beyond both ego and True Self, in which the realities of each person's unique person, gifts, and obligations are re-vivified by their awakening. Enlightenment can no longer be seen as an elite achievement, precisely because each individual is non-interchangeable and irreplaceable and has a unique gift that only they can give. If only a lucky few get to be and act Enlightened, then rest of us—the masses—are by definition living and acting in ignorance and ego. This may have been a workable model before democratic government and before existential risks escalated to the point of placing massive responsibilities on the shoulders of everyday people. Today everyone must be awakened to give their fullest gifts and to do their needed good deeds, and these may not be the gifts and deeds traditionally associated with Enlightenment (i.e., you may not take to sitting on meditating on stage, holding discourse, and all the various trappings of those historically praised and treated as Enlightened). Every individual has the capacity to identify with their Unique Self, and thus to be and act Enlightened, although this capacity is too often occluded or inaccessible.

When a group of individuals identify with their Unique Selves it lays the ground for the emergence of a Unique Self Symphony. To understand the true significance of Unique Self Symphonies a prefatory remark is in order. The sciences of complexity and emergence tell us

evolution has a *telos*, a trajectory.<sup>22</sup> The trajectory of evolution appears to be towards ever-greater complexity, ever-greater consciousness, ever-greater uniqueness, ever-greater synergy, and ever-greater intimacy. These qualities are inter-included and inextricable from each other all as a part of evolution's arrow. The fifth quality—intimacy—is the one we will focus on briefly as a way to frame the nature of Unique Self Symphonies as an evolutionary emergent. Beginning with attraction at the subatomic level, one might accurately say that reality is defined by allurements, all the way up and all the way down. From electromagnetic attraction and gravity in the physiosphere (physical reality), to the dynamics of symbiosis and mating in the biosphere (life), to the dynamics of mimetic evolution in the noosphere (culture), reality self-organizes towards every greater levels of interconnectivity. The interior of interconnectivity is intimacy. When Unique Selves are connected to each other in small groups new levels of intimacy are achieved. From this intimacy a kind of collective intelligence emerges which is greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise, when Unique Selves gather via the Internet and connect into larger synergistically integrated collectives then a new quality of intimacy is born. The quality of intimacy found in a Unique Self Symphony is a kind of collective intelligence or enlightenment, representing a local apex in the expression of the evolution of intimacy. A genuine Unique Self Symphony contains a complex motivational architecture that is richer and more potent than any known system of economic or social incentives. One is motivated to participate in evolution itself, to give one's unique gift, and to experience the vital *Eros* and joy of evolutionary community. Even more motivating is the innovation and creativity that is seen to be unleashed from Unique Self Symphonies. This is a bottom up, self-organizing expression of human creativity, soon set to emerge at scale as a new evolutionary form or structure.

Unique Self Symphonies occur in a state of shared non-duality as individuals cooperate beyond ego. This means all members experience a certain quality of interaction and reflection. Terms like reciprocity, democracy, transparency, and natural hierarchy all come to mind. There is a sense that all individuals are profoundly important and that their unique contributions are essential.

There is no voice in the group that is marginal. There is no hidden discontent among those who feel used, undervalued, or coerced. Talk to anyone in the group and you will get the same kind of positive statements about their participation: they feel like they are a perfect fit in the group, they are empowered and autonomous while also deeply merged in collaboration and communion. Trust and honesty create an opening in which almost miraculous group phenomena begin to occur, sometimes referred to as “Collective Enlightenment.”

Contrast this with groups that “succeed” precisely because certain members sacrifice their uniqueness for the sake of the whole. They become distorted into the shape needed by the group and find ways to silence their inner longings to express more of their uniqueness. Importantly, groups that require some members to distort their uniqueness are unsustainable and inefficient; they will not last. This is because of what it *feels* like to be a part of them. Resentment, fear, alienation, neuroses, and illness, these all follow from the day-to-day distortion of self to fit a social role. It becomes literally impossible for someone in this situation to give their all and try their best. Inefficiencies follow from this. Needs for surveillance and micromanaging arise, as disgruntled group members cannot be trusted to do what is required of them. So while the group may “succeed” for a time and even appear to be synergistic — “like a well oiled machine” — in the long run the group will implode in eruptions of violence, revolt, and self-destructive behavior. It feels fundamentally different to be a part of a Unique Self Symphony. In this case the emergent collective intelligence and group success is a direct result of Unique Self optimization for all members. There is a felt sense of reciprocal respect and recognition of the unique value of each participant. Each person is aware of their own Unique Self of the Unique Selves of all others. By making use of the unique contours of their puzzle piece, each member of the group merges with and completes both themselves and the larger whole. The Unique Self experience is both the heart of the phenomenon of collective intelligence and the key to its emergence in any given situation. It is also a moral compass, signaling the justice and health of any give social synergy. Groups that

function by suppressing uniqueness are almost always unethical. Groups that function by leveraging and respecting uniqueness are almost always just and healthy.

For much of human civilization this kind of personal sacrifice and willingness to truncate the self for group needs was held up as an ethical ideal. The result has been societies in which most of the members are living lives of quite desperation. While there have been times when the shared demands of group survival seemingly demanded societies of this type, that time has passed. Now the survival of our species depends on our overcoming societies that distort and limit individuals and creating instead societies that leverage uniqueness and allow for the emergence of Unique Self Symphonies.

The possibility of a Unique Self Symphony of indefinite planetary scope, sweeping through cultures and institutions, as the late the Roy Bhaskar predicted, via “a silent revolution of love”<sup>23</sup>—a global awakening, totalized collective enlightenment. Such is the end game of the modern capitalist world-system. The eschaton appears immanent, although its catalyst is not the God of Abraham, but the God of the Market.<sup>24</sup> Those structures that have for centuries provided for the global hegemony of certain economic classes and interests are failing now to provide for any kind of viable future. The question of “what’s next?” —as asked by Wallerstein and other heterodox economists—is a question about the silent revolution of love, a question about the shape of a society that looks “collectively enlightened” by today’s standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Integral Wisdom & Foundation for Conscious Evolution. The order of authors is incidental and decided by coin flip, a custom we follow for all our joint work. It is interesting to note that academic conventions of first and second authors does not allow us to easily capture the dynamics of collaborative Unique Self Symphonies, which is on of the topics of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> On the term “democratization of enlightenment” see, Gafni, *Radical Kabbalah*. pp. 273-278. Integral Publishers, 2012. See also Gafni, *Unique Self*, pp. 21-22,176-177. Integral Publishers 2011. Two more popular presentations can be found: Gafni, Watkins magazine June 2013, 15:46, <http://www.watkinsmagazine.com/the-democratization-of-enlightenment-by-marc-gafni>; Gafni, “Three Steps to Democratization of Enlightenment,” *Integral Leadership Review*,” Oct 2012 <http://integralleadershipreview.com/7609-three-steps-to-the-democratization-of-enlightenment/>.

<sup>3</sup> See Wallerstein (2007) *World-systems Analysis*.

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<sup>4</sup> We are not claiming that The Singularity is coming; just that the idea it is coming has a lot of traction in some influential circles. For more on the apocalyptic musing of the economic and scientific elites, see Stein and Gafni (2016) Reimagining Humanity's Identity: Responding to the Second Shock of Existence. *World Future Review*. 7(1) 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> Wallerstein. I. (2007) *World-Systems Analysis*. Moore, J. (2016) *Capitalism and the Web of Life*.

<sup>6</sup> See: David Harvey (2006) *Limits to Capital*. Capitalism tends to solve its problems by spreading out or putting things someplace else in space, the so-called "spatial fix." This worked when there were frontiers. We are probably nearing the end of spatial fixes.

<sup>7</sup> See Stein (2016) *Social Justice and Educational Measurement: John Rawls, The History of Testing, and The Future of Education*.

<sup>8</sup> And see also Capra and Luisi (2014) *The Systems View of Life*, for an up to date review of the literature on complex dynamical systems, autopoiesis, and other aspects of the sciences that study non-linear biological growth and evolution. Wallerstein's world-system analysis is directly influenced by Capra's theoretical forbearer, Ilya Prigogine, whose foundational work studied the patterns in dissipative structures far from equilibrium, which show emergence and spontaneous structuration. Prigogine foresaw a time when the social sciences could make use of the complex dynamical models being used in physics and systems biology.

<sup>9</sup> Teilhard (1952) *The Future of Man*.

<sup>10</sup> See: Jon Darrall-Rew and Dustin DiPerna's (2016) *Earth as Eden: An Integral Exploration of the Trans-Himalayan Teachings*.

<sup>11</sup> John Cobb & David Ray Griffin's (1976) *Process Theology*.

<sup>12</sup> See: Sri Aurobindo (1949) *The Human Cycle: The Ideal of Human Unity, War, and Self-Determination*.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Poetry of Being, Lecture on the Philosophy of R. Kook, Yosef Ben Shlomo, Hebrew University, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Stein (forthcoming). *Education in the Anthropocene: Essays On Schools, Technology, and Society in a Time of Planetary Transformation*.

<sup>15</sup> "Concrete utopian theorizing" is not about religious visions of hope or science fiction movies. It is an aspect political praxis and an important method within ethics and philosophy. It consists of articulating preferable futures for society in a principled and realistic way, painting a picture of the practices and personalities that are attainable. It gives a glimpse of easily imaginable utopian options visible from the present. These then serve to guide praxis for individuals and groups, who act not in light of some ideal or abstract code but in light of an actual possible and preferable future. See: Rawls (1971); Bhaskar, (1993) Benhabib (1986).

<sup>16</sup> Ramez Naam's (2013) *The Infinite Resource: The Power of Ideas on a Finite Planet*, gives primacy to the power of human thought and innovation, putting education at the top of priorities when considering world futures. But we do not agree with Naam's emphasis primarily on techno-scientific knowledge and physical instantiations thereof, such as technology and law. Naam explains his limited focus clearly: "the most valuable resource we have and that we have ever had is the sum of our human knowledge—our comprehension of how the universe around us functions and how to manipulate it to our ends" (Naam, Infinite Resource p.vii). Knowledge means scientific theory and technical control—period, end of story about human interiors. What about morality? What about centuries of aesthetic discourse and design? His statement reduces discussions of human knowledge to discussions of techno-scientific control. This is precisely the kind of profound and damaging truncation of human being and knowing that is explicitly

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counteracted by an integral meta-theory of education as discussed below. There is much more to human knowledge and interiority than techno-science, including the realms of ethics, art, and spirituality. An integral approach embraces the entirety of human being and knowing, and thus recognizes the possibility for educational innovation in more domains than just the scientific and technological.

<sup>17</sup> See: David Harvey (2016) *The Ways of the World*.

<sup>18</sup> See: Murphy (1992) *The Future of the Body*.

<sup>19</sup> This idea is further elaborated in Stein & Gafni (forthcoming) *Towards a New Politics of Evolutionary Love*.

<sup>20</sup> The term Unique Self first appeared in Gafni, M, *Soul Prints* and was used in public teachings throughout the late 90s and early 2000s. It was then elaborated and expanded in the context of Integral Meta-Theory, specifically and at first during the first meeting of the Integral Spiritual Center in 2004. It was thereafter given extensive academic elaboration: see the special issue of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* (6:1) dedicated to Unique Self Theory. See also, Ganif, M. *You Unique Self*; Gafni, M. *Radical Kabbalah*; Gafni, M. *Self In Integral Evolutionary Mysticism*. The idea of the Unique Self Symphony is given academic treatment in Stein and Gafni (forthcoming) *Towards a New Politics of Evolutionary Love*.

<sup>21</sup> In this way that we arrive at an equation, which integrates the fundamental intuitions of Western and Eastern enlightenment into a new theory of Self.

*True Self + Your Unique Perspective + Your Unique Quality of Intimacy = Unique Self.*

Expressed in a poetic and expressive modality the core teaching of Unique Self is as follows (this is taken from the preface of our upcoming volume on Unique Self Theory.

Your Unique Self is the best answer available on planet earth to the most important question that reality is asking you to answer every day. Your entire life hangs in the balance –determined by your answer to this question. The question is: Who Are You? The Answer is: *You are an irreducibly Unique Expression of the love intelligence and love beauty that is the initiating and animating Eros of all that is, that lives in you as you and through you, that never was, is or will be ever again other than through you.*

And as such you have an irreducibly unique perspective – an irreducibly unique quality of intimacy- and an irreducibly unique presence - all of which come together to foster your Unique Capacity to give Your Unique Gift – which address a Unique Need in Your Unique Circle of intimacy and influence. And as such you have the capacity to take a Unique Stand at the abyss of darkness – and declare let there be light – through your unique gift –your singularly unique frequency of light – which has the capacity to light up the word in a way that one else, that ever was, is or will be can do. And as Such, when you give your Unique Gift -the evolutionary impulse awakens in you; you are aligning and incarnating the Evolutionary Impulse.

<sup>22</sup> Obviously there is not space to substantiate this claim or those that follow about the trajectory of cosmic and Earthly evolution, but see: Gafni & Stein (forthcoming) *The Universe: A Love Story*.

<sup>23</sup> See: Bhaskar (2002) *The Philosophy of Meta-Reality*; Stein, Z. (2015) Beyond nature and humanity: reflections on the emergence and purposes of metatheories. In Bhaskar, Esbjorn-Hargens, Hedlund-de Witt & Hartwig (Eds.) *Metatheory for the 21st century: critical realism and integral theory in dialogue*.

<sup>24</sup> See: Harvey Cox (2016). *The Market as God*.