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FIRST NOTES ON THE CONVERSATIONAL  
COSMOS: THE AMOROUS COSMOS IS THE  
RELATIONAL COSMOS IS THE  
CONVERSATIONAL COSMOS

FROM: THE EVOLUTION OF LOVE FROM QUARKS TO CULTURE:  
THE RISE OF EVOLUTIONARY RELATIONSHIPS IN RESPONSE TO THE  
META-CRISIS

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# First Notes on the Conversational Cosmos: The Amorous Cosmos Is the Relational Cosmos Is the Conversational Cosmos

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## 1. Relationships Are Our Primal Need

We want to live from a deeper place of aliveness, joy, and vitality. A relationship can fill us with all of these—or drain us of all of these. We want to experience our lives as suffused with purpose, creativity, and fulfillment. We want not only to achieve great things but to share our achievements. If we have no one to share our achievements, they often seem meaningless. Being witnessed in relationship is part and parcel of the motivational architecture that drives us to achievement.

In a word, we want to be in relationship. We want to be outrageously<sup>2</sup> in love with our partners, our friends, ourselves, and with life itself. Only the personal love or relationship has the capacity to heal the traumatized stories of our past, and only the personal love or relationship liberates the contraction of our coiled separate self. Only the personal love heals the wounds of the traumatized ego.

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<sup>1</sup> At the turn of the twenty-first century, I partnered with a close friend at the time, Erica Fox, in the realizing of her dream of opening an institute for spirituality and negotiation under the auspices of Harvard Law School. The first event opened with a public dialogue between me and Bill Ury (the author of *Getting to Yes*, with Roger Fisher and Bruce Patton, 1991) in a packed hall at the law school. Then, I had a key conversation with Erica and Doug Stone (one of the authors of *Difficult Conversations*, 1999). In that conversation (2003 approximately), I unpacked an early version of the new Story of Value to Doug and Erica, and as part of the new Story I formulated an early notion of the Conversational Cosmos, which has later been refined over the years, in multiple teachings. To the best of my knowledge there are three of us who have expressed some notion of the Conversational Cosmos: myself, Howard Bloom, and David Whyte. Howard and I have discussed the term and its implications extensively over the years and will publish together on this term as part of our larger shared work on what we might call *honest readings of science that disclose the Amorous Cosmos*. Our thoughts on the Conversational Cosmos are somewhat related to David's but in more important ways also radically different. The formal term was first coined and published by Howard.

<sup>2</sup> *Outrageous Love* is a term we use to describe a Love that is of a different order and quality than what we call ordinary love. Ordinary love is contrived human sentiment. Outrageous Love is the structure of Cosmos itself. We turn to this distinction later in this book; see especially Sections IV.1–2.

It is in relationship that we transcend ourselves—only to find ourselves.

It is not by accident that our shared path of meaning in the world today is the path of relationships. Relationships are not an adjunct of our lives. We hold them to be essential to a life well-lived. Whatever our nationality, our stance on religion, our political or spiritual orientation or lack thereof, there is one path that we all walk together: the path of relationships. It can be fairly stated that the one shared spiritual path in the world today is the path of relationships. This path is being walked by atheists, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Aborigines, and everyone else.

Reality is relationship. Relationships are our primal need.

Imagine this scene: You have won the lottery, or you have realized a precious life goal, or you have seen something of dazzling beauty or depth. You rush to your mobile phone to text, email, or share on social media. But you are stopped short by a crushing realization: There is no one who wants to receive your communication. There is no one with whom to share. You are crushed by loneliness.

Based on extensive scientific research, we now know that loneliness, even without physical isolation, far outweighs diet and lifestyle as a predictor of disease and death.<sup>3</sup> We lose our will to live if there is no other being with deep interiors with whom we can exchange feelings, energy, and information. Put simply, if there is no one to talk to—to *really* talk to—life virtually ceases to be worth living.

If we do not have at least one being with whom to communicate, who has an interior quality resonant with our own, our life is a horror of loneliness. We can have everything we need to survive. We can have every material pleasure available to us—delicious food, a beautiful setting, and the most sublime music, coupled with every available form of entertainment. We can have every intellectual pleasure available to us. But if we cannot communicate with another person, interior to interior, then life becomes almost not worth living. Without relationship, life withers and dies. For most people, not being able to talk to another being with an interior sense of self generates borderline or full-on suicidal depression.

We are compelled to foster relationships again and again, even when facing

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<sup>3</sup> On the connection between quality of relationships and chronic health, see “Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development,” by John F. Mitchell (2004), pp. 178–179, and *Love and Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy*, by Dean Ornish (1998).

past pain and failure. The imperative to relationship, however, is not merely a *biological* imperative. It is the categorical imperative of all of Reality, from atoms to planets to cells to humans.

Remember the wonderful twenty-first-century movie *Cast Away*. The protagonist Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks, is marooned on an island in the South Pacific. He uses his own blood to imprint a face on a Wilson Sporting Goods volleyball. He gives the ball a name—Wilson. He needs someone to talk to, and Wilson is that someone.

He had everything he needed to survive, and even thrive materially, on the island. But despite that, he risked his life to get off the island by setting off in a makeshift raft. He would rather die in search of another human being than remain alone on the island. Chuck is expressing something much deeper than a strange fluke of human beings who can't stand to be alone. He is expressing a core imperative of Reality, the drive to relationship. He knows that the lack of (fulfilling) relationship is literally a form of death. In the language of the erotic mystics of the Talmud in the third century, *havruta o mituta*—either relationships or death.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Conversation Happens between Edges of Desire

From the perspective of CosmoErotic Humanism, we live in a Conversational Cosmos; our lives are a series of conversations. Chuck, cast away on an island, is desperate for conversation. Although in objective terms he has little chance of surviving the open sea on his makeshift raft, the call of subjectivity entirely overwhelms the objective. Without the experience of conversation—meeting another interiority—life isn't worth living. This is not an abstract postulate but our own direct experience of reality. In the concentration camps, the prisoners whose interiors had collapsed, who had resigned themselves to the horror, often lost their capacity for conversation. They went silent—a silence of absence, in which the cries of suffering were silenced by the deafening intensity of pain that muted all conversation.

What is a conversation? It is the place of encounter. Encounter happens between edges. The edge of my face meets the edge of your face. We are face to face, which is the position of authentic conversation.

In an authentic conversation, I need to be in my own voice. I need to find the

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<sup>4</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit 23a.

singularity, the aloneness of my voice. I need to feel the contours of my desires held in the qualities of the voice that is uniquely mine. My voice is the quality of unique desire that is my identity.

At the edge of my identity, which is the edge of my desire, I yearn for contact with you. This is the nature of Eros—the experience of radical aliveness, desiring ever-deeper contact and ever-greater wholeness.<sup>5</sup> Contact happens through conversation. But my desire is not just for contact with you in any generalized sense but with *the edge of your desire*. If you are lost inside of your desire, we cannot make contact. If you are alienated from your desire, we cannot make contact. It is only when you are both *inside* your desire and *at its edge* that you open to my desire. In the space in between, contact happens.

The image of reality preferred by the lineage of Solomon is two sensually entwined cherubs atop the ark of the covenant in the inner sanctum, called the *Holy of Holies*, of the temple in ancient Jerusalem. In the language of the sacred text, it is the place of meeting—the empty space *in between*, from which the word of the Divine emerges. Conversation takes place in the empty space between the cherubs.

Contact is conversation. The movement of Eros is to contact through conversation, which generates deeper contact and greater wholeness. All of Eros is conversation.

The sexual models the Erotic, which is why the interior sciences often understand sexing as conversations: Upper lips meet upper lips, and then lower lips begin to speak, evoked by *tongue*. Indeed, the very word *tongue* (in both Hebrew and English), can refer to language—the structure of consciousness that arouses and capacitates conversation. All conversations are erotic conversations.

The primary Hebrew term for sexing is *Yada*. *Yada* means “to know,” in the sense of carnal knowledge. Carnal knowledge is where the edge of my desire meets the edge of your desire, in the space in between the cherubs, from where a new *gnosis*—the word of God—emerges. Sexing that ignores the desire of the other is not conversation. Communication is communion; intimate communion is the conversation of desires that meet at the edge and create a new gnosis. In the language of the text, Adam and Eve transcend their loneliness in the gnosis of sexing, which is intimate communion.

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<sup>5</sup> See Essay One, Section 2.4, for a more detailed definition of Eros.

Sex is contact at the edge of identity. My identity is the unique quality of desire that fills me. I am desire.<sup>6</sup> The only way to embody the fullness of my own unique desire is to realize that the name of God is Desire<sup>7</sup>—and that there is no *local* desire, even as there is no *generic* desire. To be a Unique Self<sup>8</sup> is to realize that I am not separate from the larger field of Desire, even as I am a unique incarnation of that very field. Therefore, my identity is my unique configuration of desire.

Desire expresses allurements to a value or set of values. Therefore, the clarification of desire generates the clarification of value. In other words, desire is a conversation around value. All desire is the desire for a deeper conversation around value, and Conversation itself is a value of Cosmos. That is what we refer to when we talk about the Conversational Cosmos.

### 3. Conversational Cosmos: The First Whispers of Conversation

Once pointed out, the conversational nature of reality becomes self-evidently true in the human realm. But according to both the interior sciences and exterior sciences,<sup>9</sup> this is the nature of reality all the way up and all the way down, in every dimension of reality. From a scientific perspective, we live in a Conversational Cosmos.

There are conversations taking place between subatomic particles that become atoms, between the atoms that become molecules, between molecules that become macromolecules, between macromolecules that become cells, between simple cells (prokaryotes) that become more complex cells (eukaryotes) and then multicellular organisms, and between organisms and organs within an organism—all the way up the evolutionary chain. These conversations are based on shared values, shared meaning, shared telos, and shared story. These four overlapping elements are often referred to in the exterior sciences as *information*.

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<sup>6</sup> This identity between the human being and desire is the core of an earlier work, *A Return to Eros: The Radical Experience of Being Fully Alive*, by Marc Gafni and Kristina Kincaid (2014), and the forthcoming twelve-volume *Phenomenology of Eros*.

<sup>7</sup> See Essay Three, Section 4, for a conversation on the name of God in the lineage of Solomon.

<sup>8</sup> See Essay One, Section 3.3, for an analysis of the name of God.

<sup>9</sup> For the exterior-science perspective of the Conversational Cosmos, in formal terms, see “Conversational (Dialogue) Model of Quantum Transitions” by Pavel V. Kurakin, George G. Malinetskii, and Howard Bloom ([https://www.academia.edu/33106632/Conversational\\_dialogue\\_model\\_of\\_quantum\\_transitions](https://www.academia.edu/33106632/Conversational_dialogue_model_of_quantum_transitions)). On the Conversational Cosmos in a more conversational tone, see *The God Problem: How a Godless Cosmos Creates*, by Howard Bloom (2016), pp. 409–452.

In the next two sections, we'll explore the conversations happening on the most fundamental levels of Reality, between subatomic particles. Later throughout the book, we'll turn to conversations between atoms, molecules, and cells.

### 3.1. Quarks: Beloveds Who Are Never Separate from Each Other

Let's go back to the beginning of the Universe.

In the first nanoseconds after the Big Bang, gazillions of quarks explode as Reality. Quarks are called elementary, or fundamental, particles because they are the essential building blocks of the Universe. They are not divisible into other particles—the intimate communion that constitutes them is not, in the current understanding of science, subject to separation into separate parts.<sup>10</sup>

When trying to understand the subatomic world, it is crucially important to disengage from the image of particles as tiny balls or specks of matter, which is almost inevitably invoked in our minds by the very word *particle*. A particle is a *part* that is not *apart*; it *participates*—through its irreducible uniqueness—in the larger field of reality. Quarks, protons, neutrons, and all other particles are best thought of as sets of relationships, or allurements. Quarks, for example, which make up 99.9 percent of ordinary matter, could be seen as fast-moving, dancing points of allured energy. Professor Frank Wilczek, Nobel laureate of 2004 and one of the world's most eminent theoretical physicists,<sup>11</sup> discovered that the mass of a proton comes entirely from the *arrangement* of the quarks and not from the quarks themselves.<sup>12</sup> In an essay in *The New York Times*, MIT physics graduate Dennis Oberbye writes about Wilczek<sup>13</sup> (we added the italics for emphasis):

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<sup>10</sup> This description is rooted in the so-called Standard Model of particle physics. It was developed in stages throughout the second half of the twentieth century, by many scientists worldwide. Although the Standard Model has demonstrated some success in providing theoretical predictions that were later confirmed experimentally, it falls short of being a complete theory of fundamental interactions, as it leaves some physical phenomena unexplained.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Wilczek is known, among other things, for the discovery of asymptotic freedom, the development of quantum chromodynamics, and the discovery and exploitation of new forms of quantum statistics. See, for example, his *Longing for the Harmonies: Themes and Variations from Modern Physics*, with Betsy Devine (1989), and *Fundamentals: Ten Keys to Reality* (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from "In the New Physics, No Quark Is an Island," by Dennis Oberbye (2001): "The arrangement of the quarks' means their movements and the relationships between them. Their movement creates kinetic energy, which is, according to Einstein's relativity theory ( $E=mc^2$ ), equivalent to mass." (<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/20/science/essay-in-the-new-physics-no-quark-is-an-island.html>)

<sup>13</sup> Oberbye, "In the New Physics."

Nowadays physicists—those coldblooded reductionists—are telling a . . . poetic but no less mathematically rigorous tale. It is a story not of a clockwork world but an entangled interactive world *whose constituents derive their identities and properties from one another in endless negotiation*—a city, in one physicist’s words, of querulous social inhabitants. In other words, they are telling a tale about *relationships*. . . . Particle physics, Dr. Wilczek and his colleagues like to point out, is not really about particles anymore, but about their mathematical *relationships*—in particular symmetries—aspects of nature that remain invariant under different circumstances and viewpoints.

In the language of CosmoErotic Humanism, particles are fundamental configurations of Eros and intimacy in a larger Field of Allurement.

Quarks are so relational that they are never found in isolation. They first appeared in the Universe as the so-called *quark-gluon plasma* (*gluons* are quanta of energy that bind quarks together). Once the Universe cooled down a bit, they entered into even more intimate relationships with each other, in groups of three, within (what we now know as) *neutrons* and *protons*. We use the word *intimate* here not poetically but precisely—according to the terms of our intimacy equation:<sup>14</sup>

1. They have a shared *identity* (as a neutron or a proton) while retaining relative otherness as distinct quarks.
2. They *recognize* each other; we know this because they enter into relationships only with particular *types* of other quarks: A proton is made up of two *up* quarks and one *down* quark, and a neutron is composed of two down quarks and one up quark (*up* and *down* are two of six distinct “flavors” of quarks).
3. They converse and *feel* each other through *gluons*, the carriers of the strong nuclear force that binds them together.<sup>15</sup> In the language of

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<sup>14</sup> Intimacy = Shared Identity × [Relative] Otherness × Mutuality (Recognition + Feeling + Value + Purpose). See also Essay One, Section 2.3.

<sup>15</sup> The strong force, which binds the quarks together, is weak when the quarks are close (it even drops to zero when the three different color charges of the quarks get close to one another) but increases steadily when you try to

CosmoErotic Humanism, we might say that gluons are intimate love notes between quarks.

4. Their shared field of *value* is constituted by the laws of physics and mathematics they all obey, as well as their mutual drive to become parts of larger wholes.
5. And finally, they have a *shared purpose* as neutrons and protons, which go on to co-create all known chemical elements of the universe and, ultimately, biological life.

In the interior sciences, the configuration of intimacy at the level of elementary particles is characterized as two beloveds making love, who do not ever separate from each other (in the Aramaic of the *Zohar*, *Teri Rein DeLo Mitparshin*). This is called, in the interior sciences of Hebrew wisdom, the *Zivug* of *Abba* and *Imma*—the *Sefirot* of Wisdom (*Chochma*) and Insight (*Bina*) in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. These are the higher Sefirot in the Tree of Life.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2. Intimate Conversations within Atoms: No Electron Is an Island

It is now 380,000 years after the Big Bang. A proton, neutron, and electron, in particular configurations, are coming together to create a new whole called an atom. Howard Bloom writes about the emergence of the first atoms in the Universe:

Electrons do indeed discover that their inanimate lusts match the loneliness of protons perfectly. And electrons and protons do glump together. They do pair up in proton-electron twosomes. What's worse, when electrons discover how naturally they fit around protons, the result is a radically new set of properties. . . . It's the handful of properties we call an atom: hardness, durability, and the ability to play with others in the sandbox of space, to team up in ways this cosmos has never seen before.<sup>17</sup>

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separate them, making it impossible to isolate a single quark. This property of the strong force, which is known as asymptotic freedom, is a surprising, counterintuitive property, which is not found in any of the other fundamental forces. That is why the theory describing the strong force, called Quantum Chromodynamics (QCD), has to be simulated on huge computers. See, for example, <https://phys.org/news/2005-05-mysteries-quarks.html>.

<sup>16</sup> The Kabbalistic Tree of Life consists of ten *Sefirot* (the word usually mistranslated as “spheres” but uniting three related meanings: *mispar*, “number,” *sipur*, “story,” and *sappir*, “light”).

<sup>17</sup> Howard Bloom, *The God Problem: How a Godless Cosmos Creates* (2016), chapter 2 (Kindle edition).

While electrons and protons are stable on their own, a neutron has about a fifteen-minute life span outside of the nucleus of an atom, that is, outside of its relationship to a proton. If it does not establish a relationship, it loses its wholeness as a neutron and decays into a proton, an electron, and an antineutrino. But once it creates a relationship with a proton to form the nucleus of an atom, it can last as a neutron for billions of years.

All the particles within an atom are in unique relationships with each other and in constant intimate conversations. The messages between the atomic nuclei and the electrons dancing around them take on the form of *photons*—the carriers of the *electromagnetic force*.<sup>18</sup> The nucleus of an atom consists of protons and neutrons.<sup>19</sup> The electromagnetic force would have repelled protons from each other, because they are positively charged. However, at the very close distances inside the nucleus of an atom, the so-called *residual strong force allures* protons and neutrons together. When three quarks are bound together in a proton or a neutron, almost all of *the strong nuclear force* carried by the gluons goes toward binding the quarks together. However, a tiny fraction of the force acts outside protons and neutrons and allows them to have a conversation that generates a new whole, the nucleus of an atom. The messages in this conversation take on the form of *mesons* (quark-antiquark pairs).

Said differently, there is a constant interplay between forces of allurement and autonomy between particles and an exchange of energy between the protons and neutrons within the nucleus of the atom. We might also say that neutrons and protons are aroused to be in conversation with each other.

All matter is made up of atoms and their relationships. And all atoms are made up of relationships: the strong nuclear relationships between the quarks (and their intimate relationships and conversations), the residual strong nuclear relationships between the protons and neutrons (and their intimate conversations), and the electromagnetic relationships and conversations between the atomic nuclei and electrons.

An atom is a new emergent whole: It is more than the sum of its particles. The particles themselves are changed and transformed in that relationship, in a way that is essentially not so different from how we are changed and transformed in

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<sup>18</sup> If we could magnify the simplest hydrogen atom so that its nucleus (in this case only one proton) were the size of a basketball, then its lone electron would be found about two miles away).

<sup>19</sup> The most common form of hydrogen has no neutrons, but this should not obscure our discussion.

an intimate relationship.<sup>20</sup> As the quantum gravity theorist Lee Smolin formulated it: “It can no longer be maintained that the properties of any one thing in the universe are independent of the existence or nonexistence of everything else,” and “No electron is an island.”<sup>21</sup>

### 3.3. Wholeness Implies Conversation

Both protons emerging out of conversations between quarks and atoms emerging out of conversation between protons, neutrons, and electrons are what Arthur Koestler called *new holons*.<sup>22</sup> A holon is a set of parts that come together to participate in a larger whole. The emergence of holons is a structural quality of Cosmos. In a holon, each part is both individuated and has the wider identity of the larger whole. This is the core of our definition of intimacy (see Essay One, Section 2.3). In effect, a holon is a *conversation*—an act of communication generating communion, or wholeness.

Proton, neutron, and electron are allured to each other. They are desperate to talk. In conversation, they form a shared identity—they are now an atom. They obviously recognize each other. They feel each other, so they have shared pathos. But they also have a shared value. It is the shared value of wholeness itself, and what each of them brings to the table to generate the new configuration of intimacy. This, in turn, creates new vectors of possibility—a shared purpose. The reality of shared value is the premise for shared purpose.

If they were not communicating through some sort of conversation around value, they would have no reasons to integrate; they could not come together in the pattern of intimacy we call *atom*. Only shared value can evoke the underlying codes of communication. There needs to be a conversation—an exchange of meaning. Conversation is absolutely intrinsic to Cosmos. Wholeness always implies conversation, which always implies meaning and value.

The notion of conversation blurs the line between two forms of meaning or

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, *Gravity, Special Relativity, and the Strong Force*, by Constantinos G. Vayenas and Stamatios N.-A. Souentie (2012), *Gauge Theories of the Strong, Weak, and Electromagnetic Interactions*, by Chris Quigg (2013), and *Particles and Nuclei: An Introduction to the Physical Concepts*, by Bogdan Povh et al. (2008). See also “The Four Forces,” by T. Thacker (1995, <https://webhome.phy.duke.edu/~kolena/modern/forces.html#005>), “The Color Force” by Lena Hansen (1997, <https://webhome.phy.duke.edu/~kolena/modern/hansen.html>). For a simple summary, see, for example, “What Is the Strong Force?” by Jim Lucas, LiveScience (2022, <https://www.livescience.com/48575-strong-force.html>).

<sup>21</sup> Lee Smolin, *The Life of the Cosmos* (1997).

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (1964).

value, *instrumental* and *intrinsic*. A conversation may have a purpose, but it can also be self-validating—valuable for its own sake. In other words, conversation is a mode of activity that is both intrinsically valuable, in and of itself, and extrinsically, instrumentally valuable for other purposes. It is this blurred distinction that makes conversation a core structure of reality, all the way down to quarks. It is critical to understand that this is the core of science. Reality is holons—conversations—all the way down and all the way up. This is not a regressive animism but the realization of an Intimate Universe, a CosmoErotic Universe.

This conception of conversation as both intrinsic and instrumental is, in part, what animates the notion of Leela, or Divine Play, of the great traditions. Play is both infinitely serious and pure play at the same time. Similarly, conversation is both serious and playful. It is valuable for its own sake and is somehow accomplishing something. What is the most basic structure of reality? Multiple forms of serious yet playful conversation in pursuit of some open-ended expression of value. In this realization of the nature of conversation, we begin to get a fragrance of the paradoxical relationship between contingency, randomness, and design—one of the big unanswered questions in evolutionary thought. To hold this paradox, we simply need to look at the nature of conversation.<sup>23</sup>

I have often been in deep conversation with a close partner. We have never prepared a script for the conversation. There is never an outline or talking points. There is a sense of utmost seriousness in the conversation, and yet there has always been a sense of play, the sense of Leela, a sense of delight for its own sake. And yet, if you were to read the transcript of the conversation, you would think that we had spent weeks orchestrating it. In retrospect, it looks as though the conversation followed a script, planned and carefully designed. And yet it is also fully filled with spontaneity—contingency and surprise. The conversation is not random but rather free and open.

What we are saying is that conversation is the structure of evolution itself. This is the nature of conversations all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary chain. That is the interior of what is now exteriorized as information theory. One of the core weaknesses of some key strains in information theory is the attempt to take the music out of the conversation and reduce it to its

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<sup>23</sup> We return to this theme in more depth in Sections IV.7 and V.1.

mechanics. It is the attempt to transform conversation—the exchange of meaning—into a purely causal, mechanistic process. But value and meaning that are the substrate of every conversation are beyond the category of causality.

### 3.4. All Conversations Are About Value

At the earlier levels of reality (as in the conversations between quarks or atoms we just described), the conversation seems to be more scripted than at the later levels. In other words, the first-person experience of freedom and choice with regard to desire and its clarification is more veiled. Yet it is still present, in the form of proto-desire, or what Whitehead called prehension.<sup>24</sup> However, Reality evolves. Indeed, we might see Reality as the evolution of Eros itself. The evolution of Eros is the evolution of desire. The evolution of Eros is the evolution of conversation, for desire is, at its core, the lonely self desiring intimate communion. Communion emerges from conversation, and all conversation is a conversation around value.

Why do we have conversations, which are the root of all occurrences? Why does something occur in the world? Is it because of causality or is it because there is agency?

This is what Whitehead was exploring. In the end, we understand that everything is rooted in prehension—a proto-consciousness, a *Tao*, a Field of Value, in which all things arise. At the most foundational level of atomic particles, prehension may look a lot like causality, and yet even these fundamental conversations are exchanges of information—value and meaning. Value expresses itself in the material and the biological through conversations. Without this realization, all our conversations lose their meaning, and we are left in a crisis of meaning, which at its core is a crisis of Eros—a crisis of conversation.

All through Reality, conversations have had meaning, from the beginning of time, and all of those conversations—between particles, between atoms, between atoms, between molecules and macromolecules, between single cells and multicellular structures—continue in us. All of those conversations live in me. I am physically constituted by meaningful conversations. I am constituted by conversations around value.

That is why we are all desperate for conversation. That is why everyone

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<sup>24</sup> See *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, by Alfred North Whitehead (1978).

understood Chuck in the Tom Hanks movie *Cast Away* we invoked above. Nobody said, “Huh? That’s really weird. Why is he doing that?” Everyone got it. There was a universal anthro-ontological recognition of the rightness of it.

We now begin to understand the root of mental crises. We are told that there is no inherent value, and therefore there is no shared value. But the essence of conversation is shared value. If there is no shared value, then there is no conversation—and there are also no heroes, and no love stories. What the Conversational Cosmos says is that there *is* a conversation to be had, and declarations to be made. Both our words and actions matter, and our words *are* actions. You can be a hero in every conversation.

Conversations are always, at least implicitly, about value. The Eye of Value, which illuminates every conversation, discloses value through our own deepest heart’s desire. In opposition to the Eye of Value, you have the eye of anti-value, which actively seeks out the sacred to destroy value. The natural strategy of the eye of anti-value is to destroy conversation. The eye of anti-value desires—a pseudo-Erotic desire—to destroy all of the deepest conversations you could have.

The Eye of Value is art. The eye of anti-value is advertising.

The Eye of Value is Eros. The eye of anti-value is pseudo-Eros.

The Eye of Value is depth. The eye of anti-value is clickbait.

So much of what we are attempting to do in this book, and all of our writing, is articulation of a new language for value. The old ways of making arguments don’t even work anymore. We are in a new stratum of language and justification that, at its core, is a new language of value. We need to move beyond the *nowhere*, where you can live from an assumption that there is no Field of Value, to a place where we can fiercely contest values, but *from within* the Field of Value.

In medieval times, God was everywhere. In modernity, God is nowhere. *Messiah* means that God will be everywhere, again. That is the messianic transformation of the assumption behind all the conversations: We reclaim, at a new level of consciousness that integrates all sciences, that conversations about value are real, and that they only take place within the context of the Field of Value.

### 3.5. Messiah Is Conversation

When I meet the depth of experience, I cannot but respond. I erupt in song. It might be a song of praise, a love song, an ecstatic song or melody of grief and pain—but the bursting of a song wells up from the conversational demand of the intimate moment; it is quite different from silent introspection. The messianic moment is demarcated by song, for nothing can hold the fullness of eruption other than the conversation between finitude and the Infinite, for which prose is insufficient. Only poetry and song can begin to even allude to that ultimate conversation.

But for the lineage of Solomon and many other interior sciences, song is not merely a human trope. It not just about adding the bird song or the whale song either. *All* of Reality is song, and each unique discretion of infinity has its own finite song. Nachman of Breslav writes that every distinct blade of grass has its own song. This realization is the premise of *Perek Shira*, an ancient work called *chapter of song*. The work, comprised of six short chapters, is attributed by some to Solomon, by others to his father David or perhaps their descendant Judah the Prince of the second century. At its core, it is understood by all to be the lyrics for the song of all of Reality—the song of the rock, the song of the field, the song of the trees, the song of the earth, the song of the sky, and all the way through the elements of the biosphere. By *song*, the text means something like: Reality is sentient, Reality is coded with unique qualities of meaning, and every dimension of the Real has a unique song. *Song* is taken to point to value, to unique qualities of intimacy, that both evoke and incarnate a uniquely intimate conversation with Reality.

The interior sciences deploy the term *Messiah* as a code word for conversation. The Hebrew root word for the word *Messiah*, according to interior scientist Nahum of Chernobyl, is *siach*, the same as in “conversation”:

Every person who is a God wrestler must prepare a palace for the part of Messiah that is of his soul. Then the complete form of Humanity/Reality will be whole. . . . Messiah is related to the word *maShiach*, meaning conversation . . . and when thought unites with speech wholeness is

realized and the Messiah arrives.<sup>25</sup>

What the interior sciences describe as *Messiah* is in effect what CosmoErotic Humanism calls the New Human and the New Humanity. For the interior sciences of the great traditions, Messiah is not a single person but the emergence of a new consciousness in humanity. It is the natural progression of evolution itself. Relationship, which is the structure of Reality itself, is defined or expressed in terms of the deepening capacity for *conversation*, itself the basic unit, or monad,<sup>26</sup> of Reality.

In conversation, desire meets desire. Desire is our edge; it is the realization that we are not self-contained in our autonomous vessel. We are longing for communion—we are filled with the urgent desire for conversation. We yearn for intimate unions, recognition, mutuality, and embrace. Desire is our edge. The edge of our desire is not a desire in its superficial form but our deepest heart's desire to speak, and be heard, and to witness our beloved.

Conversation is desire. Messiah is the harmony of all desire and conversations. When all conversations at the edge synergize into Unique Self Symphonies,<sup>27</sup> we begin to smell the fragrance of Messiah. In effect, Reality is the evolution of love, which is the evolution of conversation, which is the evolution of intimacy.

But Messiah is not an omega point. It is not the final conversation but the culmination of what is possible in the sublunar theater—and then we begin again, at the next level, in the next place, on the next journey.

## 4. Eavesdropping on the Conversational Cosmos

One of our key intellectual partners and our dear friend, Howard Bloom, with whom we have been in deep conversation for many years, speaks of the Conversational Cosmos from the perspective of the classical exterior sciences.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Nahum of Chernobyl, *The Light of the Eyes: Homilies on the Torah* (2021), pp. 633–34.

<sup>26</sup> The term *monad* comes from ancient Greek, *μονάς* (monas) unity, and *μόνος* (monos) alone. Originally, it was conceived by the Pythagoreans. For them, the Monad is the Supreme Being, Divinity, or the totality of all things. For Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (and other philosophers of the early modern period), however, there are infinite monads, which are the basic and immaterial elementary particles, or simplest units, that make up the Universe (*Discourse on Metaphysics and The Monadology*, 2005). We are using *monad* in something approximating the first sense in the sense of the implicate order of wholeness of being that defines and allures Reality to its own evolutionary becoming.

<sup>27</sup> See Essay One, Section 3.5.

<sup>28</sup> Bloom, *The God Problem* (2016).

We speak of—or perhaps eavesdrop on—the Conversational Cosmos from the perspective of the interior sciences. We refer to the Conversational Cosmos by different names: *the Intimate Universe*, *the Amorous Cosmos*, *the CosmoErotic Universe*, *the Universe: A Love Story*, or *Evolution: The Love Story of the Universe*. The conversation between the interior science and exterior science is critical, for reality is interiors and exteriors all the way down and all the way up the evolutionary chain.<sup>29</sup>

The following text is derived from a conversation between Howard Bloom and myself. I had just introduced to him the key ideas around *Reality is relationship*, *Reality is evolution*, and *Reality is the evolution of relationship*. Howard was profoundly aligned with this view, to which he, from his self-described perspective of a materialist mystic,<sup>30</sup> then offered his exterior science view of the Conversational Cosmos in support. We deploy different language and take issue on multiple fronts. But we both see the truth of *Reality is evolution*, *Reality is relationship*, and *Reality is the evolution of relationship* as the fundamental pattern of Cosmos. Howard, as an expression of his own early training, uses words like *sociality*, while we use words like *intimacy*, *Eros*, and *desire*—but we are looking at the same patterns of Cosmos. Our empirical descriptions overlap and fructify each other. In the following section, my words in the language of CosmoErotic Humanism are interspersed with Howard’s, without identifying who the speakers were, in order to show the common nature of Cosmos toward which we are pointing.<sup>31</sup>

- The intimate configurations of communion that animate Cosmos—what empiricists sometimes call the sociality of the Cosmos—begins when the

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<sup>29</sup> See Section I.2.

<sup>30</sup> Howard views his role as maintaining his materialism, and from there speaking into the classic scientific discourse. Howard’s materialism, as it has emerged in dozens of conversations between us over some seven years, has little to do with the kind of neo-Darwinian reductive materialism that is fashionable in the scientific community. Rather it more closely approximates what the seminal sage of Kashmir Shaivism Abhinavagupta called *vimarsa*, which itself discloses a kind of pervasive panpsychism, as the material body of all existence. New Materialists like Karen Barad have written importantly if partially in this regard. I have looked with some care at this set of issues over many years in multiple conversations with the sensitive teachers of Kashmir Shaivism, our dear friends Michael Murphy, Sally Kempton (Swami Durgananda), and Michael Schumacher (Swami Chetanananda). Worth reading in this regard is the work of Loriljai Biernacki, *The Matter of Wonder: Abhinavagupta’s Panentheism and the New Materialism* (2023), who in part sees Abhinavagupta as a kind of materialist mystic, in which the split between the purely material and the purely mystical, or matter and what matters, virtually disappears.

<sup>31</sup> Howard’s voice in these texts is drawn from our conversation and leavened with pieces of his writing, or phrasing, particularly from *The God Problem: How a Godless Cosmos Creates* (2016).

first particles emerge, in the very, very, very first blast of the Big Bang. The first particles are inherently conversational. These particles cannot exist without each other. They cannot exist without creating a society, and if they don't make it into one of these twosomes or threesomes, they are over and out. How do the twosomes and threesomes get together? They converse with each other. They pick up the signals of attraction and repulsion from each other, and then they act on them. There is an exchange of meaningful information that leads to new emergence. This Universe, from its very first instant, if it's anything like the axioms that are used by corollary generators, has inherent in it everything that will happen until the very end, in that first microflash of a second.

- Imagine entropy as things continually falling apart. When you were a child, you would put a Slinky at the top of a staircase—if Slinkys were still something that you had in your house—and you watched it. You would put one end on the first stair going down, and you watched the Slinky go down stair after stair after stair. That's what is supposed to happen to the Cosmos under the rules of entropy.
- Entropy is not a valid idea. It is not borne out by any aspect of the Cosmos whatsoever. In fact, the impossible is the real perception, in the reality of this Cosmos. Because the Universe is like the Slinky footage being run in reverse. So, the next step up is invisible at any given point in time. It is implicit, meaning that from the very time of the very first particles, that staircase for the Slinky run in reverse is already there. All the stuff in the Universe is in the process of discovering its way toward the next invisible stairstep up. But when it comes to these quantum leaps, when it comes to these phase transitions, when it comes to the transition from quark soup to protons and neutrons, those stairsteps, a proton and a neutron, are not at first visible.
- The Universe does not show randomness as the primary driver of Cosmos,<sup>32</sup> and it doesn't show randomness especially at that first sliver of a second of the Universe's existence. A random Universe would be a gazillion particles, a gazillion different kinds of particles, with no necessary coherence, no necessary relationship between them, even though they all sprang from the

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<sup>32</sup> See also Sections V.1–2.

mother of the space-time manifold. But quite the opposite is what emerges. What emerges is a universe of inherent and necessary coherence. And it emerges in stairsteps.

- Stairstep number one: the emergence of quarks.
- Stairstep number two: quarks showing social properties and glomming together in groups of two or three, what we call in CosmoErotic Humanism configurations of intimacy. Without which the quarks disappear.
- Stairstep number three: These threesomes turn out to have astonishing emergent properties—the emergent properties of protons and neutrons.
- This is but one snippet—but one expression—of what we are describing in CosmoErotic Humanism as the evolution of relationships.
  - The evolution of relationships is, first, the evolution of the relationships between quarks.
  - Next is the evolution of the relationship between the neutrons and protons.
  - Way, way down the road, we have the evolution of relationships in a really big way, when we have electrons and protons, neutrons getting together. We have described this just above, and it is about 380,000 years later.
- A hydrogen atom is based on what you could call a perpetual conversation between an electron and a proton. That's a staggering emergence of a new kind of relationship that produces whole new emergent properties, radical supersized surprises, emergence that makes absolutely no sense based on prior causation. New wholes are clearly called by the music of future; they are not merely the result of mechanical process of the past. It is rather emergence based on the evolution of new forms of relationships that are called forth by the inherent value structure of Cosmos itself. The magical ingredient that we cannot leave out if we are honest empiricists is the supersized surprise. Indeed, emergence is the fairy dust of science.
- This is what we describe as *Intimacy generates Emergence*. The radical amazement, the wonder of Cosmos, is that ever-deeper intensities of intimacy themselves generate new configurations of intimacy, which are in effect both the catalysts and expression of new emergence. The electrons

and protons can get together, and out of nowhere, out of no thing, all of a sudden, the properties of hydrogen, helium, and lithium come into existence, and we couldn't have predicted them by knowing the properties of electrons and protons (and neutrons). This is the *creative advance into novelty* emergent form, the lure of becoming which is core to CosmoErotic Humanism.<sup>33</sup>

- Now, with this in mind, let's turn to the *valence*, or *value*, of subatomic particles as it appears in chemistry and physics. The valence of an electron is negative, and the valence of a proton is positive. Now, if we were to go to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we would see that the root of the word *valence* is the same as the root of the word *value*.<sup>34</sup> Valence is also part of the cluster of words that includes valor, valiance, *valentes*, and valentine, all of which, like valence, are rooted in value, which itself is self-validating.
- At the outset of the Song of Songs, the lover says to her beloved, "Draw me after you, and I will run toward you."<sup>35</sup> The word for *run toward you*—in Hebrew *rutza*—shares its etymological root and meaning with the Hebrew word *ratzon*—which translates as *will*. In other words, *draw me after you*, meaning allurement, and at some point, when the intensity of the intimate allurement becomes sufficiently potent, I will run after you. I will surrender my lower will to you and allow myself to be taken over by the deeper ErosValue—the erotic will of Reality—moving through me, which arouses me to you, generating a new and unique configuration of intimacy and Eros that overwhelms all separation and boundary and generates new emergence in Reality.
- This text is central to the Song of Solomon. The song, however, is far from

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<sup>33</sup> The particular phraseology appears in various guises in the writings of Alfred North Whitehead, but the basic notion is also central to multiple other heterodox theorists of evolution from the proto-evolutionary theories of Luria to the writings of James Mark Baldwin and especially Charles Sanders Peirce. See also Essay Three, Section 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Valere* means both to be strong and to be of value, to be of worth. It goes from Latin *valere* to Old French *valor*, which is connected to *worth*. A valorous knight is not just strong but represents value; he is saving the damsel. Then it goes to Middle English, and then to *value*. A violation of value arouses political will. Will is aroused by value. The knight accesses their valor because their valor is connected to their values. That root is related to the root of the word *will*. This is a willful Universe. The word *will* in the original Hebrew—*ratzon*—is an Eros word, which is drawn, among other sources, from the Song of Songs. The Song of Songs is an erotic expression of Reality that declares *its insides are lined with love*—in other words, Reality itself is Eros. The Song of Songs is understood by Akiba—the central figure in the transition from the Jerusalem Temple to the oral law—in one text as participating in the ontology of the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple and in another text as being a sufficient basis to guide the moral world if the Torah had never been given.

<sup>35</sup> Songs of Songs 1:2–4.

being a love song only about a particular love between human lover and beloved. Instead, it understands itself, together with an entire current of esoteric texts in the interior science of Hebrew wisdom, as describing the very source code of Reality itself, all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary chain, or some version of what used to be called the great chain of being. The core text of the Song of Songs is *Tocho Ratzuf Ahava*, “*Its insides are lined with love.*” Or, said differently: Reality is Eros.

- Reality is Eros all the way down and all the way up, and a core quality of Eros and its allurements is will. Will is an expression of desire. And desire, in its clarified form, is simply the will toward value. In other words, the amorous desire of the Cosmos, the evolutionary will of Reality, always reaches for—desires—ever wider and deeper value. This notion of value is inherent in Reality from the first nanoseconds of the Big Bang. Value evolves—that is clear. But value at its core is not a human construction but an intrinsic property, the valence of Reality itself.
- There are certain principles, certain relationships, that are in the Universe, very near the very beginning, and then they show up over and over again, level after level of emergence. Value is one of them. There is a primitive precursor of *valentes*—of will—at the very beginning of the Universe. The fact that this Universe spurts out space, time, and speed—that’s *valentes*. That’s the precursor of will in its later forms—precursor of the will that’s in you and me.
- Now, we need a couple of Herbert Spencer’s terms here. Herbert Spencer talks about differentiation and integration. Indeed, that is the title of chapter 15 of his work *First Principles*.<sup>36</sup> What does that mean? That means that we all have unique personhoods and need to, in some way, demonstrate our uniqueness. Personhood is deeper than personality. It is not an accidental feature of the mechanical cosmos that developed a random new application. Personhood is the unique conversation that is every being and most potently incarnate in every human being.
- When you enter a new group, you have two jobs:
  - The first is to show that you blend in. In other words, to feel your common identity. This is the first dimension that generates the

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<sup>36</sup> Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (1880).

communion (through integration) within the larger group.

- And the second is to show that you stand out. In other words, to feel your irreducible uniqueness within the group. This is the second dimension that generates communion (through differentiation) within the larger group.
- But then: Once you have differentiated, when you are coming together in a whole, the whole that you make—the society that you make—has radically new emergent properties. And this dialectical tension between our uniqueness and our sameness is the key to intimate communion at every level of Reality, from matter to life to mind. Indeed, this dialectic of sameness and uniqueness is an expression of what we call, in CosmoErotic Humanism, two First Principles and First Values of Cosmos, allurement and autonomy, or what are also sometimes referred as autonomy and communion.
- A lump of dirt is a social relationship. Or said more clearly, it is a configuration of intimacy—of intimate coherence. A lump of dirt is composed of atoms and molecules in intimately configured relationship with each other. (And, if it is soil on Earth, it may even include hundreds of millions of microorganisms living in intimate communion.)
- A single bacterial cell is a relationship at a whole different level of intimate communion. It builds on all the intimate relationships between the organic molecules inside of it, which make up the different parts of the cell, the DNA, the RNA, the amino acids, and proteins; but then it adds a radical new dimension of self-replication and self-actualization. If we were to musically compose the dazzling complexity of intimacies between myriad parts in insanely intricate, allured erotic unions of shapes and forms, we would understand that a single bacterial cell is a musical symphony of intimacies that would shame Mozart.
- A bacterial colony is a relationship of a radically new kind generating an ever-higher and deeper level of intimate communion. It is a community of bacterial cells in communion; the cells communicate and support each other in locating or generating the optimal life conditions for the whole community. You and me, two human beings, again, we are manifestations of relationship that produce dramatic differences, dramatic new things. But we are in the same continuum of intimacy, conversation, and relationship.

- Herbert Spencer called this progress. Another name for it might be the evolution of intimacy, or the evolution of love, or, most simply, the evolution of relationship. Clearly, relationship is a core plotline of Cosmos, even as it is equally clear that the evolution of relationship, or what we also refer to as the evolution of intimacy, is a core plotline of Cosmos.
- In the language of CosmoErotic Humanism, we say that there is a wholeness that can generate more wholeness. In other words, a level of wholeness has been achieved through intimate communion between the parts. But that wholeness does not cease desiring. Wholeness is allured to ever-deeper and wider intimate communions, which means ever-more profound conversations that generate ever-deeper and wider wholeness. This is precisely the Eros equation that we referred to above:<sup>37</sup> Eros = the experience of radical aliveness, seeking, desiring, moving toward ever-deeper contact, ever-greater communication conversation and communion, and ever-greater wholeness.
- The new wholeness is of a kind that you never imagined before. That's why these are supersized surprises. In between differentiation and integration and progress lies the supersized surprise. This form of social organization, of intimate communion, produces a whole new kind of Reality, a previously unimagined new kind of Reality. What emerges is a new configuration of Eros, intimacy, and desire, a new level of conversation, which is what we call in evolutionary language a new emergent.
- The allurements to higher intimacies is fundamental to cosmos. One relatively early incarnation of this phenomenological reality of Cosmos is a wave. A wave is constantly recruiting new water molecules and then abandoning them, and recruiting a whole bunch of new ones, and so on and so forth all the way across the ocean. It never has the same constituents for more than about fifteen seconds. The matter that makes it up is always changing. Yet it retains its coherence because there is some sort of tenacity to larger configurations of intimacy.
- The wave is a result of intimate patterns of relationship that are evoked by the inherent nature of reality. But if you just looked at it as relationships, you wouldn't see the wave. You can describe the wave with equations. It is

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<sup>37</sup> See Section 2.4 in Essay One.

this kind of relationship that can be described with simple equations, that persists. It has its own will, and yet it is nonmaterial.

- Human beings are part of a continuum with the wave of evolving patterns of intimacy. But of course you and I are not just the water molecules in that wave. We are constantly changing, unlike the water molecules. But even though we are constantly changing, we are forming a part of some larger pattern that seems to have been inherent from the beginning. I mean, how can we go from people who lived in societies of thirty-five to a hundred fifty individuals eleven thousand years ago to people who live in a society of a billion today? And it's a largely coherent society, even while we are so individually fluid.
- So, the question is, how does reality generate coherent complexity? In our reading, Alan Turing's essential response in "Morphogenesis"<sup>38</sup> is simple first rules.
- Yes, I came to a similar conclusion as Alan, based on a somewhat different set of scientific axioms of reality. There are three or four simple rules that are largely scientific but which have value implications.
- These simple first rules are similar to what we call in CosmoErotic Humanism First Principles and First Values. But in CosmoErotic Humanism, the simple first rules address not only exteriors but also interiors. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say that complexity theory operates based on the iteration of simple First Principles and First Values in exteriors, while the evolution of culture and consciousness is animated and driven by the iteration of simple First Principles and First Values in interiors. We have identified, in CosmoErotic Humanism, some eighteen First Principles and First Values.
- We might also talk about these as learning algorithms of the Cosmos. One example of a learning algorithm is very much akin to Herbert Spencer's: First, reach out and explore; then, rush together again and consolidate; then, reach out and explore again. Fusion and Fission is another way to express the same simple first rule of Cosmos. So, those are the two fundamental learning rules of the Cosmos, and probably rules at the very beginning of the Cosmos—the simple rules, the First Principles and First

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<sup>38</sup> Turing, "The Chemical Basis of Morphogenesis."

Values, are what we might call the axioms that kick-started the Cosmos.

- In CosmoErotic Humanism, we say it something like as follows: Differentiation is the drive toward ever-deeper irreducible uniqueness, a form of autonomy, while integration is the allurements toward ever-greater, deeper, and wider intimate communion. Allurement and autonomy are both First Principles and First Values, which are themselves the plotlines of Evolution: The Love Story of the Universe. Indeed, Eros itself is not allurements but rather the precisely calibrated dance between allurement and autonomy.<sup>39</sup>
- The big thing to not lose track of is the things that we do not have sufficient words for and that science has not really grappled with—things like the wave, which is a self-sustaining pattern that is not dependent on any individual group of material things. Those are the stairsteps, those larger patterns that emerge only when there are enough of us getting together. Those are the invisible stairsteps, and those are all about relationship, except there is something bigger than relationship at work. It's about the evolution of these new properties that we can derive. It's also about the next stairsteps up, which are not things over which we have a choice. These new patterns are what we have called in many conversations a memory of the future, called forth by inherent Eros of Cosmos itself.

## 5. Intimacy Generates Emergence

Great literature is often about great people—often those who are willing to risk everything, including fame, fortune, and reputation, for the sake of relationship with their beloved. The beloved may well be another human being—family, friend, partner, or lover—or it may be a beloved of an entirely different nature. It may be an animal; there is an entire literature of love stories between human beings and animals.<sup>40</sup> It may be a group, a society, a tribe, an army unit, a sports team, or a

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter III.

<sup>40</sup> One beautiful example of this genre is the film *My Octopus Teacher*, which came out several years after the core of this text was written. It is a love story between a masculine and muscular South African diver, Foster, and an octopus. He describes with enormous depth and beauty the subtle love that developed between him and an octopus that he met in his deep-sea dives. Wikipedia describes the movie as follows: "The film shows Foster's growing intimate relationship with the octopus as he follows her around for nearly a year. They form a bond where she plays with Foster and allows him into her world to see how she sleeps, lives, and eats." Here is some of the

group of old friends. It may be a set of values, a religion, a society that stretches across space and time. It may be a country, a body of knowledge or gnosis, or a set of intrinsic values of Cosmos expressed in a cause. All of these are subjects of relationships with whom we may be in intimate communion.

Equally profound is the capacity to be in relationship *to yourself*. That is not as simple as it seems. In most of the great interior sciences, the essential movement of Reality is when *subject* becomes *object*. Divinity expresses herself as subject and can reflect on herself as an external object. The same principle is true at the highest reaches of human development. For American developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, a new level of consciousness and depth is obtained when the subject of one level of consciousness becomes the object of the next level of consciousness.<sup>41</sup> This is a form of evolving relationship to self. Let's deploy two examples to illustrate what we mean by *subject becoming object* as a form of relationship to self.

Newborn babies cannot discern between what is their bodies and what is not. They cannot discern between different parts of their bodies. They *are* their bodies. Their bodies are subject. It takes several months until they start to voluntarily move their hands and watch their movements with their eyes. This is a nascent realization: *I am not my body, I am in relationship to my body*. And it takes even longer until they understand that they cannot make their caretakers come and go, nor can they move their caretaker's hands. This is the nascent realization of separation individuation—self and other:<sup>42</sup> *I am not other; I am in relationship to other*. These realizations emerge when one day, they, the babies, are able to discern between themselves and their hands, or themselves and their bodies. They have made their bodies object: *I can look at, and talk about, my body. My body is part of who I am, but it doesn't exhaust my whole me. My body is an object inside of my whole me (my subject)*. Similarly, they distinguish between self and other: *I am not merged with my mother or caretaker*.

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language that the diver uses to describe their love: "My relationship with the sea forest and its creatures deepens . . . week after month after year after year. You're in touch with this wild place, and it's speaking to you. Its language is visible. I fell in love with her but also with that amazing wildness that she represented and . . . and how that changed me. What she taught me was to feel . . . that you're part of this place, not a visitor. That's a huge difference."

<sup>41</sup> Robert Kegan introduced his subject-object theory in his books *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (1982) and *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994).

<sup>42</sup> See the work of Margaret Mahler (MS 1138 in Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/12/resources/>).

Another example of subject becoming object is the psychological process often called *shadow work*. A quality that is in shadow cannot be seen. It has been dissociated *within* the subject, whether it is a negative quality or a wondrous positive quality. It is a split-off part that cannot be made object, so it remains an unconscious subject and is thus invisible. Because the shadow quality is split off, it will then be projected into second and third person. For example, take the quality of anger or rage, which lives in the first person of the subject but is split off or disassociated. Instead of recognizing ourselves to be angry, we project the anger onto someone else. There is a failure of intimacy with self, which causes the projection of the self-experience onto someone else. This dynamic expresses as: *I am not angry, but you seem to be angry*, or: *All the other people out there are angry*. Anger is simply not recognized as being part of one's own self, the subject. Rather than becoming a healthy object inside our own subject, the shadow part is dissociated and projected onto another subject that then becomes an object.

The person onto whom we have wrongly projected the split-off anger—our own split-off shadow quality—can no longer be accurately felt. That person becomes to us not a subject we can relate to but an object, a thing. Our relationship with that person thus devolves from what Martin Buber famously calls an *I-Thou* (subject to subject) relationship to an *I-it* (subject to object) or *it-it* (object to object) relationship.

The reason it would be an object-to-object relationship is because by splitting ourselves off from our own anger, we become nonintimate with ourselves. We reduce ourselves from a subject that we can accurately feel to an alienated object. When we evolve or deepen our consciousness, the split-off quality can be returned to the light. We can take our projections back and recognize our projected shadow as part of our own self or subject. The alienated quality becomes a part of our whole being. More formally, it becomes an object, which we can see and therefore act on, shape, or direct, *within* our subject—our own felt sense of our full self. This is because we can now *see* the split-off quality within our self and therefore act upon it, perhaps to transform, activate, redirect, or even honor it, depending on what the precise nature of quality might be.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> To cite one example: Many years back, I was working with a wonderful CEO of a major firm, who was a decent and kind man with genuine integrity. But he was always having conflicts with his management team. The conflicts were often intense. He would not back down, and they seemed incongruous with his persona and personal ethic in other dimensions of his life. After a short series of talks, we excavated an early set of memories, when his father,

Whichever one of the myriad forms of relationship we are referring to, the fundamental facts remain the same:

Reality is relationship.

Reality is evolution.

That means that the evolution of Reality is the evolution of relationships.

That is true not only on the macro level of history, from quarks to humans, but also in your life. The more you evolve, the better quality of relationships you will want. The more we evolve, the more we are willing to risk everything not just for a relationship but for an even deeper relationship. Or even better, if at all possible—and it sometimes is and sometimes is not—to deepen the relationships we already have.

Relationships are expressed in conversations. The evolution of relationships is the deepening of conversation. At the core of an extraordinary life are always extraordinary relationships, which are constituted by extraordinary conversations.

Remember the old adage: *If a tree falls in a forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?* Let's rephrase its implications more overtly in terms of relationship: *If something momentous happens to you and there is no one there to share it with, did it happen?*

But it is even more than that. Relationships are not only about sharing—they are about creating or synergizing new life through our coming together. Sometimes, that new life is a baby. At other times, that new life is new depth, new truth, new goodness, and new beauty in the Cosmos that was birthed by our relationship. It is new relationship, new intimacy, that generates all novel emergence. Or, said simply: *Intimacy generates emergence.*

## 6. Invisible Patterns of Intimacy

Giacomo Rizzolatti discovered another core expression of *Reality is relationship* in

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who started the company, would say to him, "Don't let the management team take advantage of you. You have to show them who is in charge, or they will ride all over you." This was a mantra from his father that he had forgotten in his conscious mind. But when we recovered it, we realized almost instantly that, when he engaged his management team, he was not directly engaging them. Instead, his communications and positions were in fact directed toward proving to this father that he was a worthy successor to him. This entire dynamic had been in his subject. When we recovered it, it became object. He was not in relationship with this part of himself. And once he realized it, he was in relationship and had the capacity—if he so chose—to evolve the relationship.

the realm of molecular biology. He called his discovery mirror neurons.<sup>44</sup> Humans and other primates, he claimed, make use of mirror neurons to read emotions as well as behaviors in others.<sup>45</sup> He and one of his young postdoctoral researchers were shocked to discover that some of the exact same sections of the brains of macaque monkeys that activated when they performed an action were also activated when they watched someone else performing that action. Other scientists, including Stephanie Preston and Frans de Waal,<sup>46</sup> have independently argued that the mirror neuron system is involved in empathy.

Their research suggests that when you watch someone else in a moment of joy or pain, you are having the same experience, at least in terms of the neural activations in the brain. This applies not only to the sensation of physical pain but also to the emotional aspect of the experience. We activate each other's neural circuitry all the time. In fact, as Rizzolatti's and others' work makes clear, perceiving Reality is in no sense an individual affair. It is a result of shared neural circuitry. Neurons externalize, in our physical brain circuitry, the felt sense of others.

In some sense, in order to perceive and understand another, we merge with them for a moment. We recreate their experience as if we were having it ourselves. We have a core human capacity rooted in our neural circuitry to literally feel into the experience of another, whether through mirror neurons or other

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<sup>44</sup> Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, "The Mirror-Neuron System" (2004).

<sup>45</sup> The first animal in which Rizzolatti and his colleagues studied mirror neurons was the macaque monkey. What they called a *mirror neuron* is a neuron that fires both when the monkeys act themselves and when they observe the same action performed by another. In other words, the neuron mirrors the behavior of the other, as though the observer were itself acting. Researchers have found such neurons in human and primate species, as well as in birds. However, the function of these mirror neurons in humans is a subject of much speculation. To date, there have been no widely accepted neural or computational models put forward to describe how mirror neuron activity supports cognitive functions. While many researchers in the scientific community have expressed their excitement about the discovery of these mirror neurons, there are also scientists, such as Hickok, Pascolo, and Dinstein, who have expressed doubts about the existence and role of the so-called mirror neurons in humans. For example, Gregory Hickok published an extensive argument in 2009 against the claim that mirror neurons are involved in action understanding. The name of his paper is "Eight Problems for the Mirror Neuron Theory of Action Understanding in Monkeys and Humans." He concludes that "the early hypothesis that these cells underlie action understanding is likewise an interesting and prima facie reasonable idea. However, despite its widespread acceptance, the proposal has never been adequately tested in monkeys, and in humans there is strong empirical evidence, in the form of physiological and neuropsychological (double-) dissociations, against the claim." In the preface to his *The Myth of Mirror Neurons: The Real Neuroscience of Communication and Cognition* (2014), Hickok writes, "The international debate over mirror neurons and indeed the nature of human cognition has intensified. Mirror neurons are no longer the rock stars of neuroscience and psychology that they once were and, in my view, a more complex and interesting story is gaining favor regarding the neuroscience of communication and cognition."

<sup>46</sup> Stephanie D. Preston and Frans B. M. de Waal, "Empathy: Its Ultimate and Proximate Bases" (2002).

mechanisms.<sup>47</sup> There is a partial intimacy. For a moment, there is, in our experience, a shared identity between ourselves and the person we are observing. The simple act of reading a novel opens a window to the implicit intimacy between us that connects us in a way that is accessible to almost every human being.

This is the same process that Alfred North Whitehead saw taking place between elementary particles. The subatomic particles have what he calls prehension, a very elementary feeling in which the perceiving thing apprehends aspects of the perceived thing.<sup>48</sup> It is that ability to feel each other that allows them to enter into the bond of intimate relationship. The same process in ever-more evolved forms takes place all the way up the evolutionary chain. For Reality is relationship, an intimate relationship, all way down and all the way up the chain.

At the human level, the boundary between you and others (especially those in your circle of intimacy) is blurred. Those boundaries are mediated by a complex mix of neural firings originating from inside and outside your head. That is why we might be watching a movie and alternatively sobbing tears of pain or tears of joy depending on the scene playing out. As Rizzolatti's student Christian Keysers notes, "Watching the movie scene in which a tarantula crawls on James Bond's chest can literally make us shiver, as if the spider crawled on our own chest,"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> While experts like Gregory Hickok doubt that complex capabilities in humans (and in somewhat different form in primates), like empathy, imitation, social learning, et cetera, can be explained by mirror neurons alone, there is no doubt that these abilities exist. In chapter 8 ("Homo Imitans and the Function of Mirror Neurons") of his book *The Myth of Mirror Neurons: The Real Neuroscience of Communication and Cognition* (2014), Hickok writes, "Here we have a potential behavior that mirror neurons might support, not simple imitation (mimicry), but some form of social or imitation-like learning. But what kind of social learning could mirror neurons support in the context of the experimental paradigm that led to their discovery? . . . Macaques reach for and grasp things all the time and they observe their own actions visually. Pretty soon, an association builds between the execution of an action and the (self) observation of that action. Poof! Mirror neurons are born. Now, when the animal sees the experimenter execute an action similar to those that the monkey has previously executed, the cells fire because of the preexisting association built on self-observation. It's got nothing to do with understanding. . . . I'm suggesting an associative account of mirror neurons similar to the one Arbib and Heyes promote, but with a different source of the association: the experimental training itself rather than self-action to other-action sensorimotor generalization. The mirror neuron research team may have inadvertently trained mirror neurons into the monkey's brain. Hopefully, future experiments will be designed to test this hypothesis." See also "Schema Design and Implementation of the Grasp-Related Mirror Neuron System," by Erhan Oztop and Michael A. Arbib (2002), and "Where Do Mirror Neurons Come From?" by Cecilia Heyes (2010).

<sup>48</sup> Prehension was not conceived as a cognitive process at the level of basic particles but rather an unconscious apprehension. It may be thought of as more of an inherent reflex of what has been called proto-feeling or proto-touch that connects ostensibly alienated particles. See *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, by Alfred North Whitehead (1978).

<sup>49</sup> Christian Keysers et al., "A Touching Sight: SII/PV Activation during the Observation and Experience of Touch" (2004), p. 335.

because, in a very real sense, we are experiencing the physical sensation of a tarantula crawling across our own chest, along with the emotions that go with it.

The more we love the other, the more actively our empathy is aroused. Eros expresses itself in our psyche and in the physical structure of brain circuitry. Even just seeing another's emotional state is enough to trigger an emotional response in ourselves. American neuropsychologist Allan Schore has discovered that mothers and their babies often have interlocking brain waves. This phenomenon of relationship is referred to as brain-to-brain entrainment, right-brain-to-right-brain nonverbal communication, or interbrain synchronization.<sup>50</sup> They are so deep in relationship that, from the perspective of brain waves, the prefrontal cortex of the mother becomes the prefrontal cortex of the baby. There is an emerging body of research, using dual EEG,<sup>51</sup> showing evidence that the EEG brain-wave patterns of the mother synchronize with the EEG pattern of the baby in a variety of states.<sup>52</sup> When they separate, their brain waves diverge, only to recalibrate and resonate once again with each other when they come back together.

This kind of entrainment is not limited to mother-baby pairs, however, but is inherent in many forms of relationship, including, to some degree, two strangers who are paired for an experiment.<sup>53</sup> Partners even seem to be able to send brain signals from isolated rooms to each other. The person whose brain is receiving the brain signal will imitate the brain pattern of the sender. The partner and sender do not need to know each other, and there is no contact between them other than mental intention.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Allan Schore, "The Interpersonal Neurobiology of Intersubjectivity" (2021) and "Right-Brain-to-Right-Brain Psychotherapy: Recent Scientific and Clinical Advances" (2022).

<sup>51</sup> Dual-EEG research is simply research involving two or more subjects wearing electroencephalograms and looking at the correlation patterns between subjects performing a variety of tasks.

<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, the project "Using 'Naturalistic Dual-EEG' to Measure Mother-Infant Brain-to-Brain (b2b) Synchrony in Socially-Mediated Learning," led by Victoria Leong and Samuel Vincent Wass, researchers at the University of Cambridge (<https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FN006461%2F1>).

<sup>53</sup> On neural synchrony between strangers, see, for instance, "Brain-to-Brain Entrainment: EEG Interbrain Synchronization While Speaking and Listening," by Alejandro Pérez et al. (2017).

<sup>54</sup> The following are three related studies from the late 1990s that participated in generating this field of inquiry: "The Electricity of Touch: Detection and Measurement of Cardiac Energy Exchange Between People: An Exploratory Study," by Rollin McCraty et al. (1998); "An Experiment on Remote Action Against Man in Sensory-Shielding Conditions," by Mikio Yamatomo et al. (1996); and "Biophoton Emission of the Human Body," by S. Cohen and F. A. Popp (1997). See also "EEG Correlates of Social Interaction at Distance," by W. Giroladini et al. (2015), "Electroencephalographic Evidence of Correlated Event-Related Signals between the Brains of Spatially and Sensory Isolated Human Subjects," by Leanna J. Standish et al. (2004), "A Direct Brain-to-Brain Interface in Humans," by Rajesh P. N. Rao et al. (2014), and "BrainNet: A Multi-Person Brain-to-Brain Interface for Direct Collaboration Between Brains," by Linxing Jiang et al. (2019).

All these invisible patterns of intimacy—as well as those yet to be discovered—are exterior confirmations of the core truth: Reality is relationship. Reality is Eros.

## 7. The Fellowship of the Ring

J. R. R. Tolkien's epic Lord of the Rings trilogy—*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*—is all about one theme: Reality is relationship.

Tolkien's books, and the movies based on them, found their way into the world to a real degree, independently of the contrived marketing machines of studios and publishing. Tolkien's books have sold somewhere around six hundred million copies—powered in great part by their own inherent momentum.

At each key moment in this story, there is a dialogue clarifying the most essential structure of Reality as radically committed relationships. It is about relationships between two individuals and about relationships in the context of the group. It is about whether the Fellowship of the Ring has the integrity and potency necessary to stand against corruption and evil.

The Ring is most powerfully described as *precious*. Gollum, the emotionally and physically twisted figure, who was formerly a hobbit, once possessed the Ring. He is both madly devoted to it and degraded by it. Gollum rasps in whispers again and again through the text "*My Precious*" in his reaching for the Ring. The Ring, *My Precious*, represents anti-precious or anti-value. Or, said slightly differently, the Ring is Anti-Eros.

Eros is the core value of Cosmos. According to the Eros equation, Eros is the experience of radical aliveness, yearning for ever-deeper contact and ever-greater wholeness. In other words, Eros itself is about contact between parts and generation of wholeness—right relationship between parts—in other words, *ethos*. Eros is ethos. In their deepest expression, there is no split at all between the erotic and the ethical.

Eros *is* ethos.<sup>55</sup> Or said slightly differently, Eros is Value exponentialized as the

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<sup>55</sup> Naturally, Eros and ethos appear at different levels of evolving consciousness. Level one of Eros is often an explosion of Eros that is not yet clarified by ethos. There is a second level, in which ethos constrains Eros, demanding its clarification and appropriate context and expression. There is then a third level, where Eros and ethos disclose their fundamental identity. True Eros—when it is clarified, when one accesses, at the level of human Eros, one's deepest heart's desire—is always the highest expression of Eros and ethos as one. When the clarification of Eros at level two does not take place, then the natural explosion of Eros at level one reappears, in many distressing disguises, as pseudo-eros—showing up whenever the experience of emptiness and void is too

Infinite Value that suffuses Reality. Nothing exists outside of the circle of Eros as Value and Value as Eros. Eros *is* ethos, and ethos, or Value, is the *Ought* implicit in Reality that suffuses all of Cosmos. This is what we refer to in CosmoErotic Humanism as *ErosValue*.

The Ring, however, was forged by the corrupt Lord Sauron to dominate and bind all other rings in blind submission to his power. It experiences itself as being outside the circle of Eros and Value. This is the optical delusion of consciousness that is generated by the Ring. The Ring promises ultimate power and freedom—not authentic power or freedom, but the freedom from the *Ought* of Eros and Value, from *ethos*, from the Obligation and Joy of Reality. The Ring of power is the evil of cancerous independence from the larger Whole, which not only is alienated from the Whole but hates the Whole and Wholeness.

The Ring of power, in the myth of the Lord of the Rings, like in the interior science of Hebrew wisdom, has quasi-autonomy in the sense that it has its own motivational architecture toward abusive power in its most pseudo-erotically degraded forms. In other words, the Ring is pseudo-eros so exponentialized that it feels like Eros herself, with powers of seduction that are similarly exponentialized.

In other words, the pseudo-eros of the Ring is so radically exponentialized that it feels like Anti-Eros—Anti-Value, which presents as Eros herself—as Value herself. That is precisely why evil crusades attract support and followers. Said succinctly: Anti-Eros presenting as Eros is the ultimate expression of pseudo-eros.

A flashback in the movie shows how the Ring is rediscovered at the bottom of a riverbed by a young diver. Within moments of his discovery, however, the young man's friend, entranced by the ring's precious, raw Anti-Eros, its seductive potency, kills him to gain its possession.

The biblical story of Cain and Abel has the same theme. Judas betraying Jesus is the same story. And every Asian, native, and western tradition has its versions of the same tale of betrayal.

The betrayal of intimate friendship manifests the very nature of the Ring. Anti-Eros rears its head to destroy the authentic Eros that is the very nature of Reality, whose narrative arc is the progressive deepening of intimacies, a series of love

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powerful to bear, and there is no genuine Eros that the person has the capacity to access to fill the hole. That happens, in other words, for anyone not constantly engaged in the wondrous work of self-transformation and clarification.

stories, all the way up and down the evolutionary chain.<sup>56</sup> The response to Anti-Eros can only be Eros of the most potent form. This is the Fellowship of the Ring. Thus the Ring, Anti-Eros, can only be undone by the Fellowship. Gandalf and the warriors Legolas and Gimli, together with Boromir, son of the steward of Gondor, and Aragorn, the not-yet-recognized king, as well as the hobbits Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin are at the core of the Fellowship. Others are key beloveds. Arwen, the beloved of Aragorn; Galadriel, the Elven priestess; Elrond, father to Arwen and leader of the Elves; Faramir, brother of Boromir; Theoden, king of Rohan, and his daughter Eowyn and nephew Eomer are all central beloveds in the story, each with their role to play in supporting the Fellowship. It is only the bonds of love and loyalty between the Fellowship that will allow the Ring to be dissolved and Eros restored.

When the Fellowship is threatened, the Ring gains ascendancy. When the Fellowship is strong, the way is opened to the dissolution of the Anti-Eros of the Ring. If the Fellowship is broken, then the bonds of trust and love in relationship are betrayed, Eros—Value itself—is broken, and the Ring grows strong.

One of the core motifs of the New Story of Value we are telling in CosmoErotic Humanism is the demonstration that Reality is Eros. This is not different than demonstrating that Reality is Value. Eros is the right relationship, rooted in ethos (the right valuation of the parts), which then generates a larger whole. In other words, to say *Reality is Value* or *Reality is Eros* is absolutely identical to declaring *Reality is ethos* or *Reality is relationship*.

In Tolkien's trilogy, the truth of *Reality is relationship* is incarnate in the Fellowship of the Ring. Indeed, virtually all great literature and the lyrics of virtually all popular music revolve not around philosophical inquiry or doctrinal issues of faith or psychological personality analysis but rather around intimacy and relationship—the longing, the betrayal, the pain, the ecstasy, and the joy. For Reality is relationship—all the way down and all the way up the evolutionary chain.

In the trilogy, seduction by the Ring is the original sin, heralding the destruction of the characters' reality. Because Reality is relationship, the rupture

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<sup>56</sup> One of the constituents that define a story is some dimension of freedom, a sense of choosing, at least to some degree. It is for that very reason that Eros, by its very nature, must entertain the possibility of Anti-Eros. Otherwise, Reality would not be a story but a tech manual. See *First Principles and First Values: Forty-Two Propositions on CosmoErotic Humanism, the Meta-Crisis, and the World to Come*, by David J. Temple (2024).

can only be fixed by repairing and restoring relationship. But it cannot be simply a restorative repair, where relationship goes back to its prior status. After the shattering, a new and more whole vessel of relationship must emerge. This evolutionary deepening of the relationship, forged in the outrageous pain and Outrageous Love of our lives, is the goal of the quest. The quest, which seeks liberation from the Anti-Eros, the ultimate pseudo-eros of the Ring, is not only about returning to Eden or restoration. It is about the radical deepening of relationship, the yearned-for utopia of relationship that is our grail. In other words, for the Fellowship to thrive, relationship (the Fellowship) has not only to continue but to evolve. Reality is not only relationship. Reality is evolution, and Reality is the evolution of relationship.

It is in the ever-deepening and evolving integrity of the Fellowship's intimacy that hope for Reality lies. The hobbits are carriers of the great power of relationship. They lack fighting skills. They have no political power to speak of. They know no magic. They have studied no great wisdom texts, and they command no armies. But they understand, with the unvarnished depth of pure wisdom, that all of Reality is relationship. And life in the Shire, the hobbits' home, is about the natural deepening of relationship in the context of the everyday nature of living. The hobbits incarnate a certain innocence, not of a naïve kind but rather *a second innocence* of the kind that comes after tragedy and loss. They live the simple truth: *Reality is relationship*.

In the third book, *The Return of the King*, it is the depth of love between the hobbits Frodo and Sam that allows Frodo not to be destroyed by the Ring. The true trial in that book is: Will Gollum (the hobbit who committed the original murder to take possession of the Ring) succeed in destroying the bonds of friendship between Frodo and Sam? For a time, Gollum succeeds in doing just that. He convinces Frodo that Sam has betrayed him and seeks only to steal the Ring for himself. This is precisely the nature of Anti-Eros as the ultimate pseudo-eros. It persuades the Fellowship that the original sin of betrayal has been committed, when in fact there is only radical love and loyalty. Pseudo-eros imitates Eros, as in, for example, the twisted and tragic nature of Gollum's feigned outrage at Sam's presumed betrayal of Frodo.

Without Sam, Frodo cannot find his way. He winds up shrouded like a mummy in the suffocating web of a cruel spider. He is about to be killed. He cannot complete his mission to destroy the Ring. Reality will be destroyed.

The turnabout in the last moment happens through the recovery of their Fellowship. Sam and Frodo restore the integrity of their relationship; hope and possibility are reborn. In that moment, each recognizes their unique singularity. Sam realizes that only Frodo can carry the Ring, and that Sam cannot share that burden with him. But Sam says to Frodo,

*Come, Mr. Frodo! I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you.*

Frodo realizes the truth of this, and in this new partnership, their love—the Fellowship of the Ring—deepens and evolves.

The books and their movie versions are sprinkled with dialogue that would be easy to miss but that carries the deeper intention of the whole story. It is only in knowing that Reality is the integrity of relationship that the Fellowship of the Ring can save Reality.

Because of the limitations of space, we will share only four short scenes from just one of the movies, *The Return of the King*. But these scenes sufficiently represent the essence of the realization we have described to this point. The scenes all take place at a moment of possible death. Every great wisdom tradition says that the moment right before our death is a moment when the veils part and truth is revealed for a fleeting moment. What is truly Real comes to the foreground, and everything else recedes.

The first scene is a dialogue between two great fighters, the Dwarf warrior Gimli and the Elf prince Legolas. It takes place at a moment when their deaths seem imminent.

*Gimli: Never thought I'd die fighting side by side with an Elf.*

*Legolas: What about side by side with a friend?*

*Gimli: Aye. I could do that.*

The second scene is in the same battle, led by their friend Aragorn, the returning king. The king is an archetype of Unique Self. The Unique Self is the one who fully incarnates their unique configuration of intimacy—their unique expression of LoveIntelligence, LoveBeauty, and LoveDesire. This is the one who decides to move through the trauma and demons from the past in order to claim the full power of their unique destiny. That is what it means to be king.

Historically, the realization of Unique Self was thought to be limited to kings and queens. Everyone else was expendable. It was the king and queen who were uniquely called, needed, and chosen by Reality. In this era, we now realize that greatness is democratized. We are all Unique Selves. We are all—in potential—kings and queens—the democratization of royalty.

The realization of the Intimate Universe is the realization that every human being is a unique configuration of intimacy—intended, recognized, chosen, love-adored, desired, and needed by All-That-Is. Every person has their unique instrument to play in the music of the Unique Self Symphony.

Moments before the battle, in which Aragorn's army is outnumbered and, from the look of things, will be unable to triumph, Aragorn gives a classic speech. It is the speech of the Unique Self king. It is about one thing only: Reality is relationship. Aragorn speaks of the potency and power of the love that binds friends. He rides before the men and shouts these words:

*Sons of Gondor! Of Rohan! My brothers!*

*I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship. But it is not this day. This day we fight! . . .*

*By all that you hold dear on this good Earth, I bid you stand! Men of the West!*

We now turn to scene three. After the Ring has been destroyed, Sam and Frodo are stranded on a slab of rock in the midst of volcanic eruption. They seem once again to face certain death. Frodo turns to Sam and says poignantly but powerfully:

*I'm glad to be here with you, Samwise Gamgee, here at the end of all things.*

Who are you truly with at the end of all things? You are with your friend. If that is so, then Reality—Relationship and Love—triumphs over death. If that is not so, then you are dead already, so death matters little.

In the same moment, before what seems to be their impending death, Sam remembers what he wished to have done in his life. He does not wish for wealth, power, or any other achievement. He wishes for relationship. Sam remembers the relationship that never happened, the girl he would have married. He can see

Rosie Cotton dancing. *She had ribbons in her hair. If I ever was to marry someone, it would have been her. It would have been her.*

Another key relationship in the trilogy is that of two other hobbits from the shire: Merry and Pippin. They are separated at a key moment in the third movie. It marks an imminent danger to the very survival of Reality as they know it. That danger is marked by what seems to be the breaking of a core relationship between friends.

*Pippin: But we'll see each other soon? Won't . . .*

*Merry: I don't know.*

And after those words, the entire tale of *The Return of the King* unfolds. After a battle where Merry is wounded by a dark foe, the end is marked with these simple and unpretentious words between Merry and Pippin when they are reunited.

*Merry: Are you going to leave me?*

*Pippin: No, Merry. I'm going to look after you.*

The entire trilogy ends with the reuniting of Aragorn and Arwen—the king and queen. But theirs is far from an ordinary love story. Theirs is quite an Outrageous Love Story. What is most potent is that they are not role mates having children and surviving. They are not merely soul mates staring deeply into each other's eyes. They embody a new station in the evolution of love—an evolutionary relationship. They are whole mates. Their love is intensely passionate and personal, but it is not just about them. Their love is in service to the larger Whole.

Perhaps the best way to close this meditation is to return to Frodo and Sam, with whom we began. They are at the beginning of their mission. Their relationship is suffused with loyalty and love. But it's not just about them. They are pulled by a purpose that is larger than them. They are whole mates in evolutionary relationship.

*Frodo: It would be the death of you to come with me, Sam, and I could not have borne that.*

*Sam: Not as certain as being left behind.*

*Frodo: But I am going to Mordor.*

*Sam: I know that well enough, Mr. Frodo. Of course you are. And I'm coming with you.*

## 8. Reality Does Not Only *Create* Relationship: Reality *Is* Relationship

We live in a CosmoErotic Universe, an Intimate Universe, an Amorous Cosmos. The subatomic and atomic world, which constitutes all dimensions of Reality, is animated by the Field of Intimate Allurement and Autonomy, the Eros-suffused conversation. In this Field, desire for new configurations of Eros and Value—Eros as Value and Value as Eros—defines the evolutionary movements of Reality. Evolution is the Love Story of the Universe.

There is both radical continuity and discontinuity between the levels of Reality, from matter in all of its levels, to life in all of its levels, to the depth of the human self-reflective mind in all of its levels.<sup>57</sup> The drive of a neutron toward feeling, sensing, or prehending a proton in the space and creating a new reality, in which both are inter-included in a larger whole, the nucleus of an atom, is part of the essential structure of Reality. As mentioned above, this is the only way that neutrons can survive for more than fifteen minutes without falling apart: A neutron that is not in intimate conversation with a proton will decay within fifteen minutes. In other words, the neutron really *needs* the presence of the proton in order to be itself. In effect, the proton says to the neutron: *Your need is my allurements*. This is a sentence birthed by the mutuality of pathos that is core to our intimacy equation; it expresses shared identity in which we feel each other in multiple loops of ever-deepening feeling: I feel your need and I am allured to fulfill it.<sup>58</sup> We come into the depth of our identity in the context of relationship. It is relationship that evokes our *I-ness*.

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<sup>57</sup> This is the principle of continuity and discontinuity of value all the way down and all the way up the evolutionary chain, and in the inception of the evolutionary chain, a core tenet of CosmoErotic Humanism. See *First Principles and First Values: Forty-Two Propositions on CosmoErotic Humanism, the Meta-Crisis, and the World to Come*, by David J. Temple (2024).

<sup>58</sup> To be clear, we are not suggesting a magical animism. There is no equivalence between the human experience of allurements and need and the experience of allurements and need at the subatomic level. There are obvious radical discontinuities between the structure of consciousness of an atom, an amoeba, a plant, a fish, a dog, and a human being. But there is also a fundamental underlying continuity, as all the above are animated by ever-evolving levels of interiority or consciousness. At the atomic level, that might be a form of proto consciousness, what Alfred North Whitehead called *prehension* and Abraham Kook called the *Ratzon* of the *Domem*, the elemental will that lives in the ostensibly inanimate.

Great traditions classically speak about the Infinite Divine from the perspective of *power*. Divinity is the Infinity of Power. However, the deeper realizations of the interior sciences evoke the Divine as the Infinity of *Intimacy*. Indeed, in CosmoErotic Humanism, we evoke a new Name of God—the *Infinite Intimate*.

Reality creates relationships. But even more fundamentally, Reality *is* relationship. The basic process of Reality is that an individualized part of Reality reaches out to another part. Each part prehends, senses, or feels the presence of the other, and both parts create a new whole. The new whole is, in multiple ways, greater than each of the parts and has new qualities that neither of them has on their own, but neither loses their individual integrity in the larger whole. This process is the essence of Reality itself.

In Arthur Koestler's terms, the new whole that is formed from this process may be called a *holon*.<sup>59</sup> This is an entity that is simultaneously a whole unto itself and a part of a larger whole. A holon has two characteristics:

1. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. The parts do not lose their integrity in the larger whole.

This process has also been called *synergy*. Alfred North Whitehead called the process or the occasion of one part reaching to feel and receive the other part prehension:<sup>60</sup> One subject prehends a second subject. Prehension could be described as proto-touching or proto-feeling. In prehension, one subject prehends another subject and then adds something emergent to form a new whole. This is the property of Reality that he called *creative advance into novelty*.<sup>61</sup> As Whitehead demonstrates, this relational process is the wondrous essence of Reality that keeps repeating itself at more and more evolved levels, all the way up the chain of matter, life, and human culture.<sup>62</sup>

That essential structure of Reality is always evolving within a trajectory of telos, reaching toward ever-deeper and wider expressions of the core values of Cosmos

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<sup>59</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (1964). See also Section II.3.3.

<sup>60</sup> In philosophy, prehension is taken to mean the reaching or grasping of a part toward another part, event, or entity as a mode of perception, though not necessarily cognition.

<sup>61</sup> "Neither the God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty." *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, by Alfred North Whitehead (1978), p. 349.

<sup>62</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 349.

itself. It is precisely this quality of Reality that caused life to spread across the planet at every stage of emergence. The expanded network and depth of relationship, the progressive deepening of intimacies, and the evolution of intimacy are the essential methodologies of evolution. **The evolution of life is literally the evolution of relationships.** As Fritjof Capra, a philosopher of science and a systems theorist, put it, “Life did not take over the planet by combat but by cooperation, partnership, and networking.”<sup>63</sup> Read: *by relationship*.

## 9. The Evolution of God: As Above So Below

There is a knowing in the interior sciences of Hebrew wisdom, hermeticism, and many other traditions—a realization that *as above so below*. By *above and below*, we are not referring to the above and below of the great chain of being, with matter at the bottom and Spirit at the top. It also doesn’t mean that there is a structural analogy between the upper and lower words, however one interprets that innocuous phrase.

In CosmoErotic Humanism, we understand *as above so below* as referring to interiors and exteriors. Manifest Reality is—as above so below—*participatory*. The finite human being participates in the interior structure of the manifest Divine, even as Infinite Divinity participates in the manifest structure of finite humanity.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Hidden Connections: Integrating the Biological, Cognitive, and Social Dimensions of Life into a Science of Sustainability* (2004), p. 231. See also Capra’s *The Web of Life: a New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (1996). Capra published *The Web of Life* in 1996, a year after our friend and colleague Ken Wilber published his magnum opus *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality* (1995). Wilber’s book integrates more philosophical ground (while remaining readable) in that he deals directly with issues of epistemology—how we know what we know. Wilber adapts and expands on Jürgen Habermas’s framework of communicative action based on three types of speech acts and validity claims, developing the four quadrants—an epistemological framework that recognizes the co-validity of different spheres of knowing: subjective and objective, individual and collective. Wilber recognizes that the worlds that these spheres of knowing point to tetra-arise—that is to say, they all arise together, and any attempt to absolutely prefer one over another is an epistemic confusion. Capra later reissued a more complete work of *The Web of Life* in 2014, together with coauthor Pier Luigi Luisi, under the title *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (2014). This is an excellent edition, which implicitly unpacks the Eros in systems theory in animating the structure of Reality. One of Capra’s updates is an important chapter—chapter 13—on the relationship of science to spirituality. In it, Capra responds effectively to Wilber’s early critique of *The Tao of Physics* (Capra 1975), which in certain passages seemed, in Wilber’s readings, to reduce mysticism to physics. For a sophisticated reading of Wilber’s critique of apparently reductionist strains in ecological theory, see “Ken Wilber’s Critique of Ecological Spirituality,” by Michael Zimmerman (2001).

<sup>64</sup> A distinction is drawn in all of the interior sciences between the Infinite that has no quality, that is beyond any words or quality, and the manifest Divine, which garbs Herself in quality or story. This is called—to cite but one example—*Ein Sof*, the formless-beyond-description Divine, and *Sefirot*, the Divine Luminations, Divinity disclosed in the language of human quality and story.

Just as neutrons only retain their identity by entering into relationship with protons, so Infinite Divinity only expresses the depth of identity by entering into relationship with the finite. The interior sciences describe this truth of becoming one's unique identity only in the context of right relationship as the essential process of Reality's manifestation—in other words, the Personhood of the Infinite. Said more bluntly, in the realization of the interior sciences, there is some way in which God becomes *more* God through entering intimate relationship. Of course, by *the Personhood of the Infinite* we do not mean a white-bearded god in the sky but rather point to the primordial Face of Reality, which is personal, and understand it as a manifest expression of the Infinite Personhood, which is the second-person Face of Cosmos.<sup>65</sup>

In some mysterious sense, when Infinity enters relationship to finitude, a new dimension of God emerges—what we might even call, audaciously, *an evolution of God*. These words, which can barely be spoken without trembling in joy, are expressed in the interior sciences in manifold ways, including the formulation of Meir Ibn Gabbai, in his realization of *Avodah Tzorech Gavoha*—God Needs Your Service.<sup>66</sup> In the writings of Abraham Kook, this notion of the evolution of God, although almost never explicitly stated, is a major structural theme.<sup>67</sup>

For Kook, as for all of lineage masters of a key branch of Hebrew wisdom, the core structure of Reality is *Tzimtzum*, *Shevira*, and *Tikkun*. Loosely translated:

- *Tzimtzum* means *Divine Withdrawal*.
- *Shevira* means *shattering* or *breaking*, what is called *the breaking of the vessels*.

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<sup>65</sup> On the first-, second-, and third-person Faces of Cosmos, see *Tears: Reclaiming Ritual, Integral Religion and Rosh Hashanah*, by Marc Gafni (2014), introduction, and especially the subsection “The Three Faces of God—The Second Sacred Methodology.”

<sup>66</sup> For example, Arthur Green, in his essay “God’s Need for Man: A Unitive Approach to the Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel” (2015), writes that “in his summary of kabbalistic teaching, ‘Avodat ha-Kodesh,’ Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai, who lived in the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century, offers a great synthesis of Jewish mystical wisdom in the generation immediately preceding that of Moshe Cordovero and Yizhak Luria, who were to make such great additions and changes to that tradition. The key theme of the work, repeated frequently throughout, is *ha-‘avodah tsorekh gavoha* (lit.: ‘service is a need on high’), that worship, including the life of the mitzvot, fulfills a divine need.”

<sup>67</sup> On the evolution of God, see also *Soul Prints: Your Path to Fulfillment*, by Marc Gafni (2002), chapter 6, Section “Keeping God’s Soul Print Alive.” A key collection on the sources on the evolution of God can be found here: <https://www.marcgafni.com/evolutionary-kabbalah/>. For a conversation on the evolution of God, mediated through Abraham Kook, as an expression of this radical motif in the Hebrew wisdom lineage and in Unique Self Theory, see *Your Unique Self: The Radical Path to Personal Enlightenment*, by Marc Gafni (2012), pp. 113–133.

- *Tikkun* means *fixing* or *repair*, but not simply *restorative* repair but *evolutionary* repair, fixing, or rectification.

*Tzimtzum* is the Divine Kenosis, in which Divinity manifests Reality not by thrusting forward but by emptying Herself (Herself, Himself, Itself, etc.) *out* of Reality. This allows for Reality's manifestation. However, the Divine Kenosis is not *ontological*, meaning Divinity cannot empty itself out of Reality, or Reality would disappear. Rather, it is epistemological or—said simply—the Divine Kenosis *appears* as if Reality is devoid of the Divine, and it requires a process of *noticing*—waking up or contemplation—to realize the full suffusion of Reality with the Divine—Value, Meaning, Truth, and Beauty.<sup>68</sup>

This intensity of the Infinite in the space of finitude, or manifestation, causes the second step, *shevira*, the breaking: The vessels of the manifest world shatter because they cannot hold the intensity of Infinite Presence. Broken vessels are spread throughout Reality.

Humanity liberates the sparks from the broken vessels in a process of *tikkun*. Tikkun, evolutionary rectification, is the process of evolving God. As my friend Abraham Leader, scholar of the interior sciences, has pointed out, *tikkun* means, in many sources of the interior sciences, not restorative repair but evolutionary rectification—a new whole emerges, greater than the sum of the parts. The *tikkun* takes place through the human being who participates in the Divine.

If the human being becomes more whole, God somehow, impossibly and paradoxically, becomes more Whole. Remember, Divine Kenosis is only apparent but never Real.<sup>69</sup> Thus, finitude, including humanity, participates in the Divine. When we generate, through a process of *tikkun*, a New Human and a New Humanity, both individually and collectively, we generate a new Face of the Divine that is somewhat more complete than the original God. In some mysterious sense, it is when Infinity enters relationship to finitude that a new dimension of

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<sup>68</sup> Another master of the Hebrew wisdom tradition, however, Nachman of Breslov, comes along and says we must take the void seriously as an ontological possibility, even if it is not an ontological Reality. It is only then—after sitting deeply in the void—that we attain the realization that the void is real but not Real. Or said slightly differently, the void is real but not true. Nachman demands our capacity to live in the radicalness of paradox. We must take radically seriously our own human experience that tells us, at our most painful and devastating of times, that the void is real. And only then do we realize that the void is not Real, and that Divinity suffuses everything and every person.

<sup>69</sup> In other writings, we have said: It is real but not Real. Meaning, it is real in our experience, and we need to deal with it on that level, but it doesn't have Ultimate Ontology. It is not Real.

God emerges. In other words, all of Reality, including the Divine, the Ultimate Real itself, becomes more Whole through relationship, through new intimacies.

The human being becomes intimate with her- or himself, with the beloved, and with Reality—and directly with the Infinite Divine in both first, second, and third person:

- The Divine as it lives in the human being (first person).
- The Divine in the sense of the Infinite Personhood of Divinity that knows our name (second person).
- The Divine in the sense of the third-person manifest Divine that we meet in all the sciences.

In the intimacy between the Infinite and the finite or, as Plotinus wrote, the intimate communion between the lonely one and the lonely one, the Divine becomes more Whole, more fully God, and the human being becomes more whole, more fully human.

Once we understand that the human being evolves the Divine even as the Divine is Eternal, and that the Divine holds us even as She lives in us, we understand the notion of *eternal and evolving values*. This notion is at the very heart of the new theory of value and the New Story of Value in CosmoErotic Humanism, which is so critical in responding to the meta-crisis. We call this new theory of value evolving perennialism.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of the evolving perennialism, see *First Principles and First Values: Forty-Two Propositions on CosmoErotic Humanism, the Meta-Crisis, and the World to Come*, by David J. Temple (2024).