

Re-Enchanting the World: Proceed with Care

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So, oft in theologic wars  
The disputants, I ween,  
Rail on in utter ignorance  
Of what each other mean.  
And prate about an elephant  
Not one of them has seen!

“The Blind Men and the Elephant”

John Godfrey Saxe

[A]ny people--just as, incidentally, also any individual—is worth only as much as it is able to press upon its experiences the stamp of the eternal; for thus it is, as it were, desecularized and shows its unconscious inward convictions of the relativity of time and of the true, that is metaphysical, significance of life.

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, §23

[T]he most radical, pervasive, and earth-shaking transformation would occur simply if everybody truly evolved to a mature, rational, and responsible ego, capable of freely participating in the open exchange of mutual self-esteem. *There* is the real "edge of history." There would be a *real* New Age.

Ken Wilber, Up From Eden, Chapter 18

How would the world and our lives be transformed if, beyond observable or measurable matter/energy, there were an immanent intelligence or as Stan Grof calls it, an ultimate creative principle? I attempt to answer this important question only after posing a question of my own. At the outset, however, let me assert that modern materialism provides a woefully inadequate account of reality. Too much is unaccounted for, including not only first-person everyday experience, but also experiences of non-ordinary states, including the many instances of spontaneous mystical states recounted a century ago by William James in Varieties of Religious Experience.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, countless reliable

people, including advanced spiritual practitioners as well as scientists who research paranormal phenomena, have reported events that defy explanation in terms of the assumptions of contemporary materialism.<sup>2</sup> A challenge for post-materialists, as suggested by the lines *from* Saxes's poem above, is developing a coherent and integrated map of the many different and sometimes bizarre experiential domains described by psychics, mystics, shamans and others who have opened what Aldous Huxley called the "doors of perception."<sup>3</sup> Some may interpret such experiences as confirming the validity of idealism, ("All is mind, or consciousness"), but post-materialists should perhaps avoid an anti-materialism that simply reverses the status of the poles in a problematic metaphysical dualism. Just as Nietzsche sought to go "beyond good and evil" in order to effect a transvaluation of value, so post-materialists might seek to go "beyond materialism and idealism" in order to effect a transformation of prevailing ontology.

In my view, then, the best kind of post-materialism will not restore pre-modern supernaturalism or classical idealism, but instead will cooperate with the best natural science in expanding the horizons of the "real," while recognizing that experience--including the remarkable experiences that contemporary materialism cannot explain--is always associated with a body. Post-materialists should encourage, instead of fearing, attempts to correlate ordinary and non-ordinary experiences with the findings of neurophysiology. What post-materialists should resist, however, are attempts to reduce such experiences to material states. David Chalmers has made an excellent case for the notion that consciousness and matter/energy are both basic features of the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> If panpsychism is true, then so is pan materialism. Just as ordinary experiences are correlated with gross (ordinary) corporeality, so too non-ordinary states of consciousness are associated with non-ordinary modes of corporeality. This is what so many esoteric

traditions mean by saying that to psychic, subtle, and causal experiential states, there correspond psychic, subtle, and causal bodies. In The Future of the Body, Michael Murphy remarks that the perennial idea of involution (emanation from Source) and evolution (return to Source)

helps explain the profound resonance between human volition, imagery, and flesh through which psychophysical transformations appear to be mediated. Our cells, by this account, respond to our thoughts and intentions (and to ego-transcendent agencies) because they arise from the same eternal or primordial Source. The involution-evolution idea resonates with my proposals that transformative practice (like evolution) can evoke our latent capacities for extraordinary life. According to this formulation, human nature can realize metanormal capacities because that is its predisposition.<sup>5</sup>

When science takes seriously and examines how body evolves along with consciousness, a topic that must be reserved for another essay, we will presumably live in a world with expanded metaphysical horizons and with correspondingly different individual subjectivity, institutions, and social practices.

Modern materialism has rightly been criticized for its excessiveness. In its zeal to purge the cosmos of everything but physical phenomena, materialism promoted what Ken Wilber has called a “flatland ontology,” which cannot explain what many different traditions call consciousness, soul, and spirit.<sup>6</sup> By disenchanting the world, however, modern materialism made possible science, technology, and industry, the remarkable success of which contributed to legitimating and spreading democratic ideals and institutions. Early moderns posited mechanistic materialism as a methodological principle to open up a free space for inquiry, protected from the dogmatic utterances and intrusions

of religious authorities, who appealed for legitimacy to an invisible Creator. As a metaphysical hypothesis, materialism cannot be proven to be true, any more than can idealism. Methodological materialists, then, talk and act as if there were only matter/energy, without interiority, consciousness, soul, spirit, Source, and so on.

Methodological materialism and democratic ideals, the twin pillars of modernity, contributed to one another in complex ways. Authors of the essays found in this anthology, even though they are in many cases critical of materialism, appreciate the freedom of inquiry made possible by a modernity that was profoundly influenced by that materialism. In illiberal, premodern or non-modern societies, people cannot publish documents that openly challenge the prevailing belief system. Punishment for such an offense ranges from imprisonment to exile, or worse. The most credible alternatives to materialism will explicitly affirm and integrate modernity's noble achievements, including free inquiry, which always threaten conventional mores and institutions. By taking a simultaneously affirmative and critical stance toward modernity, contemporary re-enchanters would receive a more open hearing from those moderns (and postmoderns) who equate re-enchantment solely with unacceptable social and psychological regression. If we wish to preach to more than members of the choir, we must develop rhetorical strategies to invite skeptics into the tent.

Now let us return to my question, which I mentioned earlier. In referring to an immanent intelligence, are John Mack and Trish Pfeiffer implicitly steering clear of transcendent intelligence, understood as an otherworldly God? This God, associated with the ascent tradition in medieval Christianity and in many other world religions, is frequently said to encourage contemptus mundi, abhorrence of the flesh and blood of which we are (at least in part) composed. Surely such contempt is misguided, although

equally misguided is overly strong attachment to material phenomena in the ordinary, gross, or manifest plane. If medieval ascenders denied the immanent realm of matter, modern descenders--including materialists--deny realms that cannot be accounted for in terms of contemporary notions about matter/energy. Remarkable scientific developments have challenged some basic aspects of mechanistic materials, but quantum theory, chaos theory, systems theory, and cellular automata investigate phenomena from the third person perspective. Subjectivity, interiority, or consciousness, however, must be approached via introspective and dialogical modes of inquiry. Otherwise, one will not be able to provide an adequate, that is, truly integrative, account of your experience in reading this sentence.

Perhaps talk of an immanent creative intelligence is an effort to negotiate a path between materialism (naturalism) and transcendentalism (supernaturalism), as David Ray Griffin has attempted to do.<sup>7</sup> A major challenge involves defining what is meant by an ultimate creative principle. If the ultimate were equated tout court with an immanent intelligence, I would demur. Many spiritual traditions maintain that non-dual Spirit transcends all distinctions, including space and time, subject and object. Such nonduality cannot be an object for consciousness, nor can it be described in language, so references to it are typically indirect and inferential. Even though many mystics, including Plotinus, maintain that Spirit manifests itself in graded stages—moving from non-dual Spirit to nous, psyche, mind, life, and matter-- , many of the same mystics claim that every phenomenon manifests Spirit as completely as possible within the limitations of that phenomenon. Spirit, then, is not merely beyond observable matter/energy, but is also ingredient in matter/energy itself. Hence, I prefer to speak of the ultimate creative principle--Spirit, Godhead--in terms of panentheism, according to which Spirit both transcends and is immanent in all phenomena.

Of course, my reference to the transcendent would certainly raise eyebrows among many contemporary scientists and philosophers, whose materialistic and post-Kantian presuppositions make them skeptical of the validity of claims made about what allegedly transcends experience. How to conceive of an intelligence--even as immanent nous, or as eros that lures matter-energy toward generating ever more complex modes of being that lies beyond observable matter/energy? Even if a modern skeptic were to concede that non-dual Spirit may be the best inference based on the ostensibly “highest” modes of consciousness described in mystical literature, such a skeptic would question whether such conscious modes are possible in the first place. To avoid dogmatic assertions about domains discounted or ignored altogether by materialism, re-enchanters must do more than describe experiential states that ostensibly reveal ontological domains unaccountable for in terms of materialism’s constricted metaphysics. In addition, re-enchanters must describe the practices required to generate such states. Were scientists to follow the long-standing practices developed by spiritual adepts, scientists would presumably undergo “mystical” experiences. Such experiences, which take place through the eye of contemplation, confirm that there are realms that transcend the spatio-temporal, material domain.

In The Marriage of Sense and Soul, Wilber argues that to reconcile science and religion, religion must give up its attachment to non-verifiable beliefs, and science must surrender its attachment to materialism, including the notion that truth can result only from using the eye of flesh and eye of scientific/rational mind to investigate phenomena, ignoring in the process the eye of contemplation or spirit.<sup>8</sup> Before discussing these different ways of seeing and knowing, let me point out that Wilber’s effort to reconcile science and religion occurs within the context of his larger effort to re-enchant the world

in the most responsible and integrative manner. According to what he calls the Great Nest of Being, each wave or level of reality both transcends and includes prior waves or levels, as the molecule transcends and includes the atom, and as the organism transcends and includes the molecule. Most recently, Wilber argues that the patterns or modalities of the more advanced experiential waves--psychic, subtle, causal, and non-dual--are still in the process of being developed. Calling on Charles Saunders Peirce, Wilber envisions natural laws as long-standing cosmic habits.<sup>9</sup> Some habits, for example, ancient ones in the material domain, are strongly fixed, whereas others, for example, some of those in the socio-cultural domain, are less fixed. Consider the case of the structure of atoms.

Arguably, there was no pre-ordained "law of nature" governing how atoms were to be structured. Instead, atoms constitute an emergent phenomenon that unfolded in a certain way as a result of prevailing conditions that scientists are still trying to understand. Once unimaginably many atoms started structuring themselves in the way they happened to, constant repetition solidified that structure into a fixed cosmic habit. Other emergent phenomena, ranging from molecules to organisms, have established relatively fixed habits of their own.

Wilber also draws upon Rupert Sheldrake's work, according to which repeated occurrences or practices generate morphogenetic fields, which are like habits in the social and personal domains.<sup>10</sup> For instance, warlord societies are similar the world over, because countless repetitions of war lording have developed well-formed morphogenetic fields from which significant deviation is unlikely in practice. Modern liberal society's morphogenetic field has a number of relatively fixed forms, channels, or practices, but still remains open for some innovation because modernity is a recent development in human history. Postmodern societies inherit all the patterns that came before, but are in such an

early stage of development that no specifically postmodern patterns or habits have yet been established as habits.

Likewise, individual moral development occurs in accordance with certain well-established habits or patterns, which Lawrence Kohlberg summarized as pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Similarly, human consciousness develops predictably in terms of a sequence of waves or stages, including infantile, emotional/magical, symbolic, conceptual, formal-operational, and beyond. Few people have explored in a sustained manner the post-rational waves, including the integrative, psychic, subtle, and causal. Hence, the contours of these waves are still under formation. Despite the confidence with which Plotinus, for example, spoke about higher levels of consciousness, they must be elaborated and defined by future generations of humans (and whatever other beings are engaged in such exploration). The development of consciousness remains an adventure, with risks and rewards.

In speaking of the Great Nest, Wilber wants to emphasize that as a new wave or pattern emerges--in material, social, cultural, or personal domains--it includes the achievements of the previous stage, so that the cosmos is constituted as a graded and inclusive hierarchy, which (drawing on Smuts and Koestler) Wilber calls holarchy. Wilber maintains that the whole cosmos may be understood in terms of (at least) four basic domains, which he calls quadrants. In the two right hand quadrants are found individual (upper right) and social/collective (lower right) phenomena that can be examined externally, by the natural and social sciences. In the two left hand quadrants are found individual (upper left) and cultural/collective (lower left) phenomena that can be understood only by entering into a dialogue with individuals about their own experiences or with members of a culture about their beliefs, attitudes, and concepts. Modern

materialism cannot explain, so tends to discount or explain away phenomena in the left hand quadrants, which are characterized by an interior realm that cannot be studied from natural science's third-person point of view. Materialists not only discount the left hand quadrants, but also deny that there are waves of consciousness that transcend and include linear rationality.

Consequences of this constricted view of reality, according to various critics, include personal despair, cultural nihilism, social anomie, and ecological crisis. These consequences are serious, although their extent is subject to debate. A constructive postmodernism would seek to ameliorate them. While criticizing the dark side of modernity, however, we ought also to emphasize its many important contributions-- scientific, technological, political, economic, social, and personal. One of modernity's most defining efforts was to differentiate among domains that fold in upon one another in premodern cultures: science, religion/morality/politics, and art/subjectivity. In premodern culture, establishing and defending truth are not independent enterprises, but instead are inextricably related to political and religious authority, as Galileo discovered in the sixteenth century. Moreover, individuals are not free to develop their own aesthetic taste and subjective preferences, but instead must conform to communal practices that are in turn consistent with prevailing cultural, religious, and political norms. Modernity's nobility lies in the fact that it differentiates among science, morality/politics, and art/subjectivity, which Wilber labels "the Big Three" of I, We, and It, distinctions that are found in virtually every natural language. The I domain is the upper left hand quadrant, the We is the lower left, and the It includes both the upper and lower right hand quadrants.<sup>11</sup>

Having paved the way for material prosperity, political democracy, and individual liberty, however, modernity soon took a wrong turn when natural and social scientists--

students of only one of the Big Three, the “It” domain--asserted that rational-empirical inquiry alone generated valid truth claims. Like Jürgen Habermas, Wilber concludes that modern science became scientism, which colonized the world of everyday life and transformed political decisions into technocratic ones. Truth claims in the left-hand quadrants, which moderns initially regarded as having their own validity and norms, were soon dismissed by scientists as merely subjective utterances or emotive expressions that lacked validity when compared with the truths arrived at by empirical science. In the intersubjective quadrant of We (or better: You and We, to take into account the dialogical or intersubjective dimensions of this domain), people arrive at moral and political truth claims by dialogue and other modes of intersubjectivity, including collaborative inquiry, justice, hermeneutics, and so on. In the personal domain, of I, truth claims are evaluated in terms of authenticity, integrity, and sincerity. In contrast, empirical science is monological, because it investigates material phenomena strictly from an external or third person viewpoint. Natural and social science often discount or fail to acknowledge the reality of interior phenomena, including personal subjectivity and cultural norms, because study of such phenomena requires both introspective (phenomenological) and dialogical (hermeneutic) processes, in which people discuss with one another (and often try to arrive at some consensus about) their understanding, for example, of value.

The first evolutionary step toward an authentically postmodern wave of consciousness, which Wilber calls variously translogical, cenaturic, or vision-logical, arises when a person recognizes that his or her preferred way of knowing--whether monological, dialogical, or personal, corresponding to the domains of It, We, and I--has no claim to validity beyond its own particular subject matter.<sup>12</sup> In connection with the distinction among different subject matters or domains, let us now return to our discussion

of Wilber's distinction among (at least) three kinds of "eyes," each of which perceives different kinds of phenomena: eye of flesh, eye of mind or reason, and eye of spirit or contemplation. Eye of flesh refers to the organic eye that perceives material phenomena when light is present; eye of mind refers to the mental eye that perceives (and generates) mental phenomena such as concepts, ideas, mathematical formulae, and scientific principles and hypotheses; eye of contemplation, finally, eye of spirit perceives phenomena pertaining to Spirit or Source. In terms of modes of knowing, eye of flesh corresponds to empiricism; eye of mind corresponds to rationalism; and eye of spirit corresponds to mysticism. Wilber points out that modern science and religion could co-exist peacefully if modernity accepted all three modes of knowing as legitimate. In this case,

Empirical science would pronounce on the facts delivered by the eye of flesh, and religion would pronounce on the facts delivered by the eye of spirit (or the eye of contemplation). But mainstream modernity has soundly and thoroughly denied reality to the eye of spirit. Modernity recognizes only the eye of reason [rationalism] yoked to the eye of flesh [empiricism]--in Whitehead's phrase, the dominant worldview of modernity is scientific materialism, and whether that science be the holistic science of systems theory or the subatomic physics of quantum events, science is the eye of reason linked to evidence offered by the empirical senses. In no case is the eye of contemplation or the eye of Spirit required... or even allowed.<sup>13</sup>

Most scientists already recognize interior phenomena, namely, their own thought processes, analyses, cogitation, none of which can be studied with the eye of flesh.

Although conceding that there is an eye of mind or an eye of rationality that differs from

eye of flesh, most scientists are unwilling to concede that there is at least one more mode of knowing, the eye of contemplation or spirit. Wilber argues that empirical evidence gained through practices associated with the eye of contemplation--practices developed in major mystical traditions--should be accorded the same standing as empirical evidence associated with the eye of flesh and interpreted with eye of mind. Natural science, which combines eye of sight and eye of mind, calls on three related practices to produce reliable, valid knowledge: 1) an instrumental injunction to follow certain procedures; 2) direct apprehension or experience of the results of following the injunction; 3) communal confirmation or rejection of truth claims associated with the results. Spiritual disciplines involve the same three practices, although designed for the eye of contemplation: 1) an instrumental injunction (meditate according to these methods for ten years); 2) direct apprehension of the results of following the injunction (experience of Godhead, non-dual awareness, archetypal phenomena); 3) communal confirmation or rejection of truth claims associated with the result (experienced practitioners validate truth claims).<sup>14</sup>

Wilber insists that real science and real religion are allied in opposing dogma and bogus claims.<sup>15</sup> If someone wants to become an experimental physicist, he or she must undertake arduous, long-term practical and theoretical training. Without such training, a person is simply not in a position to contest, much less to understand, the truth claims made in connection with observing the results of following experimental injunctions. Analogously, if someone wants to become a spiritual adept, he or she must undertake arduous, long-term practical and theoretical training. Without appropriate training, a person is simply not in a position to contest, much less to understand, the truth claims made in connection with observing the results of following such injunctions. Consider that

in the world of mathematics, some proofs are so complex that very few people can judge whether they are valid. The activity of such judgment involves undertaking certain internal experiences that seek to replicate other internal experiences, namely, those of the person who came up with the proof. Non-experts, that is, most people, are in no position at all to evaluate the proofs validity, but instead must rely entirely on the trustworthiness and competence of those few who are judged by other experts to be capable of evaluating the proof in question. Similarly, someone who has not spent many years following spiritual injunctions is in no position to evaluate the validity of truth claims made by someone who has followed those injunctions.

Scientists are inclined to rely on the trustworthiness of their colleagues in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology, because scientists take for granted that there are numerical, physical, chemical, and biological dimensions of reality. Scientists are not inclined to rely on the trustworthiness of mystics, spiritual adepts, and advanced meditators, however, because scientists assume a priori that there are no extra-material dimensions of reality. This dogmatic assumption, however, is inconsistent with the experientially based, inquisitive character of science. Moreover, as Wilber notes, scientists constantly rely upon non-material phenomena in order to do science and mathematics:

[S]cience approaches the empirical world with a massive empirical apparatus containing everything from tensor calculus to imaginary numbers to extensive intersubjective linguistic signs to differential equations--virtually all of which are nonempirical structures found only in interior spaces--and then astonishingly claims that it is simply “reporting” what it “finds” out there in the “given” world --when, in fact, all that is given is colored patches.<sup>16</sup>

For science and spirituality to be reconciled, then, scientists must be willing not

only to engage in some of the practices needed to generate empirical confirmation of spiritual truth claims, but also to expand their cosmology beyond the limits imposed by reductionistic materialism. Scientists in search of God must learn not to look up, but instead to look within, into the interior dimensions that modern science is not equipped to study either with the eye of flesh or the eye of mind.<sup>17</sup> In short, scientists need to be willing to develop a kind of transcendental naturalism.<sup>18</sup> Wilber maintains that for spiritually oriented people to make possible integration between religion and science, only “modest compromises” are necessary:

Religions the world over will have to bracket their mythic beliefs, beliefs such as Moses parting the Red Sea or Lao Tzu being nine hundred years old at birth....

Instead, each religion needs to focus on those aspects of its tradition that were disclosed by its own deep science of the interiors, whether the contemplative prayer of St. Teresa of Avila, the yoga of Patanjali, the vision quest of tundra shamanism.<sup>19</sup>

For scientists to take religious claims seriously, those claims must in principle be capable of verification. For religious people to take scientists seriously, scientists must be willing either to accept the empirical findings of spiritual adepts or else to engage themselves in spiritual practices, the results of which would provide the experiential basis needed for scientists to move beyond a strictly materialist cosmology. By aligning themselves with a verifiable process of discovering the truth, and by bracketing unverifiable and thus dogmatic truth claims, religious people would not only make their views more appealing to scientists, but would also encourage the integration of world religions, which are often antagonistic to one another by adhering to mythic beliefs for

which no verification is possible. By emphasizing the empirically verifiable character of spiritual truth claims, including the assertion that there are domains of reality to which neither eye of flesh nor eye of mind can gain access, transcendental naturalists can demonstrate a way to re-enchant the world and thus restore a profound dimension of significance to it, without resorting to what Plato, in his Republic, called a noble lie. Political and/or religious leaders invent such holy fictions to provide ordinary people with orienting myths that justify their lives and that legitimate prevailing social and political arrangements.

Problems, however, stand in the way of realizing Wilber's program for re-enchanting the world. For one thing, spiritual practices often remain bound up with mythical beliefs that cannot easily be teased apart from those practices. Moreover, as already noted, the higher waves of consciousness-- integrative, psychic, subtle, and causal--remain relatively unformed, because so few people have inhabited them in a sustained way. Many individuals have experienced temporary states of consciousness--including psychic, subtle, and even causal--that transcend the limits of personal subjectivity, but such states, are typically temporary. The individual soon finds himself or herself back in everyday subjectivity. Although perhaps intensely convinced about the reality and importance of those non-ordinary states, the individual is unable reliably to generate and to sustain the mode of interiority revealed by the non-ordinary states. The individual has had a post-personal state of consciousness, but has not yet consolidated an enduring post-personal wave or stage of consciousness. An analogous situation obtains for an early adolescent, who can temporarily experience a state of individuated (and responsible) subjectivity, but who readily falls back into the pre-individuated stage of subjectivity. Only with much effort, and after many mistakes, does the adolescent gradually manage to

develop a sustained mode of responsible individuation. Even allegedly full-grown adults, of course, slip back into pre-personal consciousness, which is evidenced by behavior inconsistent with what is conventionally understood as personal responsibility. Indeed, when life conditions change--as in times of war or economic collapse--almost anyone may regress to a mode of consciousness that corresponds to the new conditions.

Now, let us return to John Mack and Trish Pfeiffer's question about how the world and our lives would be transformed if there were an immanent intelligence or ultimate creative principle. The short answer is: It all depends on the personal, social, and cultural horizons of the person who believes that there is such an intelligence. If the person's belief is based on assertions made by others, such as parents, religious teachers, or those claiming first-hand experience, the truth status of the belief is surely in need of careful examination. Even if a person had first-person experience, an altered state of consciousness testifying to the reality of such intelligence, however, such experience is never self-interpreting. "God revealed Himself to me!" a person might exclaim after a powerful experience, but he or she must interpret that experience within the disclosive horizon consistent with his or her level of personal and spiritual development, and that is defined--at least in part--by a host of social and cultural factors. Hence, the "same" experience would be interpreted quite differently by a fundamentalist Muslim whose disclosive horizon is defined by premodern religious and social categories, than it would be interpreted by an early 20th century rationalist operating within the disclosive horizon of secular modernity. Remarkable first-hand experiences, including encounters with sacred powers, out of body experience, near death experiences, alien abductions, shamanic voyages, psychotropic drug trips, and so on, may dramatically challenge the adequacy of one's disclosive horizon, as the history of religion makes clear. Although such

experiences may encourage one person to explore a more integrated or inclusive level of consciousness and a correspondingly advanced mode of spirituality, the same experience might simply reinforce another person's belief in values, institutions, and practices that most authors and readers of this anthology would find problematic at best.

Those of us writing for and reading the essays collected herein have typically developed post-conventional spiritual and moral views. Convinced of the limitations of materialism and perhaps inspired by first-hand experience of sacred, post-personal modes of consciousness, we might conclude that widespread belief in a divine intelligence would lead people to behave more compassionately and less selfishly. The universe, so we may assert, is a meaningful whole within which life--including suffering and loss--can be justified, as it cannot by materialism.<sup>20</sup> For us, belief in a creative principle not only frees us from the corrosive skepticism and nihilism promoted by reductionistic materialism, but may also provide experientially grounded metaphysical comfort in the face of personal mortality. For us, however, belief in such a divine intelligence occurs within the context and presupposes the validity of universalistic modern discourse and inclusionary postmodern discourses.

The great majority of the world's people, however, already believe, as they have for many centuries, that the universe is governed by divine intelligence. Many of these people live in premodern societies, or societies that are making the transition to modernity. The practical outcomes of belief in a sacred intelligence have varied dramatically in premodern societies. During the European Middle Ages, believed in a divine intelligence that transcended the world, but that often intervened in it as well. In honor of that divine intelligence, Europeans constructed the extraordinary cathedrals whose soaring vaults and stained-glass windows still inspire awe. Even as some Christians erected those sacred

building, however, others were slaying infidels in the Holy Land and plundering cities along the way, all in the name of the divine Creator. Medieval Benedictines may have developed admirable social and personal practices influenced by belief in God, but much of the rest of society was characterized by social stratification, oppression, ignorance, and poverty that would shock any postmodern person. For many premoderns, then, belief in divine intelligence occurs within the tribalistic, xenophobic, oppressive, and exclusionary discourses. I merely state the obvious, then, when I say that belief in God can lead to violence, as in the case of contemporary Islamic terrorists. From the perspective of such true (premodern) believers, the authors of this anthology are infidels whose relativistic postmodern beliefs must be crushed, to prevent them from seducing believers into questioning Holy Scripture.

Many people have suffered from the disenchantment accompanying the death of the mythic Biblical God. The young Nietzsche, as evidenced in the quotation at the start of this essay, believed that a culture declines if it lacks an inspiring mythic horizon, that is, if it fails to understand itself in terms of an eternal realm lying beyond spatio-temporal phenomena. The thirst for the spiritual sustenance promised by a higher reality, however, has sometimes been slaked with backward-looking fundamentalisms and problematic romanticisms. Indeed, critique of modernity offered in Nietzsche's book, The Birth of Tragedy, combined with its yearning for mythic belief comparable to the one at work in ancient Greece, was music to the ears of National Socialists a few decades later. Most moderns and postmoderns would be unwilling to suspend their ironic rationality to take seriously a new "myth." As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argued in Dialectic of Enlightenment, modernity involves constant self-criticism that ends up questioning even the values that such criticism was originally intended to promote.<sup>21</sup> Modern consciousness

is characteristically ironic about the validity of any claim for which reliable empirical evidence cannot be adduced. Citing Gustavo Benavides, Mark C. Taylor notes that ironic moderns distance themselves from beliefs and situations that are regarded as naive, including modern narratives of “development.” Taylor goes on to state:

Modernity, according to this analysis, defines itself in and through the constitution of and contrast with its own other. Throughout the course of the so-called modern era, this other has assumed a variety of guises ranging from the “primitive” and “aboriginal” to the “ancient” and “traditional.” The constitutive contrast between the modern on the one hand and, on the other, the primitive, aboriginal, ancient or traditional implies a related set of oppositions, which includes, *inter alia*, emotion/reason, intuition/thought, superstition/science, undifferentiation/individuation, and simplicity/complexity. For many [moderns], these contrasts are not equivalent but are ordered in such a way that the latter term is privileged over the former. When understood diachronically, this hierarchical structure leads to an interpretation of history in which the movement from primitivism to modernism involves a progression from emotion to reason, undifferentiation to individuation, simplicity to complexity, and superstition to science. Following the maxim according to which ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, proponents of this evolutionary vision of history tend to associate religion with infantile and primitive behavior, which either is or should be overcome by mature individuals who live in the modern world.<sup>22</sup>

Postmodernists like Taylor are suspicious of grand progressive narratives and binary dualisms that invidiously contrast modern with premodern and/or non-Western cultures. I appreciate the force of such suspicion, having once engaged in it myself. Years

ago, I supported of Martin Heidegger's totalizing critique of modernity. According to his view, Western history represents not progress, but a decline that began after the golden age of ancient Greece. During the 1960s and 1970s, when Heidegger's writings began to be translated into English, widespread anti-industrial and anti-modernist attitudes had created a receptive American audience for his views, as well as for those of French theorists influenced by Nietzsche as well as by Heidegger. Taylor's comments show the influence of such deconstructive postmodernism.

In the 1980s, after learning that Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism was more enduring than previously supposed, I began to re-evaluate his critique of modernity and the postmodern theory associated with it. In Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity, I showed that Heidegger shared far right-wing political views, including the now infamous notion that National Socialism represented a "third way" between capitalism and communism, the two dark expressions of a flawed modernity.<sup>23</sup> Of course, Heidegger's political views were sober when compared with the astonishing ideas promoted by leading Nazis, who remythologized the world in terms of a European master race, the realization of which demanded elimination of inferior races standing in its way. This dreadful neo-religious political movement exploded in one of the most educated and industrially advanced countries in the world. Many people were attracted to it then, and remain attracted to it now, for reasons that cannot be explained adequately in terms of class resentment or social conflict. Promising to free people from the burden of moral responsibility, which inevitably accompanies individuation, the Nazis called on their followers to submit and even sacrifice themselves to higher natural laws. Recent German history demonstrates that the solution to modernity's shortcomings, including its denigration of valid aspects of premodern culture, is not a regression to premodern social

formations, as in the case of National Socialism, but instead an effort to develop a form of postmodernism that integrates what is valid about modernity while moving beyond its limitations.

Some might object that National Socialism was hardly premodern, insofar as it made use of cutting-edge military technology to conquer much of Europe. Historian Jeffrey Herf, however, has answered this objection. German militarism and the subsequent death camps resulted not from the working out of the underlying premises of modernity, so Herf argues, but rather from its renunciation. He uses the term “reactionary modernism” to describe the peculiar Nazi social formation, which combined to great effect social authoritarianism, mythic celebration of Aryan superiority, and modern industry and technology.<sup>24</sup> In important respects, the Soviet Union may also be interpreted as a version of reactionary modernism, even though it resulted from a modern political revolution. Karl Marx himself recognized the dangers of instituting a communist revolution in an agrarian, premodern society such as Russia. Unfortunately, toward the end of his life, he tried to justify such a move. Despite asserting in the 1920s that communism would bring human freedom and self-realization, the USSR quickly reverted to a premodern social system not far removed from czarism, complete with secret police, but with vastly expanded murderous power courtesy of modern technology. In regard to treating nature as a material resource, the USSR surpassed the liberal West. Indeed, Eastern Bloc countries, led (forcibly) by the Soviet Union, caused some of the greatest anthropogenic ecological calamities in world history, including draining the vast Aral Sea to irrigate cotton crops.

Dissatisfied moderns often romanticize what life might have been like in premodern societies. Whereas Enlightenment lumières envisioned that modern science and democratic politics would usher in a new age of freedom, critics beginning with the

Romantics compared modern life unfavorably with premodern life, and called for a post-Enlightenment new age.<sup>25</sup> Tales of the “noble savages” in the New World inspired elite Europeans, who regarded their own society as effete and decadent. Surely premodern tribal societies made important contributions to world history, and surely people from those societies could have taught us important things that we have forgotten, but those same people would also have learned a great deal from moderns and postmoderns, including changing the status of women. Arguably, the emancipation of women--one of modernity’s most important achievements --became a genuine possibility only with the advent of industrialism, when machinery increasingly enabled women to take their place in the realm of public material production, despite opposition from many women and men alike. Whatever advantages women might have enjoyed in premodern societies, and presumably there were some, it is difficult to imagine that very many educated modern and postmodern women would trade places with women in previous ages. Even the otherwise admirable effort to recover an authentic feminine spiritual sensibility, after many centuries in which patriarchal religions repressed it, lacks knowledge of what such spirituality might have involved. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the acts of “recovery” constitute a mode of feminine spirituality that would have been unattainable by the great majority of women from premodern societies. In other words, contemporary Western women experience themselves, the world, and the sacred in terms of individuated modes of consciousness simply unavailable to the vast majority of premodern people.

Despite postmodern skepticism about progressive narratives, I believe that there is substantial empirical and cross-cultural evidence supporting the notion that individuals and cultures do undergo development. In many respects, modern societies are better than premodern societies, even though modernity has serious problems owing in part to having

dissociated--rather than having differentiated--its consciousness, culture, society, and science from premodern versions of consciousness, culture, society, and science. Both personal and cultural development unfolds least problematically when the arising wave of development integrates and honors valuable elements of the preceding wave. Both personal and cultural development can become distorted and even pathological if significant aspects of prior waves are repressed, denied, or dissociated. Just as an individual can repress or deny some dissociated aspect of him or her, such as sexual desire, so entire cultures can oppress and even attempt to exterminate other more “primitive” cultures, whose very existence poses a threat to the stability of the emergent culture. In every society, modernity has unfolded quite unevenly, such that idealistic commitments to “universal rights” are compromised by residual racism and ethnocentrism, which have justified terrible practices under the banner of progress.

Modern revolutions have often reacted against the allegedly dehumanizing social structures of modernity, such as capitalist social relations. Historians often interpret such revolutions as secularized versions of messianic religions, which yearn to replace sinful institutions and practices with divinely ordained ones. Bernard Yack offers an alternative account of what he calls the yearning for total revolution.<sup>26</sup> Modern revolutions presuppose that some social structure stands in the way of human freedom and self-realization, which will ensue if only the offending structure is eradicated.

And the failure of social institutions to recognize and embody our humanity is seen as the obstacle to a human life only when all social phenomena are viewed as part of an interdependent whole. If the same spirit of social interaction informs all institutions and individual actions, there will be no “human” sphere of society into which we can escape to develop our humanity. Given this perspective on the

world, we must choose between accepting the inevitability of dehumanization or searching for a means to hasten the end of our epoch. Those who choose the latter express the desire to overcome the spirit of modern society, and it is out of this desire that the longing for total revolution develops.<sup>27</sup>

Yack goes on to remark: “When one views the world from this perspective, dissatisfaction with the world can easily reach a level of intensity similar to that reached by the religious fanatic who rejects the world and longs for world redemption.”<sup>28</sup>

Two comments are in order here. First, modern political theory was crucially shaped by ferocious European religious wars during the seventeenth century. Protestants and Catholics slew each other with the enthusiasm inspired by belief that God commanded death for heretics. Modern political defused sectarian warfare by excluding religion from politics. Second, in some contemporary criticism one may detect an analogy with modern revolutionary ideologies. For Marx, because capitalist social relationships formed the social structure that impeded the full self-realization of human potential, the immediate aim of communist revolutionaries should be elimination of those social relations. For some contemporary re-enchanters, social institutions grounded in modern materialism stand in the way of a richer, fuller and more satisfying life for humankind. If we could eliminate or move beyond materialism, so the argument goes, the world would be dramatically transformed for the better. This argument fails for several reasons, among which is the fact that a move to eliminate materialism would be welcome by religious fundamentalists, for whom materialistic modernity--including the freedom of inquiry presupposed both by modern science and by contributors to this anthology--represents a threat to religious orthodoxy.

Concern about the psychologically regressive and socially reactionary potential of

re-enchantment helps to explain why many moderns regard it with either contempt or outright hostility.<sup>29</sup> Fears that re-enchantment are forms of an irrational anti-modernism can be partially assuaged re-enchanting wisely, not only by integrating modernity's worthy achievements, but also by affirming that in important respects re-enchantment presupposes those achievements. Here, we make call to mind Hegel, who demythologized Christianity by explaining it not as a matter of God becoming human, but instead of the human becoming God, in the sense of achieving divine consciousness. Offering a modern way of understanding the sacred aspect of nature and humankind, Hegel maintains that divine self-actualization occurs spatially in nature and historically in the process of individual and institutional evolution. Divine self-enactment is often hidden from the awareness of moderns who suppose that their materialism and atheism have nothing to do with the actualization of spirit. Although having contributed to the death of the mythic God, materialism and rationalism also included what may be regarded as a spiritual impulse, which not only celebrated and sought to protect the rights of individual persons, but also envisioned--however problematically--an earthly New Jerusalem made possible by humans using modern science and technology. It is possible an atheist committed to universal human rights and modern scientific methodology is more advanced "spiritually" than a premodern believer in a mythic God. Paradoxically, as I indicated earlier, a postmodern, post-materialist divinity can occur only after modernity seriously challenged or even eliminated belief in the premodern and mythic conception of God. God died, was buried, and is now being resurrected, but Spirit will manifest itself in a different manner than before, in order to withstand the scrutiny to which modern and postmodern consciousness will inevitably subject it.

What, then, would a healthy and successful re-enchanted and post-materialist

society look like? Presumably, there would be alternative forms of spiritual practice, greater openness to different dimensions of reality, scientific research into psychic and subtle modes of embodiment, fewer wars (because most countries would be truly democratic), greater availability of material goods, health care, and educational opportunities, far less sexism and racism, increased sensitivity to the needs of non-human forms of life, celebration of people from different cultures, and simultaneously careful but deliberate efforts to make available to such people more integrative modes of understanding. In many respects, however, the re-enchanted world would resemble contemporary modernity. Societies would retain commitments to the inviolability of individual personhood, to freedom of inquiry, and to other human rights. Indeed, as Ken Wilber has argued, the most important revolution--one that prepares the way for the shift to postmodern and green waves of consciousness--would be planetary consolidation of the noble modern social, political, and cultural ideals and institutions.

It is doubtful, however, that the majority of people in any society will have post-conventional morality, theology, and consciousness. Even today, most Europeans and North Americans are still working to consolidate modern consciousness. Perhaps twenty percent of Europeans and North Americans may be considered postmoderns or "green." Such people would be somewhat open to the ideas discussed in this anthology. Because everyone must pass through the various waves of consciousness, there will always be many people who are tribal, mythic, nationalistic, and so on. People are never born green, multicultural, or postconventional. Developing the institutions and social practices consistent with highly developed modes of awareness is perhaps even more challenging than the effort required by individuals in attaining those modes! Here, one need merely to reflect upon what was required in European history to replace aristocratic politics with

democratic politics, that is, to put in place institutions, practices, and values consistent with the idea of individual liberty. In the non-Western world, much smaller percentages of populations have attained green or postconventional modes of awareness. One reason is that their nations lack the social, political, and economic institutions necessary to encourage modern forms of consciousness, much less postmodern and postconventional ones. While modern societies seek to evolve into postmodern ones, the rest of the world needs to become modern. Such an extraordinary development would eliminate the premodern beliefs that fuel hatred and resentment of the West in various parts of the world, including Arab Islam, but would also generate problems with which earlier generations in the Western world were all too familiar. Ideally, future instances of modernization would integrate and respect the valid cultural practices and social structures of so-called developing countries. Modernization is usually traumatic, as Marx indicated with his famous phrase, "All that is solid melts into air."<sup>30</sup> One opportunity for those of us engaged in wise re-enchancement is to identify and to encourage forms of modernization that avoid the mistakes made in the West, including the excessive materialism and various kinds of dissociation from which the West is attempting to recover. Another opportunity for us is to replace totalizing critiques of modernity with criticisms tempered with acknowledgement that modernity has much to offer, despite the perhaps inevitable experience of cultural and social dislocation. The way to a re-enchanted world inevitably lies through a world that has been dis-enchanted, that is, modernized. One can at least hope, however, that subsequent instances of modernization can learn from the missteps of the West.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William James, Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, Gifford Lectures 1901-1902 (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902).

<sup>2</sup> Meticulous research in this area has been carried out by Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR), which engages in scientific study of consciousness-related physical phenomena. Psychic researches must develop experimental protocols that are much more rigorous than usual, because the experiments in question question basic presuppositions about the conventional view of reality. See PEAR's very helpful website, located at <http://www.princeton.edu/~pear/>

<sup>3</sup> Aldous Huxley, The Doors of Perception (New York: Harper & Row, 1990 [1956]).

<sup>4</sup> David Chalmers argues against reductionistic materialism and for a version of panpsychism, according to which “consciousness” is an irreducible feature of the universe. Two of his best papers, “Consciousness and its Place in Nature” and “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” are available on his excellent website: <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~chalmers/consc-papers.html>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Murphy, The Future of the Body (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1992), 193.

<sup>6</sup> On “flatland,” see Ken Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (Boston: Shambhala, 1995) and A Brief History of Everything (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).

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<sup>7</sup> See for example David Ray Griffin, Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Ken Wilber, The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion (New York: Random House, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> See Charles S. Peirce, The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, ed. Christian Kloesel and Nathan Houser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature (New York: Times Books, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> See Wilber, Sex. Ecology. Spirituality.

<sup>12</sup> See Wilber, Sex. Ecology. Spirituality, and Wilber, The Eye of Spirit (Boston: Shambhala, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Wilber, The Marriage of Sense and Soul, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 150-174.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>20</sup> See Stan Grof's fascinating book, The Cosmic Game (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Continuum, 1988).

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<sup>22</sup> From Mark C. Taylor's introduction to his anthology, Critical Terms for Religious Studies, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology. Politics. Art (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Herf, Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). This is an outstanding book, from which I have learned a great deal.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Yack, The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Discontent from Rousseau to Marx (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 24.

<sup>26</sup> Yack, The Longing for Total Revolution, op cit.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Yack, 26.

<sup>29</sup> For instance, during the mid-1990s, when John Mack courageously explored the alien abduction phenomenon, some of his Harvard Medical Schools colleagues convened a committee that subjected him to an inquiry that threatened to censure him. In refusing to examine some important evidence that Mack presented to it, the committee hardly displayed the openness to inquiry that is supposedly the hallmark of empirically oriented modernity. The abduction experience involves powerful experiential states that deserve examination, whatever the ultimate explanation for their origin may be. In Daimonic Reality (New York: Arkana/Penguin, 1996), Patrick Harpur persuasively interprets such experiences as terrifying instances of the "return of the repressed," when archetypal and psychic phenomena denied by modernity forcibly reintroduce themselves into experience. Such an interpretative strategy, however, is even more threatening to moderns than flesh-

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and-blood aliens piloting physically real spaceships from other solar systems. At least such aliens conform to materialist conceptions of reality! See also Keith Thompson's excellent book, Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination (Addison-Wesley, 1991). For my own views on this topic, see "The 'Alien Abduction' Phenomenon: Forbidden Knowledge of Hidden Events," Philosophy Today 41, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), 235-253; and "Encountering Alien Otherness," in The Concept of the Foreign ed. Rebecca Saunders (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books [an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield], 2002).

<sup>30</sup> For an insightful exploration of this issue, see Marshall Berman, All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> My thanks to Sean Hargens for suggestions that improved this essay. Remaining shortcomings are, of course, my responsibility.