



## Awakening into Evolutionary Activism

*A spirituality that is only private and self-absorbed, one devoid of an authentic political and social consciousness, does little to halt the suicidal juggernaut of history. On the other hand, an activism that is not purified by profound spiritual and psychological self-awareness and rooted in divine truth, wisdom, and compassion will only perpetuate the problem it is trying to solve, however righteous its intentions. When, however, the deepest and most grounded spiritual vision is married to a practical and pragmatic drive to transform all existing political, economic, and social institutions, a holy force—the power of wisdom and love in action—is born.*

—ANDREW HARVEY

I am writing these words in the surreal ambiance of mid-2017 America. Day after day, we hear news about the subversion of the U.S. 2016 election, suppression of checks and balances, unprecedented ethical violations, censorship, planned dismantling of governmental agencies that provide services essential to our—and Earth’s—well-being and even survival, acts of disrespect to America’s long-term democratic allies, exploitations of divisions of race and culture, and countless actions that threaten not

only liberal values but the fundamental conservative values of stability and respect for tradition. More important, we are seeing a great political consciousness-raising—the beginnings of a coming wave of political activism and engagement. There is every reason to expect this will become an enormous historical force. But what is *most* significant, I believe, is that this mobilization will carry far beyond popular resistance to the Trump administration, to the broader predicament that must be addressed. This new activism is an expression of our very health, sanity, and character. It is slower moving, but deep and inexorable. What is most fundamental is wholeness reasserting itself.

When we think of the creative activities that are required to preserve our collective life and future, perhaps no metaphor is more appropriate than one relating to the soil—and to the living processes that literally create soil. There has even been a recognition in some quarters that—at a certain level—“soil is the critical solution to climate change.”<sup>49</sup> Huge amounts of soil are generated from mycelium, which is something like the root system of a fungal or bacterial colony, made up of a mass of branching, threadlike structures. Through photosynthesis, soil, with its plant partners, “takes CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and releases oxygen, driving the carbon down to its roots where it is exchanged for nutrients the plants and trees need, sequestering the carbon underground where it belongs.”<sup>50</sup> Mycelium is able to sense water and nutrient availability and need, and it redistributes those resources, making its area of the forest (which can extend for many miles) more healthy. This healing function in nature helps restore balance and counters the effects of climate change.

In a very similar way, life-generating processes are countering the common life-destroying thoughts, habits, and behaviors endemic in the world today. What is healthy and wholesome and loving and generous in human connections is already present, under the surface. Our innate goodness, like the mycelium, is often relatively hidden and out of sight—though it is present, and it grows always, “going underground” in suppressive cultural environments. But it is what keeps us going, so it never dies completely. Often, it grows massively but silently and invisibly.

And yet when the time is right, the mycelium suddenly sends out shoots and blossoms. Baby mushrooms suddenly glisten in colonies scattered across the forest floor. In the same way—even when hidden—all that is good and healthy in us and between us is already present and real. Although we cannot predict the multitude of ways and times it might fully manifest in our world, we can trust that our life-generating nature will be free to show itself when the time is right, like an overnight mushroom bloom.

Biological metaphors relating to development and growth are appropriate to activism. We are a living process, like the mycelium, like Earth itself. Shelley Sacks (an Oxford Brookes University professor of social sculpture and activist)<sup>51</sup> and others have eloquently invoked this metaphor, pointing to our “social mycelium.”

There is, today, a new culture growing roots that are spreading across the planet. Right now, much communication and innovation is occurring “underground,” not fully visible to the larger culture or popular media. But we know that new shoots are forming, and a forest is in the making. Our mechanical models of reality do not account for this deeper dimension of things, and yet the biological metaphor points to amazing potentials. Like the mycelium, we are not isolated lonely cogs in a machine, but creative participants in a larger natural process, richly capable of self-transformation.

We are invited, and drafted, to participate in this extraordinary process—truly a bifurcation point in the progress of human civilization. Circumstances seem to require impossible, unprecedented levels of creative ingenuity, but we are not required to do all this by ourselves. Our ingenuity is just part of something vast that is pervading everything—the ingenuity of the evolutionary process itself. What is best in us expresses the entelechy of the great, mysterious wholeness that animates and envelops us all.

## INNER AND OUTER WORK ARE INSEPARABLE

We have already described a kind of inner work that brings us into alignment with wholeness. It leads to new behavior, individually and

collectively. Our relationships change. We develop new values, interests, and concerns. We find new ways to make a positive difference. We draw on what has been learned from the activism of the past, but it is an entirely original and contemporary phenomenon.

Our outer behavior can't help but express our consciousness. That is why practice is critical to activism, especially if we are to respond adequately to the evolutionary pressures of our global crisis. Now, as we turn to that outer work, we start with this understanding: Only through our own growth and development, arising from our humble surrender to questions whose answers we do not yet know, can we be catalysts for the evolutionary revolution that is needed. Like the mycelium, our life-enhancing service makes a contribution immediately, but in the future it will yield exponential returns.

In the short term, we won't always know exactly where we are going. We are all charged with manifesting solutions that cannot be prefigured. That means we are obliged to participate in a whole series of cultural experiments that will yield varying degrees of success. The results of this open-ended process will only be knowable after repeated iterations. Although challenges will beget new and unexpected challenges, the process will keep advancing.

This asks for profound growth and practice. *First, it requires awake, free, open, and self-transcending awareness.* This ongoing process must profoundly redefine our identities, worldviews, motivations, and relationships. Ultimately it must allow us to dream a new dream and live out a new story. Thus, our personal practice is one of the key front lines of this new cultural and social revolution.

Second, as soon as—and to whatever degree—this new consciousness appears, *it has to find powerful, effective outer expression in all of the domains of our lives.* Action begets consequences, and we learn from them, refining our consciousness and our behavior, including our initiatives. We cannot wait for perfect solutions, or for our own perfection. Whatever the deficiencies in our skills or understanding, we must start from where we are, immediately. That is how we will learn. “If you create a time lag between the whisper of intelligence and understanding in you

and your action, then you are preventing the cerebral organ from growing into a new dimension,” said the rational spiritual teacher Vimala Thakar.<sup>52</sup> “The voice of understanding, the voice of intelligence has an insecurity about it. How do you know that it is the right thing?” We must act, doing our very best even while knowing that the messy conditional world is not a place where perfect action is possible. “Unless you commit mistakes,” Thakar continues, “how do you learn to discriminate between the false and the true? In learning there is bound to be a little insecurity, a possibility of committing mistakes. Why should one be terribly afraid of committing mistakes?”

The whispers of this new intelligence are tasked to find expression in creative work that betters the world in whatever ways it can, certainly including politics. But it is by no means an activism that is restricted to, or even focused on, political power and influence. There are many “front lines” in the struggle of cultural evolution. As conscious practitioners, we find ourselves leaning out into a wild new frontier where many, many experiments are necessary. This is the context for a new kind of activism.

## THE INTEGRAL HEART IN ACTION

This is a time of intensifying complexification, acceleration, fragmentation, and incoherence. Thus, it is a time of stress and corruption. What is most radical and subversive now are the most timeless virtues—integrity, wholeness, health, coherence. Finding our way to health and to our hearts, finding our way beyond the fragmented common mind that is endlessly broadcast to us—that’s truly revolutionary. It doesn’t seem revolutionary, because we tend to recognize revolution in its familiar costumes—marching in the street in opposition to systemic injustice, organizing, designing a “hostile takeover” of the levers of power. And, indeed, revolution sometimes wears those costumes as well.

But the original meaning of the word “revolution” is “turning”—to revolve is to turn. We turn by awakening from unconscious patterns and enacting *wholeness*—healthy consciousness, behavior, relationships, ecology, and truly integrative initiatives. We will be a positive social and

political force to the degree that we are able to enact a new level of maturity guided by our highest intelligence. Since that is an inherent drive, it is already happening in myriad ways. We do well to observe this and to trust that the process is natural and unstoppable. And yet this is only so because countless individuals are choosing it. So this great matter really does depend on *us*.

Our challenges call us to a *politics of human maturity*. This is the revolutionary “turning” in which wholeness reasserts its primacy over fragmentation and regression. Our most essential political priority is cultivating, eliciting, and exercising more maturity and wisdom—so it can shape our lives and relationships, and then our public decision making. Another way of stating this is that our whole lives must be guided by *heart intelligence*. Ultimately, human maturity expresses itself as effective, wise, caring action for the benefit of the whole, putting no one and nothing out of our heart. Wholeness, maturity, and love, then, are at the core of effective evolutionary activism (which in our time is also, in a real sense, revolutionary).

To enact love in the domain of politics is profoundly tricky. It is, after all, the very embodiment of “the simplicity on the other side of complexity” that I repeatedly invoke. We have only a few models for it, but it lives in our best instincts. Charles Eisenstein states the problem very well: “As we enter a period of intensifying disorder,” he says, “it is important to introduce a different kind of force to animate the structures that might appear after the old ones crumble. I would call it love if it weren’t for the risk of triggering your New Age bullshit detector, and besides, how does one practically bring love into the world in the realm of politics? So let’s start with empathy. Politically, empathy is akin to solidarity, born of the understanding that we are all in this together.... I see its lineaments in those marginal structures and practices that we call holistic, alternative, regenerative, and restorative. All of them source from empathy, the result of the compassionate inquiry: What is it like to be you?”<sup>53</sup>

This is entirely different from the kind of activism that intensifies polarization, scorning those it opposes. It counters progressive activist tendencies to demonize political enemies—tendencies that inevitably

mobilize resentment. It doesn't sacrifice wholeness for short-term political advantage. Therefore, "love" is really our best word for what is able to defy the dysfunctional gravity of hyper-partisan gridlock.

However, this politics of love includes and cooperates with almost all established forms of activism, even those that may temporarily create or exacerbate divisions. It participates in an integral revolution of the being, in which love and wholeness are magnified—in every moment, in every individual, and in every relationship, organization, and group.

A politics of love arises naturally when there is profound recognition of nonseparation. Adi Da argues for a revolutionary enlightened politics based on the intuition of radical "prior unity."<sup>54</sup> Such a revolution by its nature takes place in each heart-mind through ego-transcending practice (which he calls "the way of the heart"). It doesn't focus on political "issues" but on the self-regulating integrity and authority of "everybody-all-at-once." Such love is not a mere feeling; it is a radical recognition of our actual condition and situation.

After stating that we are "in this together," Eisenstein asked rhetorically, "In *what* together? For starters, we are in the uncertainty together." *Exactly.* If we eschew all idealism, what might be our actual opportunity? Perhaps it is simply to abide intelligently together in the impossible questions of our situation and our opportunities. We can allow ourselves to be deepened and changed by the Genjo Koan, our existential challenge, even as we also learn by acting decisively (since the world is always giving us feedback). How to effectively engage the sociopolitical domain *as love* is a major facet of the great koan. Thus, it has no answer. Instead, it is an art form, an ongoing inquiry, a crucial exploration—one that can only be engaged imperfectly, as a passionate process, inevitably replete with mistakes.

This is utterly incomprehensible to a fragmented intelligence. It takes integral intelligence to recognize politics as an ongoing process of learning that is inseparable from personal growth. This means we must draw upon all three of the primary seats of our intelligence—head, heart, and hara. Much public discourse is at the level of merely mental intelligence, driven by the gut and clothed in sentiment. Acting alone, the mind is

easily fooled, and is incapable of the inquiry described above. But the intelligence of all three centers, integrated at the center—by the intelligence of the heart—is uncommonly smart, wise, and effective.

Every moment is a learning opportunity. We are not only learning as individuals, we are learning collectively. As we learn to bring integral heart intelligence into our relationships, our collective learning will accelerate profoundly. That is another reason the future of community is bubbling with exciting possibilities. Activist sanghas or “communities of practice” will increasingly begin to function as social and spiritual resources for their members, uplifting and integrating their intelligence and care even as they cooperate to magnify their social impact.

Heart intelligence calms us by reminding us that everything (however at risk) is, in a very real sense, totally okay. After all, the Whole *includes* everything. Holistic activism is hugely generous, but it is not only directed selflessly toward greater goals. It is also entirely self-compassionate, friendly to our own needs as members of an alienated society. The heart can recognize that it is entirely appropriate and necessary for us to serve the whole *while* serving ourselves—sharing life, enjoying friendship and community, growing and learning, and enjoying a richer existence because of and through our relationships with one another.

### THREE DOMAINS OF EVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISM

As we have said, the true integral revolution isn't along the left/right spectrum. Rather, it is the revolution of wholeness against fragmentation. A revolution of wholeness is inclusive; it does not leave people, or good ideas, behind. In many ways, the integral revolution is uncharted territory, yet its basic principles are clear.

It is useful to examine the three domains of activism: working *within the system*, *against the system*, and *around the system*. Sometimes these are presented as competing alternatives or options. But evolutionary activists work in all three of these domains—although as individuals, based on our skills and opportunities, we may choose to focus our efforts on just one or two.



### *In-the-System*

Every nation's system is different. I'll comment here on working in the system in the United States, but analogies can be drawn to working within the system in any democracy.

Like most Americans, I've assumed all my life that I lived in a relatively free and open liberal Western democracy, and that I always would. Elections might matter in terms of policies and progress, but the fundamentals were solid. I didn't have to get involved in politics in order to defend the basic foundations of my society's way of life. That assumption suddenly no longer holds. We actually might fall prey to authoritarianism. We could lose our ability to defend the planet in these fraught times, and we could even lose important civil liberties. And the only thing standing in the way is the political engagement of sufficient numbers of citizens. That makes in-the-system activism a moral obligation.

The continued evolution of consciousness and culture is utterly dependent upon civil order, education, and the free exchange of ideas. And those survive only if they are held by a network of civil institutions—all levels of government, including local police and firefighters, and extending to the justice system and regulatory agencies. Equally, we need a free press, a network of influential NGOs, and our financial institutions. We chafe under the bureaucracies of such organizations, but our freedom is contingent upon their presence. Activists are often first inspired during adolescence, so it's no wonder that the spirit of activism is influenced by a youthful idealistic rejection of intransigent institutions. Storming the barricades can seem heroic and romantic. But it is rarely wise. It is often said that when civil order breaks down, "the intellectuals are the first to go."

For that reason, as we will explore in more depth a bit later, many who appreciate that revolutionary whole-system change is necessary are focusing on affecting the structural dynamics that undermine the health of political systems. They are working in the system by getting buy-in from influential political players for *transpartisan* approaches to public policy and political reform. Transpartisanship is distinct from bipartisan-ship, which is oriented toward finding agreement between two factions

(like Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.), and it differs from non-partisanship, which avoids all political affiliation. It advocates for inclusive solutions that transcend and include all polarized political positions and promote collaboration across the spectrum for the benefit of the whole.

Although government and politics do not supply a solution to every problem, they are the arena in which we encounter our fellow citizens, adjudicate disagreements, and exercise collective decision making. They are how we allocate power and influence. After the bank bailouts of 2008–2009, two popular political revolts emerged—the Tea Party on the right and Occupy Wall Street on the left. The Tea Party had far more impact precisely because it worked pragmatically *within the system* rather than standing outside it as the Occupy movement did.

That is why it is an absolute moral and practical necessity for citizens of any imperfect democracy to participate directly in the political process. That means that **voting is a moral obligation**. This is especially true in the United States, where only about half of eligible voters cast their ballots, and elections are often decided on the basis of the different degrees of voter participation among different constituencies. But it is also true in all the world's democracies. The only way to address inequities in the electoral process itself is to participate in it in every way that is available. The most basic is casting your vote.

And much more vigorous involvement in the system is necessary too. But here, it is appropriate to celebrate the absolutely necessary public service of people who are attempting to make our political systems serve the common good. We need public servants willing to take responsibility for our democratic institutions, including getting their hands dirty by engaging in partisan politics on behalf of specific candidates and parties. Among them are many exemplary leaders—sincere, dedicated, and competent. The fact that they are serving at a time when those institutions are breaking down under stress doesn't diminish their contributions. In fact, it only heightens their significance. Being a competent politician is a high-performance athletic art form, often run in a sincere attempt to bring good governance. If the game gets nasty, playing to win won't always be pretty. But the effort to wisely steer the ship of state is a noble

and necessary function, one we all depend upon. Politicians, dirty hands and all, are sometimes very practically attempting to accomplish some of the exact things we're discussing in this book.

Any individual, however, can influence the system in practical ways—by participating in get-out-the-vote drives; getting involved in a party organization; running for office oneself; signing (or creating) petitions; working on local or state or national campaigns; working within a major or minor political party; donating money or volunteering for causes; showing up at meetings to voice one's concerns; and calling and writing one's local congresspeople, senators, and state and local elected officials. One can also have impact by participating in influential civic organizations and institutions, or by blogging, writing op-ed pieces or letters to the editor, or writing or researching an article or book.

An engaged citizen, even one working full-time, can exert significant influence. After the U.S. elections of November 2016, the *Indivisible Guide* ([www.indivisibleguide.com/guide/](http://www.indivisibleguide.com/guide/)) clarified practical step-by-step guidelines and advice on using the very practical tactics successfully used by the Tea Party to shift American politics in a more progressive direction. Elizabeth Warren advocates that citizens “do one thing every day” to effect political change. What might that be? You can call or write your representatives, show up at their office or town hall, write a letter to your local newspaper, phone a few likely voters, donate money, attempt to persuade others by posting something online, or, if you are really busy that day, sign an online petition.

But many modern and postmodern citizens either sigh in frustration or roll their eyes in cynicism at this kind of activity. In fact, political participation in America has been declining for decades. Politics has become a specialized field, dominated by the small subset of “political” people who are attracted to the cause and the battle—which is not the case for most people. To most citizens, direct political engagement seems like an unpleasant, extraneous, burdensome duty—and one they can easily shirk, invisibly, with no consequences. That is why progressive politicians so often exhort their supporters to get more engaged in the political process—and it is also why so few respond. Working in the system

isn't always lots of fun. But it is nonetheless a foundational practice of civic responsibility. It is a very necessary practice, if you have understood and taken to heart the realities we are considering here.

Journalists are a special category of in-the-system activists. They are a culture's very eyesight into the processes by which power blocs contend for influence over their government and resources. It is investigative journalists who, at crucial historical moments, have kept our country free. They are an indispensable central institution of democracy. And some among them are influential storytellers, public intellectuals, commentators, and historians, all of whom participate in the cultural processes by which our best intelligence tries to translate itself into collective choices.

Unfortunately, internet journalism was suddenly overtaken during the 2016 election campaign by a microtargeted swarm of bots (technological simulations of real people) designed to boost fake news that reverse-engineered existing prejudices and predictable neurological responses. It exploited voter credulity and subverted the healthy social role of a free press. That is not journalism. And it does not deserve the constitutional protections granted to journalists. With that enormous exception, however, the great body of journalists are crucial in-the-system activists. They are saying the things that capture our attention, and they are educating us. But the business of legitimate journalism is under threat. Creative journalistic activism has become even more crucial in this cataclysmic climate.

Those of us with modern and postmodern cognition think systemically. To us, the perversions and inefficiencies of our current system loom large. Special interests have "gamed the system," and the outsized influence of money upon politics has subverted the intent of our nation's founders. What we really want are radical changes—things like effective campaign finance reform, the elimination of the electoral college, the abolition of the two-party monopoly, the revocation of corporate personhood, the recognition of the rights of nonhumans, restoration of press standards, exposure of fake news, and more. But all realistic paths to achieving such major and fundamental changes begin with incremental changes that are far less sexy and inspiring. We're nonplussed.

This brings to the surface additional key facets of our critical big questions. We must ponder: How can in-the-system political activism be approached so that larger numbers of people come to enjoy and value and get involved in it? How can the practice of activism be self-sustaining, feeding activists rather than draining us? In the meantime, how can citizens understand and embrace and engage our civic responsibilities (even if they still seem burdensome) and actually *change* our national and international politics? These are questions we will be exploring.

Bringing it back to earth, I suggest that we regard in-the-system political activism as analogous to brushing one's teeth. You can skip it today and tomorrow, but eventually you'll be sorry. It is an unavoidable dimension of holistic hygiene. It is essential to vote, of course, but also to accept responsibility to engage more creatively. What can you do? Everything described above, and more. Americans do well to think of our friends in other countries. They cannot vote or contribute money in American elections. Aren't we connected to them in a brother/sisterhood? Don't we owe it to them to oppose or prevent irresponsible actions by the world's preeminent superpower at a time when the whole planet is in crisis?

### *Against-the-System*

Sustainable systemic change must be embodied in institutions, laws, policies, and procedures. In-the-system activism is therefore the primary means for creating lasting change. But the system as it exists also needs to be changed. It sometimes needs popular pressure that operates *outside* the existing institutions, exerting pressure indirectly.

Demonstrations and protests build such pressure by displaying the size of a constituency that cares passionately about issues the system is not able to address. This has changed the world on occasion. But it can be more smoke than fire, as we learned from the Arab Spring. Many demonstrations have produced little tangible results, and it pays to learn from those experiences.

In recent years we have seen the Occupy Wall Street movement, climate marches, demonstrations in support of the Standing Rock tribe

and opposing the Dakota Access pipeline, and the widespread worldwide women's marches following inauguration day of 2017. These are all expressions of grassroots energy whose effects reverberate. Some have immediate effects. I believe that, after President Trump's first "travel ban" executive order, fewer Muslims were radicalized than would have been the case if Americans had not rushed to our airports to aid those whom the ban had affected. In some cases, demonstrations have been inspiring examples of building spontaneous connections and speaking truth to power. Even when truth "loses," it is at least spoken and heard. In our critical generational challenge, it is crucial that the climate movement have political power. And millions of us have stepped forward, adding our voices to those of Al Gore, Paul Hawken, Bill McKibben, Joanna Macy, Vandana Shiva, and so many others.

Against-the-system activism also gives people who are functioning as a kind of cultural "immune system" an opportunity to coalesce as a subculture, to begin to become a new global tribe. A new political movement seems likely to emerge from the excesses of the Trump presidency. Protest is not always the highest-leverage form of activism, but sometimes it pressures the system to generate transformative results and it always at least exerts a little influence.

Even so, it is not itself a sufficient strategy. One problem with demonstrations and marches is that they may attract individuals with different agendas. It is impractical to vet participants in marches and demonstrations, so they don't all bring the same conscious intention to the event. Violent anarchists have derailed many otherwise peaceful protests. Demonstrations and other public gatherings usually involve people at many stages of growth and maturity and sincerity.

There are also many ways that people put pressure on the system through local actions—sometimes just the waving of placards, or chanting, or arriving at meetings to present grievances against governmental representatives. Activism on local issues can be very effective—opposing the building of a dam or a big box store, or demanding affordable housing. And if one initiative fails, other approaches to the problem (often more savvy and more widely supported) are likely to follow. Activists

have brought attention to local issues like access to healthy food in minority communities, police brutality, racial profiling, and environmental justice issues. Politicians usually act, if at all, only after activists have laid the groundwork and changed perceptions.

Integrity is a core evolutionary value. Corruption is rising as perhaps a globally unifying theme. It is an issue that needs to be addressed “in the system” and “against the system.” It will perhaps be the central political issue internationally in the years to come—not just in the developing world, but now in Western democracies. It is becoming central in the U.S., and visible in response to President Trump’s consistent flouting of multiple ethical norms. Exposing corruption has become a major issue of the opposition party. But nonpartisan initiatives like Represent.Us and its proposal for an Anti-Corruption Act are crucial to truly enduring reform.

Polarization makes it harder to address corruption. Both the collusion of those who benefit from corruption and the uncompromising idealism of those it exploits tend to be a roadblock to effective rational legislation. It is not a partisan issue. Some against-the-system activists (largely immature postmoderns on the left) refuse to work within the system at all. For some individuals, *any* level of corruption—including any form of participation in a corrupt system—is rejected. Thus, to work within the system (even to make it more responsive) is automatically equated with empowering its flaws. They claim that even voting for a flawed candidate over a disastrous one is wrong.

The reality is quite different. Many corporations and governments have been transformed by activists working within the system. *To refuse to work within the system at all is to deny the possibility that individuals and institutions can be transformed.* And yet immature radicals sometimes tend to imagine that only they are “true” activists. A much more capacious view of activism is necessary in this time.

### *Around-the-System*

Integral evolutionary activism has most effectively worked by going *around the system*. If you help educate girls in the Third World, you are not

directly changing political or environmental policies, but you *are* changing their future. If you get involved with a new technology that has the potential to make fossil fuels noncompetitive, you are not doing anything that appears to be within the system or against the system. If you build out a new worldview and educate people, helping them grow into higher states and structures of consciousness, you are not at first addressing politics directly, but over time your work has the potential to impact the system profoundly. You are going *around* the system, but you may well be doing things that could remake our future. You are no less an activist doing this than protesting or visiting your congresswoman.

Around-the-system activities include microfinancing enterprises, many varieties of social entrepreneurship, activities that improve the lives of poor people, creating new healthy currencies, and developing new models to help organizations function more efficiently and humanely—to name but a handful of many possibilities. Paul Hawken famously described the proliferation of more than two million NGOs all over the world as “the largest social movement in all of human history.”<sup>55</sup>

Our planetary crises are calling forth countless spontaneous expressions of social care. This is an organic, leaderless process, moving from the bottom up instead of the top down. To the degree that it is a movement, it is self-organized and leaderless. Hawken saw it as linking three broad movements: social justice initiatives, environmental activism, and indigenous resistance to globalization. But these overtly activist movements are interconnected with a broad network of other social-entrepreneurial and philanthropic initiatives that aim to facilitate sustainability, care for nature, evolve culture, and uplift the human condition. Thus it is even bigger and broader than he described.

A cultural sea change is gathering force; our social ideals are being transformed. What has become even “cooler” than wealth and celebrity is using wealth and celebrity to benefit society. Our idea of ultimate success has evolved from images of the mansions and cigars of gilded-age tycoons to images of Bill and Melinda Gates, Bono, Angelina Jolie, and George Clooney using their wealth and celebrity to help the global poor. A number of years ago my nine-year-old neighbor, Vivienne Harr,



opened a lemonade stand to buy freedom for human slaves, and with the support of her parents and social media, birthed a movement (that included lemonade and software companies) and became famous. She expresses a whole new zeitgeist. This notion that it is cool to be of benefit is transforming our ideals, our definition of success, and our aspirations.

We see these same principles in evidence-based and venture philanthropy. The Gates Foundation is just the largest of a whole new generation of nonprofits that attract talent from the business world and use the power of data and measurement to maximize results. It has been criticized as a high-level enterprise led by members of an elite that is out of touch with the suffering it intends to alleviate; and certainly the new philanthropy has more learning and evolving ahead. But these initiatives are already bringing creativity and rigor to the effort to make a difference. They are improving efficiency, achieving measurable results in numerous areas, aiming at scalability, and uplifting the disenfranchised. It may not yet be changing the fundamental rules of how power operates, but it is already a significant source of important, systemic beneficial impacts.

Countless creative initiatives are pioneering genuinely novel approaches to engineering social change. Many small nonprofits are collaborating with one another and creating diverse new social entrepreneurial projects. “B” (benefit) corporations are proliferating, and professionals are working pro bono to realize social-change goals. Some of them are working together in the service of profoundly creative approaches based on genuinely new thinking—high-leverage systemic and metasystemic interventions in culture and society.

These initiatives are working to create affordable sources of clean water and electricity for people who lack them. They are educating children in the developing world. They are organizing neighborhood commitments to reduce carbon consumption, block by block, in U.S. cities. They are financing and empowering poor people in the Third World to become entrepreneurs. They are supporting sustainable businesses in the developing world that reduce carbon consumption while empowering participants with entrepreneurial skills. They are designing creative educational programs aiming at transforming worldviews and eventually changing

the paradigm out of which human culture makes the choices that shape its future. They are building public-private partnerships aiming to jump-start research, shortening the development cycle of a new generation of truly sustainable new energy sources and technologies.

Meanwhile, organizational change-agents have begun enabling “next stage organizations,” nonprofit and for-profit organizations whose social purpose transforms the very way the organizations function day to day. People are realizing that human organizations are living systems, and that people function optimally when their agency, creativity, and need for meaning are engaged. So they are exploring new principles, structures, practices, and processes. Traditional top-down hierarchies are giving way to employees managing themselves based on peer relationships. These organizations see themselves as having their own purpose and sense of direction, which is constantly evolving.

## THE HOLISTIC SYNERGIES OF EVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISM

What is most exciting about working around the system is that it not only employs but requires higher structures of mind—a holistic systemic way of thinking that notices potential synergies, coherence and incoherence, and potentials for emergence.

Already, change agents have been coordinating and synergizing their efforts more and more effectively. Much cooperation is spontaneous and emergent. Some is brilliantly deliberate and strategic. With sufficient formal agreements, people are able to address multiple causes of social challenges with remarkable results.

Social innovation researchers John Kania and Mark Kramer defined five general principles for optimizing “collective impact.”

1. All participants have a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all the participants ensures shared measurement for alignment and accountability.

3. A plan of action that outlines and coordinates mutually reinforcing activities for each participant.
4. Open and continuous communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
5. A backbone organization(s) with staff and specific set of skills to serve the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.<sup>56</sup>

Collective impact initiatives have addressed a wide variety of issues, including rainforest conservation, education, health, animal welfare, homelessness, poverty reduction, and youth and community development. They were formally recognized by the White House Council for Community Solutions in 2012. Of course, in the context of the questions we are asking here, what is obviously necessary is deep, fundamental transformation of our whole civilizational system to one that supports human and nonhuman flourishing. To address our holistic predicament, the concept of collective impact must be further expanded. And it must encounter new challenges. Top-down social impact strategies will converge with the bottom-up intelligence of communities of practice. Individual projects can collaborate for collective impact only insofar as they can each remain coherent and focused, even while interconnecting and expanding—to include, ultimately, everything.

Collective impact can bring together distinct initiatives that work around, in, and against the system, all on behalf of key shared outcomes. Advocates for collective impact believe it is absolutely necessary in this time because “there is no other way society will achieve large-scale progress against the urgent and complex problems of our time, unless a collective impact approach becomes the accepted way of doing business.”<sup>57</sup>

All these new forms of activism express an awakening into a new level of thinking. They reflect systemic, and sometimes even metasystemic, holistic and intuitive reasoning. They express awareness of the fact that we live in a profoundly interconnected world. They are aimed to benefit everyone—or the whole biosphere—rather than just our own group or species. They usually sidestep confrontation, finessing cultural resistance

to social change. They often help poor people by ameliorating many of the underlying causes of their own misery and poverty. They often transcend the paradigm of benefactor and recipient, partnering with those they help, requiring and assisting everyone involved to grow and develop, individually and collectively.

This evolving consciousness is already making its way into activist culture and transforming the whole world of activism. It expresses a rising current of innovation and synthesis that is rapidly gathering steam. And yet it is not separate from anything. It is transforming the internal culture of mainstream businesses as well as charities and activist organizations. The whole nonprofit world is rapidly changing, integrating insights from innovations in the private sector. Private corporations are discovering their “evolutionary purpose.” The culture of activism is not only diversifying, it is cross-pollinating, coevolving, and transforming rapidly. It is becoming more integral and evolutionary.

Evolutionary activism is integral. On one hand, it expresses a serious commitment to whole-system change, and the emergence of a life-sustaining global culture. On the other hand, it expresses a serious commitment to becoming the kind of people who can create and enjoy a life-sustaining global culture. That means simultaneous care for and engagement with individual human beings and local initiatives *even while keeping the metasystemic big picture in mind*. Evolutionary activists view all their initiatives as collectively impacting a whole-system transition. We keep our hearts on the prize of a life-sustaining global culture. We stay human, humble, and real, and we keep growing. Then we can also notice the synergies and commonalities among our projects, and we can harmonize apparent conflicts and cultivate a greater coherence.

## FOUR EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE INTEGRAL INITIATIVES

I have been inspired for years by a wide range of enlightened integral projects that work around the system to create social and cultural change. The ones I know best arose within the integral evolutionary

cultural ecosystem, where such initiatives are incubating intensely. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and MetaIntegral have expanded on Ken Wilber's pioneering work to establish interdisciplinary integral scholarship and to fund and empower a wide range of other initiatives. Gail Hochachka and Integral Without Borders have brought integral theory into international development projects across Latin America and in Africa. Barrett Brown has brought integral leadership development to organizations on five continents. And countless additional projects and project networks are making their unique creative contributions. To understand this creativity requires a deeper look, so let's consider a few examples with which I am familiar. Here I recount the outlines of four inspiring initiatives founded by four of my personal friends.

### *The Slocan Integral Forestry Cooperative*

My friend Stephan Martineau moved in 1992 to the Slocan Valley, a beautiful Canadian mountain valley with a diverse community of about six thousand people. The social landscape included First Nations voices; a conservative faction made up of loggers, miners, and farmers; a highly concentrated and vocal green community; a multifaith landscape; two internationally recognized environmental organizations; a strong artist community; and the multinational forest products company that held rights to cut timber and was the valley's main employer.

The forested watershed around the pristine Slocan river and lake (northwest of the town of Nelson in the West Kootenay region of South-eastern British Columbia) was 95 percent government-owned, and the residents had polarized into distrust through decades of controversy and conflict over forestry practices and water quality. An increasing number of forestry workers were losing their jobs, while clear-cut logging continued at the same pace due to mechanization. By the early 2000s, more than 120 locals had been arrested at protests. The provincial government had sponsored nine initiatives to resolve these conflicts across thirty-five years at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars—all without success.

In the fall of 2003, the provincial government announced its intention to offer forest rights to local communities. Martineau recognized

that after thirty years of failed processes this was an opportunity to start over with an integral approach. If the Slocan Valley were to make a successful bid for a community forest tenure, all sides of the ongoing conflict would have to come together to agree on a single vision. They would have to change the historical pattern and replace mistrust with a new direction that would benefit all members of the community.

Martineau was inspired to make use of the many lessons that could be learned from the past and to take all the players into consideration. Would it be possible for the union, the logging company, recreation enthusiasts, First Nations, environmental organizations, and the residents to come together under one vision? Through his many conversations with the various factions of the community, the following guiding principles of an integral approach to community mediation were articulated:

1. Residents hold perspectives and value systems in relation to the forest that surrounds them.
2. These perspectives and value systems are guided and influenced by a mix of social, economic, scientific, spiritual, psychological, cultural, political, historical and institutional lenses.
3. Each of these perspectives is valuable and pertinent and must therefore be considered in solutions that will work for all.
4. By including and building upon these perspectives, solutions found will be more complete and viable in considering how the community and the forest can interface.

Martineau found many allies who came to hold this vision with him and began reaching out to the various stakeholder communities, two or three individuals at a time. The intention was that by the end of each meeting, everyone would see value in the project, would not feel threatened by it, and would feel appreciated for what they had contributed and could contribute in the future.

In particular, Martineau contacted people who had key qualities, such as integrity, a capacity to listen, flexibility, a willingness to learn, and a sincere care for the greater community. These individuals were

open to multiple perspectives, able to empathize and to practice impartiality. They were genuinely interested in understanding others' insights, values, worldviews, and knowledge. They were respected by their constituency and could offer them a voice of reason and encouragement. Through their participation, elements from each subculture that needed to be included in any single overarching direction were clarified.

Gradually a diverse core group formed that would co-own the implementation of this initiative from the start. A series of public community meetings solicited more input, further clarified the path forward, and gathered broader community support.

Eventually, loggers, city councils, environmental activists, the Ministry of Forest and Range, a variety of local residents, and three resident associations came to agreement on guiding principles, management guidelines, organizational structure, and a plan for profit distribution. This groundbreaking project received more than seventy letters of support from local governments, businesses, community organizations, and individuals across the full spectrum of values and perspectives. Through numerous negotiations the acreage they had originally been offered was doubled, and a complex multiyear process resulted in an agreement that the Slocan Valley Integral Forestry Cooperative (SIFCo) would manage 35,000 acres. After their preliminary and final community agreements and forest stewardship plan were approved, SIFCo finally signed a twenty-five-year Community Forest Agreement (CFA) with the province of British Columbia in 2011.

Today SIFCo has twelve to fifteen employees and more than a million dollars in revenue each year. It defines integral forestry as forest practices that, first, determine the ecological limits to human uses of a specified land area, and then, given these limits, apply management strategies that will maintain a fully functioning ecosystem over time. Second, integral management strategies consider humans as part of the ecosystem and aim to improve social conditions such as local employment levels, community stability, local economic opportunities, community safety, fire preparedness, and respect and understanding among residents. In addition, the board officially embraces the principles of integral community mediation listed above.

SIFCo's purpose statement explicitly prioritizes all the "triple bottom lines" of ecology, economy, and social benefit. "Our overall purpose is to serve as a model of integral forestry by owning and managing forest lands in a manner that is ecologically and socially responsible, economically sustainable, and that provides the community with all the amenities of a fully functioning ecosystem," explains Martineau.

Ecological factors include soil protection, biological diversity, ecosystem restoration, wildlife enhancement, proactive wildfire management in the face of climate change, water quality and flow, and the effects of climate change on species distribution. Last year, SIFCo released a multifaceted wildfire protection plan for the Slocan Valley, based on an innovative landscape-level approach—the first of its kind province-wide—to mitigate the increasing intensity of forest fires due to climate change. Economic factors include a diverse range of forest products, specialty woods, long-term sustainable yields, enhancing the community's economic diversity, local employment and retraining, nontimber forest products, and retaining profits in the community. Social factors include inclusive, ongoing transparent public involvement, youth training programs, minimizing the visual impacts of harvesting and road building for the benefit of the growing tourism industry, and protection of First Nations cultural heritage.

Martineau has noted that one of the most important lessons he's learned from this process is that truly integral solutions must relax abstract idealism in order to meet the people involved where they are currently. Then one step forward at a time can be taken, not achieving idealistic purity, but with mechanisms in place that enable the systems to keep evolving over time. If, for example, the aim is to reduce wood consumption in construction by 70 percent, it is better to achieve 20 percent reduction than to hold out for 70 percent and get nothing, especially if there are means for 20 percent to become 30 percent and then 40 percent. He is convinced that integral mediation and ecology offer crucial insights and tools for implementing solutions that respond to our planetary crisis, locally and globally.



*Taxi Excel*

In the mid-2000s, Grant Hunter was inspired by the transformational potential of social enterprise to lift people out of poverty in the developing world. In 2007 he traveled to Lima, Peru, to do research, having defined two criteria for success: The individual small businesses had to be profitable enough to pay back the loan required to launch them within five years. And they had to be able to lift the entrepreneur into at least the lower rungs of the middle class. Hunter was excited about what could be done using the franchise model, with its developed world standards and ongoing support.

After about a year, Hunter founded Taxi Excel, a fleet of taxis in Lima with various competitive advantages. He identified a higher mission, company identity, branding, and positioning. The company's mission was "green" in that it made use of the opportunity to replace gas- and diesel-powered vehicles with eco-friendlier ones powered by compressed natural gas. Taxi Excel identified affordable "better" vehicles, uniforms, standards of vehicle cleanliness, quality of service, and driver conduct. Then it systematized these best practices and standard means for teaching and enforcing them.

The company designed the franchise system for the individual franchisees with the distinctions of integral philosophy consciously in mind—both the "exteriors" and "interiors" of the franchisees and the culture that permeates low-income developing world markets. Taxi Excel provided a path out of the informal economy of Lima's taxi driver culture (which reflected a cutthroat, survival-of-the-fittest, Wild West mentality), through which they could transition into the formal economy (with rules, regulations, standards, laws, and property rights).

With the higher standards of the brand and better customer service, they could serve higher-paying corporate clients. Taxi drivers were trained in basic English, customer service, and basic automobile maintenance. They also offered drivers the financing to purchase their own eco-friendly vehicles. Thereby, they could increase their standard of living,

accumulate capital as they paid off their own taxis, and begin to internalize the modern values and standards of hard work, individual responsibility, excellence, and economic self-reliance through small-business ownership.

At the same time, Hunter went to socially minded investors in the United States and Europe, people with politics across the left/right spectrum. They all found things they liked in microfranchising. Those on the left appreciated that it could uplift disadvantaged people out of poverty and that it was eco-friendly. Those on the right liked the focus on individual responsibility, hard work, and free enterprise. He was able to offer market rate returns in line with thirty-year stock market averages (~10 percent), secured against an insured asset (the taxi). And all of this was accomplished while helping a man lift his family out of poverty in a sustainable fashion.

Taxi Excel ultimately fulfilled all of its key criteria. It reached break-even and paid its investors competitive returns as the cars were paid off. Many of its drivers emerged from poverty and developed personally. However, the enterprise was unable to obtain sufficient expansion capital to scale up, and at its small scale it wasn't profitable enough to be sustainable for the franchisor. So, after four years of operation it closed down, but not before successfully demonstrating a multidimensional integration of purpose and profit. Concerns for social justice and environmental benefits were achieved while also generating a financial return—successes in all three of the “triple bottom lines” accounted for among socially conscious investors.

This example is remarkable because, by pushing ownership down to the level of impoverished individuals, its social benefit is interwoven with its business model. Becoming a business owner requires and produces increased self-efficacy, responsibility, and personal empowerment. The franchisees learn to control their own financial destiny (usually for the first time). This is integrated directly into the financial success of the franchisee and the franchisor. This kind of “micro” franchising is truly integral and holistic because its social benefit *is* the entrepreneurial success.

### *Keystone at Xochimilco*

My friend Juan Pablo Rico and his partner, Arturo Farias, formed Keystone, a private investment firm in Mexico City, in order to apply holistic and metasystemic principles to complex ecosystem problems. They see business opportunities in the diverse values that can flow from better solutions to challenges like traffic, water, air pollution, agriculture, and urban development.

In 2016, they were hired by the government of Mexico City to design a process to regenerate Xochimilco, the remnants of the original wetland lake on which Mexico City was founded by the Aztecs almost seven hundred years ago. Xochimilco is at the source of the symbols and myths of Mexican culture: a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a 14,000-acre *chinampa* (wetlands agriculture) area on the south end of the city. The Xochimilco wetlands have been farmed for almost two millennia, even while they supported enormous biodiversity. Chinampa agriculture systems like Xochimilco are perhaps the most productive and sustainable of all human forms of agriculture.

However, in recent years Xochimilco has been dying. Its water has been diverted to urban use and replenished with treated sewage, so it no longer supports the ecosystem and agriculture as it once did. Four percent of its area has been converted to housing every year, a rate that would cause it to disappear in a decade. It was once a tourist destination, but only a dwindling stream of tourists retain a vague memory of the place that was once known as Mexico's "floating gardens."

In their work for the Mexico City government, Rico and Farias analyzed the situation holistically and identified key intervention points where small interventions could achieve big results. They validated their analysis with top experts and government officials—in itself a major achievement. This was the first time so many experts had been so much in agreement in half a century of efforts to rescue Xochimilco.

They identified four key leverage points: water quality, agriculture and related businesses, sustainable tourism, and housing. Surprisingly, they found that even though it had talented people and good intentions,

the city government was not in a position to solve the problem. Governments, by their very nature, solve problems by adding layers of control. But adding layers of control to a complex system reduces creativity and efficiency. Such approaches make matters worse, quickly becoming unmanageable. And that is where Xochimilco is today.

Rico and Farias approached the problem differently because they recognized that Xochimilco, like most ecological phenomena, is a complex system. Complex systems cannot be controlled or managed, even using sophisticated, complicated approaches. They can, however, be guided by incentives.

Thus, they suggested two broad approaches, both public and private. The government can institute regulations, generate public support, and foster continuous learning. A private initiative, supported by governmental action, can channel capital to projects that are aligned with the regeneration of Xochimilco. By writing new rules for a set of new companies, they have been able to attract significant investment for agriculture. With an investment fund for agriculture, they have helped bring about a consortium to operate large-scale sustainable tourism, which they expect to take over the concession for the 250-acre park. There they hope to regenerate the local ecosystem, and host the agriculture pilot projects, the value-adding operations, and the tourism business.

Even though this project is in its early stages, their progress validates their method and principles. Three crucial major achievements coincided: experts reaching an agreement about the path forward for Xochimilco; the city government, local people, and investors all aligned around a single plan; and large-scale private funding for the agricultural and tourism development.

Their business name, “Keystone,” refers to “keystone species”—animals that increase the abundance and ecological diversity of the ecosystem in which they live. Examples include wolves, bees, sea otters, and elephants. They developed an original methodology to address complex ecosystem problems using a novel map of systemic root problems and root solutions. They expect Xochimilco to regenerate, and to be a visible example of humans functioning as a keystone species over the coming decade.

### *Cosmos Co-op*

My longtime friend and collaborator Marco Morelli recently conceived and joined with others to launch a project designed to foster the *scenius* (the collective genius that emerges from highly creative scenes) that naturally gives rise to new kinds of thinking and artistic creativity, cultural experiments, communities, and projects.

It's a community, he says, of "writers, artists, programmers, designers, philosophers, and otherwise ordinary people who feel passionately about exploring the depths and potentials of our shared reality, joining forces to produce works of collective genius." Working online, they intend to incubate a rich ferment of innovation in art, literature, and culture that they have dubbed the Cosmos Co-op.

Appreciating our cataclysmic moment, and the nature of exponential change, this project is acting on the necessity for the revolution in consciousness and culture I am calling for in this book. It intends to cocreate it in innumerable ways that reclaim authentic relationships and communication from the commercialization, commodification, and cheapening of the "fire that burns within each of us"—encouraging original thinking, creative collaboration, honest dialogue, and other "deeply satisfying experiences." They want to engage one another in a way that will bring forth a whole family of new stories "about who we are, what's possible, and what we're here to do."

Cosmos Co-op has already launched a networked series of websites: an online journal, *Metapsychosis*; a social network, Infinite Conversations, and a podcast network of the same name; a publishing imprint, Untimely Books; and a network of book clubs, study circles, and community events called Readers Underground. It envisions more: a marketplace, an internal currency to support member livelihoods, and even a system for collective governance.

It has started humbly, without much funding, but with a bold vision. Morelli and the other participants in this experiment are engaging with one another vulnerably, boldly, tenderly, and poetically—and of course sometimes clumsily. They are sharing art, literature, and ideas, and their

naked responses to art, literature, and ideas. They are finding their way directly, not in the familiar terms of discourse of intellectual elites (like in the pages of the *New Yorker*). They've created a space in which they can speak to what moves them and think thoughts that defy familiar patterns. It's a place to touch and to be touched, a space where they can try new things, unafraid of experiments that might fail.

In several ways this initiative stands apart from the others I've mentioned here. Its intent is intimate and cultural, while the others are directed at social and ecological impacts. The Dark Mountain Project, mentioned later, is another example of this progression from a social to a cultural focus—a theme worth contemplating.

Although its business model is still unproven, the Cosmos Co-op is pioneering a quality of contact between participants that has already demonstrated something disarmingly beautiful. It epitomizes the holistic, metasystemic creativity that characterizes all the initiatives I've highlighted here. It addresses questions about the future of culture directly—*by being culture, doing culture, and taking action in human terms*.

But it doesn't presume to arrive at final answers to the questions it is asking: How can we meet the challenge of our wild time except by talking with one another? How can we color outside the lines of our familiar media and discourse so something beautiful, true, and genuinely new can happen? How can we foster a whole wave of authentic creative encounters and experiments in how we talk and listen and relate? Instead, it enacts an ecosystem of spaces in which many people, ideas, and experiments can interact, in which better and better answers to these questions can evolve.

I point to this fledgling project because I have so much respect for Marco's brilliance, talent, and courage, and because I'm excited that he has been attracting and is interacting more widely with other original thinkers, artists, and brave, ordinary souls. I also trust that the lessons learned in this process will bear unpredictable fruit. A passionate, holistic, metasystemic creativity is embedded in the very structures of the Cosmos Co-op. Morelli and his colleagues are attempting to work together with "candor, ethics, and compassion as essential to our

creativity.” In so doing, they are simultaneously experimenting on the evolving edge of collaboration, art, and culture.

## EVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISM AND LEADERSHIP

At whatever level we are forging solutions—local or global, even with metasystemic approaches like those above—we interact with governments and politics. For that reason, activism that goes around the system cannot be a replacement for in-the-system political solutions. Our global predicament must be addressed politically; and it clearly calls for solutions that express a higher order of intelligence than that of our current public discourse. If we could raise the level of our discourse with our so-called “enemies” to where we could find common ground to address our shared challenges, it would seem like a miraculous advance over our current situation (in which, in the U.S., the two main political parties have devolved into an almost completely adversarial relationship). In imagining new approaches, we can derive inspiration from heroes of the past. In acknowledging the interests of all sides and demonizing no one, Gandhi was able to initiate dialogue where none had existed—and extend it all the way to creating agreements where they had not been thought possible.

This does *not* mean taking the position that all sides have equal legitimacy. Sometimes it is necessary to strip away pretenses and expose disingenuous thought, speech, and actions, revealing that the emperor wears no clothes. In fact, to a much greater degree than ever before, we should not tolerate doublespeak, evasion, denial of provable facts, or out-and-out lies by anyone, especially politicians. But that is not the same thing as demonization. To demonize is to create an insurmountable good-versus-evil polarity—and to attack others in ad hominem fashion rather than dealing with the content of the disagreements. Instead, like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, we need to place equal demands on everyone to adhere to standards of integrity, excellence, maturity, civility, tolerance, and compassion. To take our own medicine is ultimately a winning strategy.

Humanity is being asked to grow up into a new species of adulthood, as in “Humanity Is Growing Up,” one of Duane Elgin’s primary “Great Transition Stories.” We are asked to grow into a *new* human adulthood. That means our familiar forms of maturity will not be enough. Our wicked problems call for solutions that can emerge only from a whole new structure of consciousness, from the “simplicity on the other side of complexity.”

Important clues to the nature of such an intelligence can be found in the discourse among integral and evolutionary thinkers. An idea central to both evolutionary and integral thought is that *consciousness and culture are always evolving through distinct stages of development*. Each stage of development is a coherent, multigenerational body of agreements and attitudes and capacities and exchanges that cohere harmoniously. Each of these “worldviews” is dynamic, responding to challenges in both healthy and unhealthy ways. Healthy responses to challenges develop new awareness and new capacities. Those new capacities eventually cohere in a whole new higher structure—a new “stage” of consciousness and culture. It is valuable in going to the next level, because it is better able to account for the current challenges. It has selective advantages; it can respond to situations with more and more nuanced complexity, consciousness, and cooperation.

## INTEGRAL POLITICS

Integral sensibilities are emerging throughout culture and politics. And significant initiatives are taking shape on both the right and (especially) the left. In the following pages, however, I will confine my exploration to explicitly “integral” political activists and theorists who conceive of themselves as “agents of cultural evolution.” They—or, shall I say, *we*—have been involved in public education and community building and original scholarship, building an integral evolutionary worldview, and creating the basis for integral politics, recognizing how crucial it is to achieve maturity in collective decision making. It is a many-faceted initiative that addresses all the key cultural challenges we face, including



partisanship, nationalism, globalism, and our relationship to our ecological and climate predicament.

Even while the negative effects of polarization are all too visible, integral consciousness notices an important category of polarities that may seem to be opposites, but are not really “good-bad” polarities. They are, in fact, “good-good” polarities, in which each pole expresses an enduring value, and they function together in a mutually complementary fashion, at least when the system is optimized. Each needs moments of emphasis—and moments when its position is released—like inhaling and exhaling. But to reach this constructive result requires that we hold each polarity in a very mature, nonattached, nonreactive way.

Integral politics also looks beyond the single axis that characterizes policies as liberal and conservative. James Turner and Lawrence Chickering, for example, expand the analysis to two axes—between freedom and order and between left and right.<sup>58</sup> More recently, integral philosopher Steve McIntosh has identified another axis of polarity that integral analyses should include: the tension between nationalism and globalism.<sup>59</sup> Most fundamentally, any integral politics is aware that *cultural evolution unfolds dialectically, through conflicting principles and ideas*, by the synthetic reintegration of the partial truths of apparently opposing points of view (thesis and antithesis). Thus, integral politics naturally takes a long view, even while caring about what may be at stake in the political battles of the current moment. It knows that progress happens by carrying forward the enduring strengths—while simultaneously pruning away the pathologies—of conflicting worldviews and political positions. The values of left and right, of order and freedom, of globalism and nationalism will continue to endure, but their creative conflicts must power the progress of cultural evolution.

In the United States integral political analysts mostly take an optimistic view of human affairs.<sup>60</sup> At the sunny side of the spectrum, the integral political commentator Jeff Salzman introduces his Daily Evolver Facebook page by calling himself “heartened by the state and future of things” and affirming his belief that “life is animated by the power of evolution,” which is taking us toward a better world. Even at the more

somber end of the spectrum, where there is profound concern about our planetary metacrisis, there is skepticism about predictions of imminent collapse, and keen awareness of the human psyche's temptation to succumb to apocalyptic narratives.

The central theme common to all of integral politics is a recognition of the centrality of human maturity on multiple levels and an emphasis on serving its emergence. This implies a shift in personal values, and the expansion of our definitions of education—for children, adolescents, and adults. It understands the importance of developing all the capacities necessary for informed, engaged, and effective citizenship. Integral researcher and writer John T. Kesler has made an important recent contribution to integral political theory by focusing it squarely on this integral agenda—human maturation—and translating the stages and characteristics of leadership maturity into terms that apply to contemporary politics in America.<sup>61</sup> Kesler even takes it further, as we will see, hoping to see a more explicit and mainstream integral political movement contribute to the broader transpartisan movement, promoting personal and cultural maturation through education, collaboration, advocacy, and public outreach.

A series of explicitly integral reports, or “white papers,” containing political analysis have been issued by the first avowedly integral think tank in the United States, the Institute for Cultural Evolution (cofounded by integral philosophers Steve McIntosh and Carter Phipps). In its published white papers, the institute advocates that postmodernists transcend the limitations of traditional progressive politics and become more effective at working for sustainability and social justice, by outgrowing the ways they have inadvertently contributed to the tensions underlying our culture wars. The institute has identified progressive distrust of globalization and of blind economic expansionism as a culturally important source of polarization. (The institute's work, especially envisioning a Future Left and Right, is discussed in the section on the transpartisan movement below.)

In a series of ebooks and blog posts, social entrepreneur Robb Smith has interpreted contemporary and historical economic and demographic

data to discern the structural dynamics of societies at different phases of their existence.<sup>62</sup> He views the dysfunctional Trump era as a symptom of what he, following Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, calls our “meta-crisis,” and he uses another term, “the transformational era,” to describe one of its most important dimensions, the economic transformation wrought by the automation of most forms of human work. All this, in cyclical terms, is prelude to a collapse and regeneration of our economic and financial systems. The collapse will result in a period of chaos and finally a complex reorganization of the economic and financial order. His economic and financial analysis can easily be reconciled with the predicament and tipping point described in this book. And he points to “a thorough politics of resilience” as essential to surviving it. His approach focuses on fostering the key factors that correlate with social resilience: social trust, communal resources, shared prosperity, the prioritization of higher purposes over lower ones, individual autonomy, innovation, and resource diversity.

In service of resilience Robb defines key positions of more sophisticated versions of both conservatism and progressivism—his vision of a “Future Right” and “Future Left.” We should all be able, he says, to acknowledge the value of entrepreneurship even as we acknowledge the limits of markets and capitalism. We should also acknowledge the potentially stifling inefficiency of government mandates and regulation, even while recognizing the necessity of some market regulation. His total analysis provides a spectrum of implications in terms of specific integral economic and political policies, animated by a creative dialectic between new sophisticated conservative and liberal understandings that admit the failures of current orthodoxies. Specifically, he calls for campaign finance reform, the pricing of negative environmental impacts (including carbon and methane taxes), the reduction of regulations that produce waste and inefficiency and handicap the market by obscuring price signals, evidence-based approaches to education and health care, and what he calls a more forceful “Constitutional Tribalism.” Resilience requires us to let go of rigid ideologies—anything that diminishes societal resilience.

Despite the troubled and turbulent nature of our historical moment, Robb is optimistic, based on the scale of likely technological and scientific innovation, the power of integral understandings of mind and society, and the intelligence, flexibility, sophistication, and spirit of millennial leaders and entrepreneurs.

## THE USA RED/BLUE DIVIDE

Let us look at the defining cultural polarity of twenty-first-century American culture—the divide between the so-called “red” (Republican) and “blue” (Democratic) cultural and political factions. “Conservative” (Republican) policies traditionally reflect a mindset that construes problems and solutions in terms of internal qualities such as personal virtue, morality, and intelligence, which can be proportionally rewarded or punished, producing a preference for market solutions, economic freedom, moral constraints, and small government. The “liberal” (Democratic) pole has characteristically prioritized policies that address and mitigate external causes of social problems—for example, advocating institutional solutions that provide guidance, resources, and structural protections for people who are not thriving.

From an integral perspective it is important to account for the dynamics of both internal and external causes and effects of policies, and to lead and respond creatively, with all the factors that bear on the whole system. Every situation has unique requirements, so both conservative and liberal policy ideas have a place in an integral approach. A core integral principle is that it cannot work to permanently privilege one pole of any true polarity at the expense of the other.

But there is more to our current polarization than the divisions between left-wing and right-wing attitudes. In addition to freedom and order, and nationalism and globalism, there are deeply ingrained moral dynamics. According to the moral foundations theory proposed and popularized by Jonathan Haidt,<sup>63</sup> certain moral intuitions have a primitive neurological basis. Liberals and conservatives are preoccupied with different moral intuitions. Liberals generally feel it is self-evident that care for others and the

minimizing of harm and suffering are the highest moral considerations. They also care about fairness and justice and concerns about equality of opportunity. Conservatives, on the other hand, pay attention to loyalty to one's family, town, or clan, obeying authority figures, and an ingrained revulsion to perceived impurity. And they think of fairness less in terms of equality than in terms of proportionality (you should reap what you sow). In today's America, conservatives dominate in rural areas (even in "blue" states), and liberals in the cities (even in "red" states).

The left-versus-right polarity has been overlaid on America's racial divides. African Americans and some Hispanic Americans have long voted Democratic. White working-class Americans have increasingly voted Republican, especially since immigration has turned America into a nation where minorities are becoming the majority. The economic pressures of globalization and radical postmodern cultural changes have evoked powerful "us-versus-them" sentiments, especially among less-educated whites. Political contests have gradually become a great proxy war between nationalism and globalism, individual responsibility and social welfare, entrepreneurial capitalism and democratic socialism, whites and people of color, educated knowledge workers and hard-working, enterprising "real" Americans. Adding to the polarization are competing narratives, debates over factual truth versus disinformation, and the corrupting influence of corporate capitalism on our political and media institutions.

The contest over American identity and our ideological culture wars between left and right have intensified and degenerated. They are no longer working out the legitimate dialectic between right and left—an emphasis on individual responsibility challenging and evolving care for those the system tends to leave behind—so that the systemic causes for personal and social problems can be effectively addressed and corrected. When the polarity functions in a healthy way, contending conservative and liberal perspectives evolve culture. Now, gridlock paralyzes intelligent collective governance and decision making. It is a critical global problem when this happens in the world's superpower, which has often been called "the indispensable nation."

The real contest being fought now is against our own unconscious demons, or psychological shadows. Since this is a battle within the psyche, and what cannot be acknowledged cannot be faced and integrated, partisans just keep questing to vanquish one another, reenacting the same old identities and agendas, spinning their wheels. The most mature participants thus are held hostage by the self-destructive impulses of the least mature, but everyone is caught together in the self-fulfilling prophetic dynamics of partisan bitterness and self-destruction. That is how this zero-sum political polarity has been able to ratchet tighter and tighter, reaching a critically pathological state of paralysis. This bondage—the underlying psychological logic of our culture wars, media bubbles, and two-party monopoly and gridlock—has made the system almost structurally incapable of allowing cooperative solutions.

The Republican Party has long been rooted in traditional values, but until recently it has been committed to a hybrid in which American traditionalism thrived in a modern, competitive marketplace. A majority of Republicans have more mature values and action-logic, but most have proved susceptible to supporting less-mature leadership, via appeals to the impassioned opinions of their supporters' cultural identities and their cherished political objectives. This has led to a critical pathology and today's insurrectionary mood among Republican voters, who carried the party into its high-risk experiment with the Trump presidency. At least at the time of this writing, the party has been captured by a malignant, opportunistic, and ethnocentric leader and faction.

The directness of impulsive, opportunistic leadership has its attractions. It at least has the appearance of decisiveness and strength, although it can be seriously compromised by corruption, opportunism, and lack of discipline. It also tends to erode the rule of law, the separation of powers, civil rights, modern pluralistic values, and democratic institutions, and—as we have seen more and more in every election cycle—it has opened the gates for money to influence politics more than ever, allowing for widespread corruption. American democratic institutions are a system of checks and balances, but the Republican Party has become reluctant to accept responsibility for applying those constraints.

In contrast, the Democratic Party is worldcentric. It spans modern, postmodern, and integral sensibilities and values, so it is the place where the healthy immune response to the malignancies of the right are most often concentrated. But the brand has big problems. To some traditionalists it seems infected with the “stink” of postmodernism that so many traditional and rural people have instinctively rejected and to which they recoil. As Ken Wilber has trenchantly observed,<sup>64</sup> postmodernism is exactly what Trump campaigned against. The modernist and postmodernist wings of the Democratic Party have an opportunity and a responsibility to evolve and come together for the good of the country and the world, but it will not be easy to achieve sufficient coherence. The reconciliation of modern and postmodern factions is so culturally significant, it may be a crucial opportunity for integral interventions.

The nation has been losing its ability to come together, even when the values and collective interests they share are threatened. And selfish special interests have acquired disproportionate political and communicative power via populist appeals to emotions, bypassing any genuine contest over ideas. As a result, both parties are in crisis—each party in itself, and both together as a dialectical system. The two-party system has always had problems, but it now seems close to critical breakdown.

The current stuckness will need to yield to healthier, more flexible politics. Major change is structurally inevitable. The status quo is unsustainable. Evolutionary pressures will require more intelligent collective decision making, as the consequences of stupidity underline the seriousness of this responsibility. We can trust that, even amidst no small amount of chaos, circumstances will find a way to bring forward previously latent capacities for leadership and wisdom. This transition may be worked out underground and emerge unnoticed, or it may evolve under emergency conditions, but it is inevitable, from a structural perspective. The question is not whether but when and how.

The questions have to do with the nature of the transition. Transition is uncomfortable, disorienting, and, when it goes on too long, exhausting and traumatizing. To what degree will worldcentric culture be able to bring the kind of consciousness and conversations described

here into today's chaotic environment? How healthy and influential will this movement prove to be?

What other forces will be unleashed, and how will everything interact? How soon will a new political order emerge? How benign will the transition be? How much disruption, destruction, and violence will accompany it? How quickly and by what path will we find our way back to sustainability? Can we soon achieve a more sustainable, healthy, and fulfilling relationship with each other, our planet, and our universe?

Each of us, at best, holds only a few strands in the great tangle of efforts and historical currents that will codetermine these results. Let's appreciate the gravity of our responsibility to foster a "soft landing," a benign transition from our overheated pattern of living to a sustainable human future.

## THE TRANSPARTISAN MOVEMENT AND INTEGRAL POLITICAL INITIATIVES

People of good faith on both the right and left have recognized the pathology of hyperpartisanship, and they have been joining together to depolarize American politics. Several dozen transpartisan initiatives have been founded in recent decades—and these efforts have been multiplying and intensifying. One of the most visible is NoLabels.org, led by cochairs Jon Huntsman Jr. (a Republican) and Joe Lieberman (a Democrat-turned-Independent). No Labels has been working on committing members of Congress to a more mature approach to leadership by getting congresspeople from both parties to pledge to put the country first—to move *forward* rather than right or left.

Several others, such as Village Square, Living Room Conversations, and Better Angels, convene groups of people from different cultural identity groups for dialogue and mutual understanding. Other initiatives promote civility in public discourse, citizen conversations across the red/blue divide, greater civic involvement, community meetings, student dialogues, congressional training sessions, civics education, relationship building, and much more. Van Jones endeavored to bring red-blue



dialogue into national view after the 2016 election in a cable TV series *The Messy Truth*.

All of these initiatives are making a positive contribution, even though the problem of intensifying polarization is historical, structural, and stubborn. The transpartisan movement has tackled a very big project. As we pointed out earlier, transpartisanship does not require transcending all partisanship. That is entirely unrealistic, in any case. It means, in the context of partisan interactions, working to get things done by identifying common interests and values and complementary benefits. There is room for political horse-trading, but not for hostage-taking. Transpartisanship does not try to homogenize competing philosophies via a mediocre “splitting of the difference,” but, rather, attempts to manage enduring tensions between competing interests and philosophies. It begins with human contact, which makes it apparent that more things unite us than divide us. Other efforts intend to rebuild diverse connections in local communities. This is exactly the point. It is no wonder that many activists in the transpartisan movement bring explicitly integral evolutionary sensibilities to bear—emphasizing developing greater human maturity as the common cause among diverse transpartisans.

James Turner and Lawrence Chickering have been elaborating an integral transpartisan political philosophy for two decades<sup>65</sup> and are now the publishers of the transpartisan movement journal *The Transpartisan Review*.<sup>66</sup> Longtime transpartisan activist Mark Gerzon has become an eloquent advocate for the crucial importance of this movement in his recent mainstream book, *The Reunited States of America*, which appeared early in the 2016 election campaign cycle. With John Steiner, Gerzon founded a transpartisan umbrella organization called The Bridge Alliance,<sup>67</sup> which connects seventy-five groups nationwide that attempt to bridge partisan differences and model mature political dialogue, focusing on civic engagement, governance, and policymaking, and campaign and election processes.

Many other organizations, such as Undivide Us, are teaching people to apply best practices to generate productive dialogue. Gerzon and Steiner have called for local citizen summits in towns and cities that

bring together people across political boundaries to discover mature collaborative approaches to complex issues in the face of hyperpolarized dysfunction. One of the first of these was organized by John Kesler in Salt Lake City. It built on two months of dialogue throughout Utah that modeled constructive dialogue across differences, and culminated right after the 2016 election in a productive meeting cochaired by Salt Lake City's Democratic mayor and Utah's Republican lieutenant governor. In the trenches, projects such as these are developing the insights and best practices from which polarization can evolve beyond its gridlock. Such transpartisan activism does the basic hard work of reknitting the social fabric, regenerating wholeness in the midst of fragmentation.

*New York Times* columnist David Brooks articulated a healthy integral communitarian insight when he suggested that, if he had half a billion dollars to spend to improve American politics, he would focus on fostering unlikely friendships rather than working conventionally to boost the political center. He imagined a network of adult "camps" where people would spend two weeks with a small, manageable group of people from outside their cultural bubbles, living together, making and cleaning up their meals, studying big ideas, but also playing sports and building things and having casual social celebrations, with a bar and music—all while temporarily isolated from outside input.<sup>68</sup> Brooks imagined unlikely friendships eventually forming through these conjunctions, reknitting our social fabric. This is precisely congruent with the spirit of transpartisan integral politics.

The Institute for Cultural Evolution, mentioned in the Integral Politics section above, has envisioned and convened a sophisticated initiative that gathers political leaders for a more long-term project—to conceive a healthy "Future Right" and "Future Left" that can function beyond the dead-ends of our current political gridlock. Such a left and right might take years to become influential. But in a future moment they will be able to naturally converse and compete with each other in productive ways—such as enacting a dialectic through which our political culture can evolve capacities to bring the necessary creativity to our collective

challenges and predicaments. Interestingly, the “Future Right” project immediately began to get traction.

The Institute’s integral political analysis largely resonates with and yet also expands on Ken Wilber’s critique of postmodernism. According to one of the think tank’s position papers, a key strategy and tactic of an integral politics is “reducing postmodern contempt for both traditionalism and modernism,” and it adds that “helping postmodernism to evolve—helping ‘uncork the bottle’—is a key to producing cultural evolution overall.”<sup>69</sup> One front in cultural progress asks postmodernists to recognize their responsibilities as the most advanced political constituency in the popular world. That means transcending the limitations of traditional progressive politics. It argues that we can become more effective at working for sustainability and social justice by outgrowing the ways we have tended to inadvertently cocreate the tensions underlying our culture wars. At the same time, it also points out to traditionalists that if they become less ethnocentric and imperialistic, they will protect their nation more effectively. It regards the political polarity between left and right as “relatively permanent and existential, continuing to reappear in new forms as society changes and evolves.”<sup>70</sup> Although this approach does not seem to adequately include the urgency of our ecological predicament, I respect and appreciate that it is ultimately an orthogonal politics, neither left nor right—one that seeks to further cultural evolution by joining with actual political players across the spectrum, thus helping to restart the evolutionary engine of their dialectical interaction.

The division and polarization of the American electorate is widely seen as the most consequential cultural dysfunction holding back effective responses to our ecological predicament. Integral observers like Jeff Salzman trust that the process has its own intelligence, despite all appearances. Ken Wilber advocates for education and uplift, to help more people mature and catalyze the critical 10 percent tipping point we described earlier. Transpartisan activists are directly crossing cultural boundaries to build human bridges. And, as mentioned above, there is work being done to plant seeds for a “Future Right” and “Future Left.” These diverse approaches to this stubborn divide are each potentially

complementary, and they're perhaps among the most potentially consequential forms of integral activism.

There are also other explicitly integral political initiatives appearing all over the world, in diverse expressions—in the form of fledgling political parties, factions within larger parties, and movements outside them. A new integral political party has appeared in Switzerland, and integral thinking is surfacing more generally in western Europe, reflected in part by the policies of a number of political parties in many nations. They don't have to win majorities, because parliamentary democracies allow minority parties to influence policy in small and large ways.

A surprising recent development has been the election in 2017 of French president Emmanuel Macron. The year before, he had created a new French political party, En Marche, which sought to transcend traditional political boundaries. Although it wasn't explicitly integral or evolutionary, it did have a transpartisan aspiration—and a stated effort to unify left and right—from the beginning. Angela Merkel of Germany embodies a different but complementary integration of conservative and progressive values and policy. Individuals such as these give many hope for a European leadership that can take the place of missing American leadership in the Trump era—although Europe too faces complex ongoing challenges, and the future of such leadership is far from secure.

Another creative international—and explicitly integral—political initiative is also worth mentioning: Simpol. It originated in the UK and has begun to get traction in Europe. Simpol promotes a commonsense mechanism for coordinating responses to international problems by passing reforms (such as financial and environmental regulations and taxes) *that will not go into effect* until they can be simultaneously implemented in a critical mass of other nations (“Simultaneous Policy” or “SimPol”). This is significant because it enables individual nations to commit themselves to making sacrifices in order to address global problems without subjecting themselves to problematic competitive disadvantages. This way, individual nations can show global leadership. And their example can be the inspiration for local activists in other nations.

Thus, new policies have the potential to gather momentum for enlightened global policies as other countries follow suit.

It's important to recognize that the necessity for transpartisan engagement doesn't diminish the necessity for partisan engagement "in the system" itself—particularly insofar as our ecological emergency is concerned. My own approach to integral politics points in the same directions as those of my transpartisan colleagues, but it expresses radical integral ecology, explicitly recognizing the necessity of ongoing partisan engagement on behalf of the health of the living Earth. And it joins with partisan advocacy for indigenous and marginalized people all over the world. It also joins with the partisan defense of universal rights and values, of reason and science, and of democratic institutions. My sensibilities have evolved beyond the leftist values of my upbringing, but those roots express essential values that cannot be abandoned. The healthy left, present and future, is grounded in reason and *care*—for the whole human family, all living things, and the health of the whole. And care is one of the deepest and most broadly significant of political values.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO? FOLLOW YOUR HEARTBREAK❧AND YOUR GENIUS❧ WITH YOUR FRIENDS

An integral sensibility directly perceives the profound interconnections that weave together our world, our problems, our individual lives, and our great predicament. That confers many advantages, but it also presents the challenge of understanding where and how to focus your own creative efforts as an activist. If I try to help orphaned children, I discover the problems of money corrupting politics. If I try to address global warming, I may first need to break partisan gridlock in America. If I try to engage politics directly, I may come to the conclusion that radical change won't be possible until large numbers of people mature into higher orders of mind. How can I best engage? What exactly should I do?

Andrew Harvey answers this question directly: "When my friends and pupils who want to help ask me what they should do, I always say

the same thing: follow your heartbreak. Determine which one of all the causes in the world really breaks your heart. When you identify this, you have found the cause you will always have the energy and passion to work for.”<sup>71</sup>

Harvey is responding to Joseph Campbell’s injunction to “follow your bliss.” Since he sees, like I do, that the human predicament requires our engagement, he is interested (as I am) in flatly arguing against the ivory-tower solipsism of a private bliss indifferent to our collective plight.<sup>72</sup> Since our care is the source of our heartbreak, our heartbreak puts us directly in touch with the healthy care, the wholeness, that motivates our best work. So he is right—if you locate a way to address what you care about, your activism will be directly connected to your heart’s intuitive and creative impulses.

But love and gratitude and generosity are powerful motivators too—sometimes far more empowering than grief and outrage. For all of us, they represent an enormous reservoir of power, and they are inherently attractive. And there’s something deeper there too: our unique character and its impulse toward self-actualization. We all yearn to give our unique gifts to life. In his book *The Genius Myth*, Michael Meade proposes that a unique expression of the genius of life itself appears in each human being. He argues that the world’s impossible problems *require* that our genius express itself. In a way, the soul of the world is crying out for what is best in our character—for our fullest creativity, generosity, and leadership.

In both in-the-system and against-the-system politics we encounter people from outside our social circles. We have opportunities for meaningful conversations, friendships, and new ways of being. All human relationships can be thought of as a kind of politics—politics on the most intimate scale. Healthy politics is the uplift of human relationships. Contemporary televised political power struggles have degraded public discourse, whereas healthy politics restores civility, mutual listening, and social trust. We reknit the social fabric by restoring our ability to have meaningful conversations about things that matter. The uplift of what we call “politics” rests on the uplift of the intimate politics of human

relationships, in which friends join and take action for the common good—and in the process, new friendships are formed. We don't have to do this work alone—indeed, we *can't* do it alone.

So I propose a refinement of Harvey's elegant summary. **Follow your heartbreak and your genius with your friends.** Your genius will show you the unique way that you can most powerfully act on your deepest care, and your genius and your heartbreak will guide you to others with whom you can take action.

It is important to understand the word “genius” as it is used here. It doesn't refer only to your special talents. It points to the *daemon*, the unique animating spirit of your character. This is a quality that shows up in both your highest abilities and your unique flavor of being. It is especially evident in your self-transcending goodness, your capacity to respond to life generously and appropriately—doing many things that are *not* your special talents. In our narcissistic culture, we easily become preoccupied with a precious version of genius, and the world has found itself burdened by “too many leaders and not enough followers.”

Your genius is your special way of seeing things. It fills a gap that would have existed if you had not shown up. Most of the time it manifests as generosity and service. Far more than your heartbreak, it directly guides you in how to bring forward your special light and flavor, and the communities and creative channels through which all the energy of your being can find its way into your contributions.

## THE ACTIVE JOY OF INTERBEING

Our ways of being activists will have to keep growing for the rest of our lives. The familiar qualities of grievance and resentment are insufficient (even though many individuals have more than just cause for feeling aggrieved). Likewise, one can get carried away with the entrepreneurial enthusiasm discussed above. Like technology, entrepreneurship is simply a means to an end. Just as personal practice and public engagement are inseparable and must occur together, entrepreneurialism (or the discovery and implementation of new fixes and technologies) is just

an unsustainable distraction unless entrepreneurs are grounded in a deep ecological awareness, a whole life of practice, and an appreciation for their responsibilities as members of many human and more-than-human communities.

The Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh coined the beautiful word “interbeing” to penetrate our modern trance of presumed illusory independence, and to point to our inextricable connection with each other and with all of life. “Interbeing” recognizes that we are all fundamentally interconnected, inseparable from one another. Awakening from this trance, and discovering that inner and outer are one, are what will sustain us and make our efforts together as activists, and as human beings, joyful and rewarding.

Above all, as activists and as human beings, we must increase or restore wholesome health—to ourselves and our relationships and organizations—magnifying all that is life-generating. Our activism is an expression of our practice in a way that is analogous to the mycelium that generates life in the soil and suddenly blooms when conditions are right as ten thousand mushroom “flowers.” We must have faith in a process that, while unknown in many ways, is inherently trustable—for we are no different from that process. We are not separated from the Whole, and we are one with the miraculous transformations of evolution. Happiness and joy are inherent to us. We already have the paradoxical ability to relax into the demands we feel, realizing that if we knock, the door will be opened to us. Dead formulas are not what we need. We already are part of a living biological process—and, beyond that, a great, overarching reality.

Yes, we will feel vulnerable. There will be setbacks. Our hearts will probably be broken, and not just once. We will suffer losses and weep for the suffering world around us. But we will not disengage. Genius permeates the biological and spiritual world, and we are all one with that genius. We are each unique, and in some ways very limited, but not isolated. We are all capable of accessing that genius in one way or another, at one level or another. We live in interesting times, during which much around us is dying. But the fruits of our consciousness and



labors will sprout, and at some undetermined point we will feel awed by our accomplishments.

At some point, the Whole, or God, or Source, decided to differentiate into all the wild, diverse manifestations of existence and exist in space-time. We are all one, yet we are multiple. Together we complement one another synergistically. We reawaken in this “we-space,” and as we move forward we will increasingly experience our inner and outer lives—and “we” and “others”—as a single great magnificence.

We will now further explore the nature of this we-space that we are beginning to consciously engage, and look at how we might transform our capacity for friendship, cooperation, and collaboration.