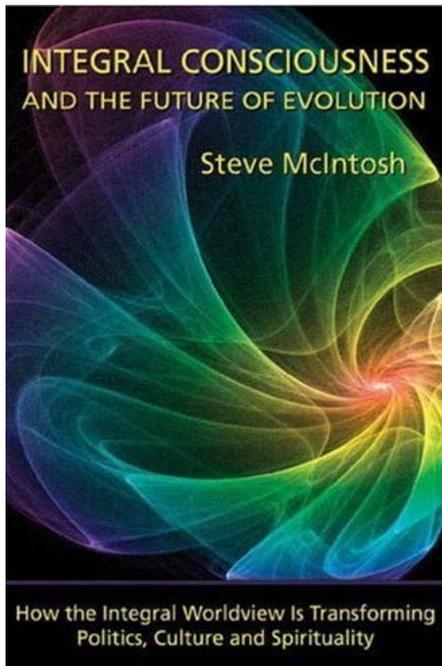


BOOK REVIEW



Steve McIntosh

*Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution:
How the Integral Worldview is Transforming
Politics, Culture and Spirituality* ↗

Hardcover, 371 pages
Continuum / Paragon House 2007
ISBN-10: 1557788677
ISBN-13: 978-1557788672

Reviewed by Ulrich Mohrhoff

Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution by Steve McIntosh starts out with a most important and all too often ignored insight:

For those of us who have been on a spiritual path for a while, there often arises a strong desire to try to make a meaningful difference in the world around us. But this outwardly directed urge to service is often dampened when we remember Gandhi's famous saying that "we must become the change we want to see in the world," which inevitably leads back to the task of working on ourselves. (1)

McIntosh claims to have been led, by closely studying the "periods in which significant cultural evolution — improvement of the human condition — had occurred" and by searching for "clues as to what had actually triggered and sustained this growth," to "the discovery of a new way of seeing things best described as *integral philosophy*."

Having *de facto* attributed integral philosophy to himself, at least provisionally, McIntosh makes the surprising claim that integral philosophy is "a philosophy of evolution that literally causes evolution." Philosophers will be happy to note that causing evolution is within their powers. But wait — *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution* "is not so much about a philosophy as it is about the results of this philosophy — the newly emerging worldview known as *integral consciousness*." So what we have here is a philosophy that has as its result a philosophy that is a worldview that is a type of consciousness. So playing hard and fast with the English vocabulary does not bode well.

There is another essential distinction that the author fails to make. When McIntosh affirms that “integral philosophy has a strong spiritual component,” and when he promises to keep “integral philosophy free from religious bias,” he is drawing a most necessary distinction between religion and spirituality. (Simply put, spirituality is a matter of experience rather than belief, whereas religion is a matter of belief rather than experience.) Hence when McIntosh goes on to write that integral philosophy’s “spirituality is broad enough to include a wide diversity of *spiritual* beliefs” (emphasis added), what he obviously intends is *religious* beliefs.

Yet another essential distinction has become a casualty of the author’s terminological generosity. We are told that “[i]ntegral philosophy is increasingly being employed by regular thinking people [*regular thinking* people or *regular thinking people?*] who are using it to make significant progress in family life, in business, in education, in politics, and in many other areas where evolution is sorely needed.” The conflation of *evolution* with *progress* — particularly the kinds of progress just cited — would ring the alarm bells of more than one integral thinker. According to Jean Gebser, for example, progress is associated with the deficient phase of the mental structure of consciousness, which is characterized by ego-inflation and atomization, whereas evolution, as it has propelled us into the mental structure of consciousness, so it is poised to propel us out of it.

Having been promised by the author that “if you read and consider the ideas in this book, they will literally raise your consciousness,” I was of course curious as to the book’s effect on my consciousness, apart from wondering how a worldview (if this is what is meant) can be raised or lowered, or how consciousness (qua consciousness) can be *literally* raised. “I trust that once you have tried on the integral worldview,” McIntosh writes, “you too will be unashamedly passionate about its tremendous potential.” I hate to disappoint the author, but it didn’t work this way for me. Perhaps I am a tad too skeptical about worldviews that can be tried on like a pair of jeans.

In the **second** of the book’s ten chapters readers are told that

Consciousness is the subjective presence of every living person — a presence made precious by the inevitability of its eventual death. Consciousness is contained and upheld not only by its biological host, but also by the culture in which it participates. Our bodies “hold up” our consciousness from the outside and our culture holds up our consciousness from the inside. (11)

Only an unrelenting materialist (or naturalist) can be *that* certain of the inevitability of the eventual death of the consciousness of a living person. For the more important integral thinkers, the opposite comes closer to the truth: it is consciousness that contains and upholds both its biological host and the culture in which this participates. (Let us also note in passing that consciousness in *this* sense cannot be synonymous with a worldview.) What follows is another section of the politically correct naturalists’ manifesto:

According to integral philosophy, the reality we are familiar with does not consist of a natural world and a supernatural world — the external and the internal are both essentially natural. (18)

If everything is essentially natural, what does “essentially natural” mean? For the more a term denotes, the less it connotes. If a term denotes everything, it connotes nothing. Having wiped out the defining distinction, McIntosh hastens to reinstate it by dividing the universe into nature plus another two domains:

Integral philosophy’s explanation of the evolving universe ... relies on the recognition of these three evolutionary domains — nature, self, and culture. (22)

Either everything is natural, including the self, or the self and nature are distinct. Which is it now?

McIntosh’s integral philosophy is indebted to the spiral dynamics of Clare W. Graves,¹ which is introduced in the **third** chapter. According to Graves, evolution is a dialectical process:

not only can we see the dialectical pattern of thesis-antithesis-synthesis in the development of the spiral as a whole, we can also see a dialectic of development within the life span of each stage. Every new level begins as an antithesis to what came before. In the course of healthy development, this is then followed by a season of synthesis wherein a stage’s primary work is accomplished. Then after its “prime time,” a stage of culture usually matures into a more orthodox thesis of itself that eventually calls forth its own transcendence by a new level’s fresh antithesis. (62)

Since the spiral is unbounded, every stage not only solves but also creates problems, which require another stage for their solution:

As consciousness becomes successful at addressing the problems of one level of evolution, those very solutions result in a new set of problems that can be addressed only by the next emerging stage of development. (48)

It pays to contrast spiral dynamics’ tenets with insights obtained by cultural historian and evolutionary philosopher Jean Gebser.² McIntosh introduces Gebser with the following words:

Beginning in the late 1930s, Gebser had a clear intuition that human history would soon produce an emergent new structure of consciousness and culture, which he termed *integral consciousness*. As he investigated this intuition, he was led to the recognition that human history had unfolded through a series of discontinuous mutations, with each mutation resulting in an entirely new pattern of experience and a new perception of space and time. Gebser recognized that each new mutation in consciousness produced an expanded type of perspective. (176)

This suggests that Gebser thought of space and time as features of a perceiver-independent reality, and that what changes with the emergence of a new consciousness structure is merely the manner in which these features are perceived. Gebser, on the contrary, held that the world’s dimensions themselves emerge, by discrete steps, as characteristics of newly emergent consciousness structures. The mental structure features three spatial dimensions — viewer-centered depth (one) and lateral extent

¹ See *Spiral Dynamics* by Don E. Beck and Christopher Cowan ♣.

² See “Evolution of consciousness according to Jean Gebser“ in *AntiMatters 2(3)* ♣.

(two). For this reason we experience a world of three-dimensional objects (presenting to us their two-dimensional surfaces) *perspectively* from a specific position in space. The preceding, mythical consciousness structure was two-dimensional and *unperspectival* in the sense that it lacked spatial depth. It featured surfaces with nothing behind or inside them. For this reason the question as to what lay behind the heavenly sphere never arose for the mythical consciousness, and anatomy did not become a science until the advent of the mental structure. Matter itself — in the sense of a “stuff” that is bounded by surfaces and capable of existing by itself, out of relation to consciousness — became a possible concept only with the advent of the mental structure.

The next structure of consciousness, according to Gebser, will perceive its world from an omnipresent “vantage point,” *aperspectively*, by an identity of the perceiver with the perceived that brooks no separating distances. This comes to saying that matter — at any rate, matter as we know it — not only came into existence with the mental structure but is also destined to fade out of existence with the arrival of the integral structure, inasmuch as this transcends the situated, perspectival outlook to which matter owes its “reality.”

Gebser saw in the dialectical process a method of the *ratio* — the deficient phase of the mental structure. He referred to it as a “pyramidal thinking,” which “has its most trenchant expression in the Hegelian axiom of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.” What the mythical structure treated as poles of an indivisible *polarity* (indivisible like the two poles of a magnet), the mental structure treats as opposites or antitheses of a *duality*. “Duality,” Gebser wrote, “is the mental splitting and tearing apart of polarity.” And from duality, he writes,

only a deficient, because unstable, form of unity can be realized as the unification of opposites in a third aspect.... This unstable form of unity is expressed by the fact that the antitheses or contraries are only able to beget a third element in a temporary for-better-or-worse union, a *tertium* which is again separated at the moment of its birth. (*The Ever-Present Origin*,³ 86)

Separated at the moment of its birth, the *tertium* becomes one of another pair of antitheses, which begets another *tertium*, and so on *ad infinitum*: “it does not represent a new unity but merely a quantity that becomes dependent on its antithesis or opposite, with which it in turn creates once more a momentarily unifying *tertium*.”

It is clear from these and other passages in *The Ever-Present Origin* how Gebser would have characterized spiral dynamics. Its dialectical process and its never-ending linearity situate it squarely within the rational (i.e., deficiently mental) consciousness structure. It thus should be borne in mind that the integral stage of consciousness discussed by McIntosh in his next chapter has little to do with Gebser’s integral structure of consciousness (which Gebser himself equated with the supermind of Sri Aurobindo’s terminology), nor should McIntosh’s notions of integrality and consciousness be confused with those of Gebser or Sri Aurobindo.

³ Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985 ♣.

“Like each of the previously arising, historically significant world views,” McIntosh writes in the **fourth** chapter, “integral consciousness is emerging in response to what might be characterized as a pull and a push.” What are the respective natures of the pull and the push? What is pulling and what is pushing? These are important questions. According to the author, the “push toward a new stage of consciousness comes from the pressure of unsatisfactory life conditions and the accumulating pathologies of previously existing stages.” But is it the unsatisfactory life conditions and/or pathologies of past stages of consciousness that contribute to the emergence of a new stage, or is it not rather the emergence of a new stage of consciousness that shows the existing life conditions in a new light and thereby reveals their pathologies?

The pull, McIntosh goes on to explain, “arises from the attraction power of a new stage’s fresh values — new truth, new beauty, and new ideals of morality that always accompany the birth of a new historical level.” How do these new ideals exert their attraction? Where do they come from? Given his naturalistic emergentism, the author is in no position to say.

The timidity of McIntosh’s philosophy, as compared to that of Gebser or Sri Aurobindo, also shows up in his aligning moral advancement with evolution itself: “because [postmodernism] is the most evolved, it is therefore the most morally advanced of the established stages of culture.” In contrast to this, Sri Aurobindo, like Gebser, regarded morality not as a *measure of evolution* but as a *stage in evolution*. While moral notions may have progressed during the mental stage of evolution, the very existence of ethics, like that of matter, begins and ends with this stage. “Ethics,” Sri Aurobindo wrote,

is a stage in evolution. That which is common to all stages is the urge of Sachchidananda⁴ towards self-expression. This urge is at first non-ethical, then infra-ethical in the animal, then in the intelligent animal even anti-ethical for it permits us to approve hurt done to others which we disapprove when done to ourselves. In this respect man even now is only half-ethical. And just as all below us is infra-ethical, so there may be that above us whither we shall eventually arrive, which is supra-ethical, has no need of ethics. The ethical impulse and attitude, so all-important to humanity, is a means by which it struggles out of the lower harmony and universality based upon inconscience and broken up by Life into individual discords towards a higher harmony and universality based upon conscient oneness with all existences. Arriving at that goal, this means will no longer be necessary or even possible, since the qualities and oppositions on which it depends will naturally dissolve and disappear in the final reconciliation. (*The Life Divine*,⁵ 104)

For McIntosh, the so-called developed world is the field of “a tug-of-war between traditionalism and postmodernism for the soul of the modernist majority.” Rising

⁴ Sachchidananda = sat + chit + ananda. Sri Aurobindo follows the original Vedanta of the Upanishads in positing an Ultimate Reality that can only be described in terms of its relations to the world: as substance (*sat*), it constitutes the world; as consciousness (*chit*), it contains the world; as an infinite bliss/quality/value (*ānanda*) it expresses and experiences itself in the world.

⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2005) ♣.

above these three, “integral consciousness recognizes that this seemingly unresolvable culture war in fact presents a powerfully problematic life condition that helps define integralism’s own transcendent vision.” Commenting on the (Western) psychology of the early 20th Century, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above.

Having decided to do without the Light above, McIntosh has no choice but to let integralism’s “transcendent vision” be defined by the problematic life conditions below. What distinguishes integral consciousness is its ability to deal wholesale with the set of problems created by all previous levels:

Unlike the previous stages, each of which take as their animating life conditions the problems of the immediately preceding level, the life conditions for integral consciousness can be found in the set of problems created by all of the previous levels at once. Integral consciousness finds its value-solutions by understanding how to harmonize and integrate the distinctive values of each historically significant world view. (*Ibid.*)

How does integral consciousness come to understand this? And are its value-solutions sufficient to solve the problems created by all of the previous levels? It would seem not, for the dialectical process must allow the integral consciousness to create problems of its own, to be solved by another synthesis, and so on and so forth. What Jean Gebser or Sri Aurobindo would say is that the integral or supramental consciousness, as defined by them, is indeed sufficient for solving the problems created by all previous levels, but that the solution cannot be achieved by *simply* harmonizing and integrating the distinctive values of each historically significant world view.

“Integral values,” McIntosh goes on to say, “arise out of an enlarged understanding of value itself.” To properly assess this claim, one would have to know more about his meaning of “understanding” and “value” than he appears prepared to say. Do we just think up the values? Do we devise them for a purpose? Do we discover them? Do they reveal themselves? What he offers in place of answers is what he believes to be of highest value to the integral worldview:

Of all the values of the integral worldview, that which it most esteems is the value of evolution itself. And with this exaltation of the value of evolution comes the ideal of “the prime directive.” The prime directive is to work to maintain the health and sustainability of the entire channel of cultural evolution, the spiral of development as a whole. (79)

That evolution is a value is news to me. I thought it was a fact, and if we have learned one thing from David Hume, it is that we can’t get a value (an “ought”) from a fact (an “is”). In any case, I seriously doubt that the “prime directive” of spiral worship can be significantly more effective than Kant’s categorical imperative. Nor do I see the maintenance of the health and sustainability of the entire channel of cultural evolution (up to the present?) as the ultimate goal of the evolutionary nissus.

One of the McIntosh’s favorite quotes by Clare Graves is the latter’s exclamation: “Damn it all, a person has the right to be who he is.”

And this of course applies not only to the people living in fragile tribal cultures, whom we all want to protect, but also to people living in fundamentalist cultures who may not be as appealing to postmodern sensibilities. So in addition to valuing the channel of evolution of consciousness and culture as a whole, integral consciousness is also able to appreciate the healthy values of each stage in a new way. (*Ibid.*)

Including head hunters (who no doubt consider head hunting essential to the health of their culture)? And how will the appreciation of the healthy values of different fundamentalist cultures by the integralist elite prevent different fundamental cultures from slitting each other's throats — literally or figuratively?

“[T]he best examples of how integral consciousness can use the values of the spiral as a whole,” McIntosh affirms, “are found in the context of politics.”

[I]ntegral consciousness transcends the politics of left and right by recognizing how the values and programs of traditional consciousness, modernist consciousness, and post-modern consciousness each have appropriate applications to different sets of life conditions. Sometimes the solutions of traditionalists apply, sometimes a modernist's approach is best, and sometimes the sensibilities of the postmodern worldview should prevail. (81)

And how do we decide which values and programs should be applied under which conditions? And how do we come to *agree* on a decision?

McIntosh believes that “by including the best of all worldviews in life condition appropriate proportion, the integral worldview is able to transcend all previous worldviews in its power to produce cultural evolution.” Jean Gebser and Sri Aurobindo — along with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin the most integral of integral thinkers — would probably agree that the power of integral consciousness to “produce cultural evolution” rests on its ability to transcend all previous worldviews, but they would certainly repudiate the notion that its ability to transcend all previous worldviews is due merely to an eclectic application of solutions offered by previous worldviews.

In the **fifth** chapter McIntosh asks, “what if we had a clear solution to not only one or two of these [global] problems, but a solution to all of them through the same method?” Well, that would certainly be great. The solution he proposes appears indeed to be necessary, but it is not by any means sufficient.

Global governance. This idea usually evokes one of two reactions: either that global governance is an idealistic fantasy best left for another century, or that global governance is the world's worst nightmare, a scenario in which the corporate elite gain complete control, and everything that is currently wrong with the U.S. government becomes writ-large on the world. (105)

[N]o matter how much power the U.N. or other international authorities are given, until there is true global law with jurisdiction over individuals, the evolutionary pressures that have produced a world of nation-states will continue to push and pull toward the next developmental level — a world federation. (107)

This is indeed the conclusion at which Sri Aurobindo arrived in *The Ideal of Human Unity*.⁶ In a postscript chapter added in 1949 he wrote:

There is nothing then in the development of events since the establishment of the United Nations Organisation . . . that need discourage us in the expectation of an ultimate success of this great enterprise. There are dangers and difficulties, there can be an apprehension of conflicts, even of colossal conflicts that might jeopardise the future, but total failure need not be envisaged unless we are disposed to predict the failure of the race. . . . We may rely, if on nothing else, on the evolutionary urge and, if on no other greater hidden Power, on the manifest working and drift or intention in the World-Energy we call Nature to carry mankind at least as far as the necessary next step to be taken, a self-preserving next step. . . . We conclude then that in the conditions of the world at present, even taking into consideration its most disparaging features and dangerous possibilities, there is nothing that need alter the view we have taken of the necessity and inevitability of some kind of world-union; the drive of Nature, the compulsion of circumstances and the present and future need of mankind make it inevitable. The general conclusions we have arrived at will stand and the consideration of the modalities and possible forms or lines of alternative or successive development it may take. The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status.

The present global economic meltdown is seen by many as a portent of precisely such a development, and it may indeed significantly accelerate it. But the essential factor that would not only secure the outcome but also ensure a safer, more harmonious process, is the need for a radical *psychological* change. Commenting on the Enlightenment ideals *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Ideal of Human Unity*:

The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. . . .

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life

⁶ *The Ideal of Human Unity* ♣ (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 1999) was written and published in monthly installments between 1915 and 1918. First brought out as a book in 1919, it was revised during the late 1930s and again in 1949. See Book Excerpts in this issue ♣ of *Anti-matters*.

insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of cooperation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life.

There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race....

Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way from the inner truth to the outer forms. Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent,— perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing,— the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.

McIntosh does admit that spirituality “is a rich and important part of the integral worldview,” but adds that

in order for integral philosophy to achieve its mission of helping to bring about the next historically significant stage of culture, it is important for integral philosophy to be described in ways that allow for the inclusion of a variety of different spiritual belief systems. (95)

Once again we run up against a lack of differentiation between the religious and the spiritual. It is of course possible to define these terms in a variety of ways, but the fact remains that there *are* core experiences testifying to an infinite self-existent consciousness or conscious existence, an aspiration to enter into contact with it, to grow one with it, to become an increasingly effective instrument for its self-expression. These core experiences must be distinguished from the many systems of practice and belief that have been founded upon them. Since we have two terms that are well suited to make this distinction and thereby reduce the potential for confusion — spirituality and religion — we ought to use them consistently.

Spirituality, according to Sri Aurobindo,

is not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things; a mental belief, creed or faith, an emotional aspiration, a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula are not spiritual achievement and experience. These things are of considerable value to mind and life; they are of value to the spiritual evolution itself as preparatory movements disciplining,

purifying or giving a suitable form to the nature; but they still belong to the mental evolution,— the beginning of a spiritual realisation, experience, change is not yet there. Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature. (*The Life Divine*, 889–890)

In the **sixth** chapter, titled “Integral Spirituality,” McIntosh writes that

the spirituality of integralists can be inspired by a wide variety of spiritual paths, traditions, and belief systems. These various forms of spirituality define the idea of the sacred differently, so the integral worldview does well not to adopt one univocal definition of spirit. (118)

There is no need to define the idea of the sacred or to adopt “a univocal definition of spirit.” Spirit is not a thing among many. It is all there is — the substance that constitutes the world, the consciousness that contains it, the force that shapes it, the delight that expresses and experiences itself in it. It is thereby, like the nature of the naturalist, intrinsically indefinable — and therefore indistinguishable from the latter. Oneness is its one indispensable characteristic, yet to properly know it is to know it as the inexhaustible origin of the boundless, riotous variety that informs the universe. McIntosh is thus right in saying that

integral philosophy relates to spirituality most effectively by acknowledging the reality of spirit, but not the final authority of any particular explanation thereof. Integral philosophy’s new frame of reality — its new agreement about the nature of the evolving universe — will not be broad enough to produce the cultural evolution it promises unless it occupies a philosophical position that honors and encompasses a diversity of spiritual paths. (119)

This chimes in with Sri Aurobindo’s views on the subject:

while many new spiritual waves with their strong special motives and disciplines must necessarily be the forerunners of a spiritual age, yet their claims must be subordinated in the general mind of the race and of its spiritual leaders to the recognition that all motives and disciplines are valid and yet none entirely valid since they are means and not the one thing to be done. The one thing essential must take precedence, the conversion of the whole life of the human being to the lead of the spirit. The ascent of man into heaven is not the key, but rather his ascent here into the spirit and the descent also of the spirit into his normal humanity and the transformation of this earthly nature...

Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being... [A]n evolution or conversion ... of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature; that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour. They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge — the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter — can be converted

into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. (*The Human Cycle*⁷)

McIntosh endorses Ken Wilber's view that just as the rise of modernist consciousness brought "the new and powerful capacity of reason," so the rise of integral consciousness brings the new capacity of "vision-logic" described by Wilber in the following words:

Where the formal-mind [modernist consciousness] establishes higher and creative relationships, vision-logic establishes networks of those relationships. The point is to place each proposition alongside numerous others, so as to be able to see, or "to vision," how the truth or falsity of any one proposition would affect the truth or falsity of all the others. Such panoramic or vision-logic apprehends a mass network or ideas, how they influence each other, what their relationships are. It is thus the beginning of a truly higher order synthesizing capacity, of making connections, relating truths, coordinating ideas, integrating concepts. (82)

If a tree-climbing primate were to catch a glimpse of the reasoning power of the human mind, how would it describe it to the other members of its troop? As a higher type of physical acrobatics? The impression I get from Wilber's description is that of a higher type of *mental* acrobatics. At any event, what is missing is what matters most: integral knowledge is not a knowledge that seeks, constructs, compares, relates, evaluates, synthesizes, or integrates. It does not seek truth but is in possession of it. While the transition from the one to the other kind of knowledge follows gradations, already the first step leads to a knowledge that is gnostic in this particular sense.

These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind and Intuition into Overmind and beyond it; there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis. All these degrees are gnostic in their principle and power; for even at the first we begin to pass from a consciousness based on an original Inconscience and acting in a general Ignorance or in a mixed Knowledge-Ignorance to a consciousness based on a secret self-existent Knowledge and first acted upon and inspired by that light and power and then itself changed into that substance and using entirely this new instrumentation. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 972)

Looking for further parallels between early modernism and integralism, McIntosh points out that "the rise of the modernist worldview in the seventeenth century was catalyzed by what we might refer to as the discovery of the big picture of the external universe." In our time, he goes on to say, "we are blessed with a similarly monumental discovery — the discovery of the big picture of the internal universe." And what, according to McIntosh, is the content of the big picture of the internal universe? "[T]he systemic structure of the spiral of development"!

This makes me think of a common strategy in the philosophy of consciousness: take something that is easier to analyze than consciousness and call it "consciousness."

⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Twin Lakes, VI: Lotus Press, 1999) ♣.

McIntosh's definition of "the internal universe" effectively forecloses proper investigation of the actual internal universe, which on closer examination turns out to be vastly richer in experiential content than the outer universe we are familiar with.⁸

The **seventh** chapter introduces us to the founders of integral philosophy. Having acknowledged the "enormous" achievements of Ken Wilber "in framing the synthesis of integral philosophy in its current form," McIntosh addresses some of Wilber's "weaknesses," e.g., his failure to "adequately address the basics (such as causation or being) in the analytical and methodical way that the philosophical profession generally requires." I'm not sure that it has been Wilber's aspiration to satisfy the philosophical profession, but I'm sure that McIntosh's magnanimous use of the English vocabulary won't satisfy it.

The first integral philosopher, according to McIntosh, was — out of all people, albeit not surprisingly, given the author's predilection for spiral dialectics — Georg W. F. Hegel. Hegel's philosophy is known to be the most complete specimen of the metaphysics which postulates that only what can be rationally conceived can be real. Because reason can conceive only the classes that things belong to, the real must be identical with the universal, and individual things can be real solely by virtue of the universals which appear in them. The existence of the world, accordingly, must flow from the universal, and this not as an effect flows from its cause but as a conclusion flows from its premises. "Thinking consideration," he thus wrote, "must deny itself such nebulous, at bottom sensuous, conceptions, as is in especial the so-called origin ... of the more highly developed animal organizations from the lower." For Hegel nature was as static as logic itself.

Next is Henri Bergson, who can "be numbered among the founders of integral philosophy because of the achievements of his philosophy and because of his significant influence on Whitehead, Teilhard, and Sri Aurobindo." I can't comment on the actual influence of Bergson on Alfred N. Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin, but to claim a "significant influence of Bergson on Sri Aurobindo" is preposterous and merely serves to draw into question the general reliability of the author's claims. Writing about what actually did (and what did not) influence his philosophical outlook, Sri Aurobindo had this to say:

What little I knew about philosophy I picked up desultorily in my general reading. I once read, not Hegel, but a small book on Hegel, but it left no impression on me. Later, in India, I read a book on Bergson, but that too ran off "like water from a duck's back". I remembered very little of what I had read and absorbed nothing. German metaphysics and most European philosophy since the Greeks seemed to me a mass of abstractions with nothing concrete or real that could be firmly grasped and written in a metaphysical jargon to which I had not the key.... As to Indian Philosophy, it was a little better, but not much.... My philosophy was formed first by the study of the Upanishads and the Gita; the Veda came later. They were the basis of my first practice of Yoga; I tried to realise what I read in my spiritual experience and succeeded; in fact I was never satisfied till experience came and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy,

⁸ See the article "Sri Aurobindo on Subliminal Consciousness" in *AntiMatters* 1 (2), 2007 ↗.

not on ideas by themselves. I owed nothing in my philosophy to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others. (*Autobiographical Notes*,⁹ 112–113)

Compare this with what McIntosh claims to know:

There is no doubt that Sri Aurobindo is a significant pioneer of integral consciousness, and he must be recognized as a prominent founder of the integral worldview. In my opinion, his masterful integration of evolution and spirituality in *The Life Divine* represents one of the twentieth century's most profound religious [!] works... Although I do not follow a spiritual path rooted in Hinduism, Aurobindo is nevertheless a personal spiritual hero of mine. However, his work is far more religious than it is philosophical. (179)

What, then, shall we make of the following testimonies?

Gandhi is one of the greatest saints, Tagore one of the greatest poets of modern India, but Sri Aurobindo is one of the greatest thinkers, indeed he has attained an incomparable triune greatness as poet, philosopher and saint. — Raymond Frank Piper, Professor of Philosophy, Syracuse University

Sri Aurobindo [is] the foremost of Indian thinkers, who has realized the most complete synthesis between the genius of the West and of the East. — Romain Rolland, Nobel Laureate

Aurobindo's treatises are among the most important works of our time in philosophy, ethics and humanities. Sri Aurobindo himself is one of the greatest living sages of our time. — Pitirim A. Sorokin, Founder of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University

I shall not restrict Sri Aurobindo's greatness to this age only. We have Plato, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel — but they do not have the same all-embracing metaphysical structure, they do not have the same vision. — Frederic Spiegelberg, Professor of Religion, Stanford University

According to McIntosh, Sri Aurobindo

wrote with the autocratic authority of an omniscient spiritual master, proclaiming universal truth as an all-knowing guru. He did not see the need to thoroughly argue for his conclusions, nor to explain how he came to know the fantastic truths he proclaimed. Moreover, Aurobindo did not acknowledge his [non-existent!] debt to Hegel or to most of the other Western philosophers whose work he clearly [!] relied on. Furthermore, although Aurobindo was devoted to an enlarged understanding of the evolution of consciousness through stages, he failed to adequately recognize the direct connection between the evolution of consciousness and the evolution of culture... I will not describe his work at length here because I believe it is primarily a form of integral spirituality rather than mainline integral philosophy. In fact, according to official Aurobindo biographer M. P. Pandit, Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary philosophy, which first appeared in his journal *Arya*, and which later became the foundation for *The Life Divine*, was produced through a kind of automatic writing. According to Pandit, "This corpus of knowledge, it

⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2006).

may be noted, was not a product of his brain — brilliant though it was. The whole of the *Arya*, he recalls, was transmitted directly into his pen.” (179–180)

To begin with, there is no “official biographer” of Sri Aurobindo. Several biographies exist, but none of them has received the distinction of being “official.” The passages from *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* quoted above should suffice to dispel the notion that Sri Aurobindo “failed to adequately recognize the direct connection between the evolution of consciousness and the evolution of culture.” That McIntosh entertains this notion is not altogether surprising, though, inasmuch as he would look for the determination of consciousness by culture whereas Sri Aurobindo wrote about the determination of culture by consciousness. With regard to automatic writing, there is a statement dictated by Sri Aurobindo in response to an article written by one Ramchandra Majumdar, published in 1945. It contains the following passage:

One or two less important points have to be mentioned to show how little reliance can be placed on the details of Ramchandra’s narrative. His statement about the automatic writing is only an imaginative inference and in fact quite groundless. Sri Aurobindo totally denies that he used the automatic writing for any kind of moral or other edification of those around him.... The writing was done as an experiment as well as an amusement and nothing else. I may mention here the circumstances under which it was first taken up. [Sri Aurobindo’s brother] Barin had done some very extraordinary automatic writing at Baroda in a very brilliant and beautiful English style and remarkable for certain predictions which came true and statements of fact which also proved to be true although unknown to the persons concerned or anyone else present.... Sri Aurobindo was very much struck and interested and he decided to find out by practising this kind of writing himself what there was behind it. This is what he was doing in Calcutta. But the results did not satisfy him and after a few further attempts at Pondicherry he dropped these experiments altogether.... His final conclusion was that though there are sometimes phenomena which point to the intervention of beings of another plane not always or often of a high order the mass of such writings comes from a dramatising element in the subconscious mind; sometimes a brilliant vein in the subliminal is struck and then predictions of the future and statements of things [unknown] in the present and past come up, but otherwise these writings have not a great value. (*Autobiographical Notes*, 95–96)

To a disciple’s question about his method of writing Sri Aurobindo replied: “My own method is not to quiet the mind, for it is eternally quiet, but to turn it upward and inward.” The disciple then wrote: “I understand that you wrote many things in that way, but people also say that Gods — no, Goddesses — used to come and tell you the meaning of the Vedas.” To this Sri Aurobindo replied: “People talk a stupendous amount of rubbish. I wrote everything I have written since 1909 in that way, i.e. out of or rather through a silent mind and not only a silent mind but a silent consciousness. But Gods and Goddesses had nothing to do with the matter.” In another letter he wrote:

I have made no endeavours in writing. I have simply left the higher Power to work and when it did not work I made no efforts at all. It was in the old intellectual days that I sometimes tried to force things, but not after I started the development of poetry and prose by Yoga. Let me remind you also that when I was writing the *Arya* and also since whenever I write these letters or replies, I never think or seek for expressions or try to write in good style; it is out of a silent mind that I write whatever comes ready-shaped

from above. Even when I correct, it is because the correction comes in the same way.... By the way, please try to understand that the supra-intellectual (not the supramental only) is the field of a spontaneous automatic action. To get it or to get yourself open to it needs efforts, but once it acts there is no effort. (*Letters on Poetry and Art*, 216–217)

Two insights are to be gained from these quotations. The first is that a careless reader may find it hard to distinguish between a supra-intellectual source of inspiration, which expresses itself through a silent consciousness, and automatic writing, a process in which the writer's hand is used in a mediumistic fashion, by mostly subconscious influences of doubtful quality. The second is that an enormous difference exists between the two processes. In one, the writer surrenders the control of her hand to an unknown influence. In the other, the agent is fully conscious of a suprarational power acting through him and of the exact use it makes of his *antaḥkaraṇa* (the perceptive Sanskrit phrase for the mental faculties and the vital force operative in a body, literally "inner instrument").

In another letter Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Let me tell you in confidence, that I never, never, never was a philosopher, although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether.... How I managed to do it and why? First, because [Paul Richard] proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review – and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. (*On Himself*,¹⁰ 374)

As you will remember, Sri Aurobindo also wrote that "I owed nothing in my philosophy to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others." I suppose this explains – to the extent that McIntosh's remarks are not wholly unfounded – why Sri Aurobindo "did not see the need to thoroughly argue for his conclusions, nor to explain how he came to know the fantastic truths he proclaimed." Let me mention in this context a striking element of my own experience when I read *The Life Divine* in 1972/3. Ever so often, while reading a sentence or paragraph, a question would arise in my mind. What struck me was that, quite regularly, I would find this exact question answered in the very next paragraph or chapter. This is what I expect from a work of philosophy but have rarely encountered elsewhere.

Just as "it is not every untrained mind that can follow the mathematics of relativity or other difficult scientific truths or judge of the validity either of their result or their process," so "all men can have a spiritual experience and can follow it out and verify it in themselves, *but only when they have acquired the capacity or can follow the inner methods by which that experience and verification are made possible.*" (Emphasis added.) What more can one say with regard to the verifiability of Sri Aurobindo's "fantastic truths"?

¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972).

In order to express what he “had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily,” Sri Aurobindo chose the conceptual framework he had found in the Upanishads. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he introduced his description of the supraphysical planes of existence with these words:

I shall follow here consistently the Vedic and Vedantic arrangement of which we find the great lines in the Upanishads, first because it seems to me at once the simplest and most philosophical and more especially because it was from the beginning envisaged from the point of view of the utility of these various planes to the supreme object of our liberation. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*,¹¹ 448)

In this and only this sense can one say, as McIntosh does, that Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual path is “rooted in Hinduism”.¹² In a letter to a Muslim, who had observed that most members of the ashram of Sri Aurobindo came from a Hindu background, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “The Asram has nothing to do with Hindu religion or culture or any religion or nationality. The Truth of the Divine which is the spiritual reality behind all religions and the descent of the supramental which is not known to any religion are the sole things which will be the foundation of the work of the future.” When the disciple persisted, Sri Aurobindo set forth his position at some length:

Every Hindu here — even those who were once orthodox Brahmins and have grown old in it, — give up all observance of caste, take food from Pariahs and are served by them, associate and eat with Mahomedans, Christians, Europeans, cease to practise temple worship or Sandhya (daily prayer and mantras), accept a non-Hindu from Europe as their spiritual director. These are things people who have Hinduism as their aim and object would not do — they do it because they are obliged here to look to a higher ideal in which these things have no value. What is kept of Hinduism is Vedanta and Yoga, in which Hinduism is one with Sufism of Islam and with the Christian mystics. But even here it is not Vedanta and Yoga in their traditional limits (their past), but widened and rid of many ideas that are peculiar to the Hindus. If I have used Sanskrit terms and figures, it is because I know them and do not know Persian and Arabic. I have not the slightest objection to anyone here drawing inspiration from Islamic sources if they agree with the Truth as Sufism agrees with it. On the other hand I have not the slightest objection to Hinduism being broken to pieces and disappearing from the face of the earth, if that is the Divine Will. I have no attachment to past forms; what is Truth will always remain; the Truth alone matters.¹³

As to Sri Aurobindo’s “proclaiming universal truth as an all-knowing guru,” it is hard to see how Sri Aurobindo’s insistence on the ineffability of Truth and the insufficiencies

¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1999).

¹² It is worth noting here that Sri Aurobindo’s father did everything he could to prevent his son from becoming acquainted with the cultural and religious life of India. At the age of seven he was shipped off to Manchester with instructions for his new guardian not to let him receive any religious instruction, and not to allow him to make the acquaintance of any other Indian. Sri Aurobindo returned to India fourteen years later, after completing a thorough classical education at King’s College, Cambridge.

¹³ Letter of 17 November 1932, published in *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 52 (August 2000), 74.

of intellectual expression could have escaped McIntosh.

When Wisdom comes, her first lesson is, “There is no such thing as knowledge; there are only aperçus of the Infinite Deity.” (*Essays Divine and Human*,¹⁴ 431)

Systematise we must, but even in making & holding the system, we should always keep firm hold on this truth that all systems are in their nature transitory and incomplete. (*Ibid.*)

[A]t one stage in the Yoga it becomes necessary to refuse to accept as definite and final any kind of intellectual idea or opinion whatever in its intellectual form and to hold it in a questioning suspension until it is given its right place and luminous shape of truth in a spiritual experience enlightened by supramental knowledge. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, 772)

But thought nor word can seize eternal Truth:
The whole world lives in a lonely ray of her sun.
In our thinking's close and narrow lamp-lit house
The vanity of our shut mortal mind
Dreams that the chains of thought have made her ours;
But only we play with our own brilliant bonds;
Tying her down, it is ourselves we tie. . . .
For Truth is wider, greater than her forms.
A thousand icons they have made of her
And find her in the idols they adore;
But she remains herself and infinite. (*Savitri*,¹⁵ 276)

In the remainder of the chapter the author honors the contributions of Gebser, James Mark Baldwin, Abraham Maslow, Graves, Jürgen Habermas and, last but of course not least, Wilber. The chapter ends with a list of what McIntosh believes to be his very own contributions to integral philosophy. One of them is the emphasis on global governance:

although others have connected the integral worldview with the evolutionary goal of global governance, I have argued that this goal will become a central focus of the integral political agenda as it emerges throughout the twenty-first-century. My original contribution in this area consists in the description of why an integrally informed world federation is desirable, achievable, and inevitable. (197)

In actual fact, Sri Aurobindo got there first with his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

In the **eighth** chapter McIntosh attempts to clarify the “minimal metaphysics” necessary for the integrity of the integral worldview. “This includes the recognition that evolution is subject to some kind of transcendental causation or morphogenetic pull, and that it is a purposeful phenomenon of growth that proceeds in a generally positive direction.” Much to his credit, he also reiterates that the “metaphysical recognition of spirit’s role in evolution is integral philosophy’s most important foundational truth.”

Because it constructs its worldview “so as to include all the kinds of experience that humans have demonstrated their ability to have,” he continues, “integral philosophy

¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997).

¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 1995) ♣.

situates itself in between science and religion.” And staying connected with science, he believes, is “fairly straightforward”:

integral philosophy does this by maintaining that when there is a direct conflict between science and anything else, science (but not scientism) wins. In other words, science is the final authority on matters of the external universe. (214)

This is problematic for several reasons. One is that there is far more scientism out there than there is genuine science. Another is that it is not so easy to distinguish scientism from science — otherwise we wouldn’t have so much scientism posing as science. Yet another reason arises from the fact that science operates within an interpretative framework that formulates questions and interprets answers, for this framework is *not* itself testable by scientific methods.

In the **tenth** chapter McIntosh acknowledges that the line between science and philosophy has been blurred, and that, in particular “science by itself cannot prove that evolution has no meaning or that it is simply random and without purpose.” Materialists “are certainly entitled to argue for a philosophy which claims that the universe is a random accident. But they are not entitled to claim that this pessimistic philosophy of the universe is the only one supported by science.” It would seem to me that if more than one philosophy is “supported” by science, then it is actually beyond science to support *any* philosophy.

As to religion, McIntosh argues that if integral theory preserves it as a category distinct from philosophy, then

it can allow for the full truth of both of these kinds of spiritual experience [the personal nature of Deity and the impersonal nature of the Ultimate]. But if integral philosophy maintains that it can only recognize “empirical spirituality,” then to be consistent it must recognize either the personal or the impersonal nature of the Ultimate as the most empirically valid — -it must choose between a loving God and Nondual Emptiness.... It seems unlikely that a clear consensus can be reached about which type of religion is right, even within the integral stage of cultural development.... In fact, at this point in cultural evolution it seems that these theological differences provide a kind of valuable diversity that enriches our spiritual culture, even as we attempt to move beyond the relativistic limitations of postmodernism’s polite spiritual pluralism. (233)

The notion that if integral philosophy recognizes only “empirical spirituality” then it is forced to regard either the personal or the impersonal nature of the Ultimate as the “most empirically valid,” is a *non sequitur*. The need to choose between mutually complementary insights or experiences is contrary to anything deserving to be called “integral philosophy.” It is only the deficiently mental worldview that cannot tolerate the rich plurality by which the infinity of the One expresses itself. For the unaperspectival consciousness, such complementary experiences are joined in an indivisible polarity, and for the aperspectival consciousness they are united by a “verition” (to use Gebser’s term) that has no mental analogue. Integral pluralism is the diametrical opposite to “postmodernism’s polite spiritual pluralism” — the relativism that makes possible the transition from the rational hegemonism and exclusivism of modernity to the verition of spirit in its unlimited diversity.

In the final analysis, “integral philosophy” is a contradiction in terms, for both science and philosophy are mental ways of structuring reality. Even an integral worldview is a conceptual and therefore a mental framework. A truly integral consciousness has no need for the fumbings of philosophy.