

Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, and the Subject-Object Relationship

or... How the Self Evolves **with Robert Kegan**

by Elizabeth Debold (What is Enlightenment Magazine)

Introduction

Have you ever thought of yourself as an *epistemologist*? Epistemology: the study of the nature and limits of knowledge. Yikes, what a mouthful—one of those too-long words bandied about in philosophy classes. But how about taking a different tack: Have you ever shared the thrill of triumph with an infant taking her first steps? Or been amazed by the experience of all of the pieces coming together in an epiphany of a new and different perspective? Or even wondered how you and another could seem to speak the same language, use the same words, and not really understand each other? In other words, have you ever been struck by how absolutely remarkable, complex, and sometimes frustrating is the human capacity for learning and understanding? Then maybe you *are* a bit of an epistemologist. This is epistemology, Robert Kegan style, taken out of the philosophy classroom into the trials and triumphs of the struggle to make meaning—to know and understand—through the course of our lives. Kegan, a noted Harvard developmental psychologist, has charted the evolving upward movement of consciousness across the life span, revealing how the self transforms through the subject-object relationship.

Right—the *subject-object relationship*. Now, don't turn the page! Yes, it does sound abstract and perhaps a bit boring, but, frankly, as Kegan makes clear, this is the crux of the transformation of consciousness. Think about it: When the great philosopher and teacher J. Krishnamurti calls us to observe and join him in inquiry, asking, "Now why is there this division in me? The 'me' and the 'not me,'" he is pointing to the relationship between subject (me) and object (not me). As Kegan explains, this reality-making relationship—what we identify with as subject and what we consider to be object—ultimately determines the difference between a baby and a buddha. And most of us fall somewhere in between. The transformation of the subject-object relationship, enabling us to become truly objective and see what is true, is actually a goal of much spiritual practice. Maybe all of us are closet epistemologists.

But it wasn't just Kegan's approach to epistemology that made us so interested in speaking with him. Kegan is a humanitarian in the deepest possible sense. He bears witness to the "astonishingly intimate activity—the activity of making sense" that defines our struggle for dignity in the face of the overwhelming immensity of the universe and the fragile finitude of our lives. To listen to Kegan is to join him in marveling at the miracle of transformation that unfolds in the myriad creative moments that constitute our constant quest for understanding and knowledge. His motivation for studying the transformations of consciousness in adulthood arises in response to the question: What order of consciousness will allow human beings to respond positively to the demands of a pluralistic postmodern culture? To answer that question, Kegan doesn't just stand above the fray. As a parent, therapist, consultant, and the first William and Miriam Meehan

Professor of Adult Learning and Professional Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, he is

in the trenches, working directly to help others to transform and evolve. In the following interview, Kegan shares with us the actual mechanisms and often syncopated rhythms of human transformation, and expresses the urgent need for us to evolve in order to meet the demands of our rapidly accelerating world.

Interview

WIE: *I'd like to begin by asking you, from your perspective, what is transformation? What exactly is it that transforms in our development, creating different stages or, as you've called them, orders of consciousness?*

ROBERT KEGAN: First, let me say that because both the subject and the phenomenon of transformation are enormously exciting and appealing, there's a temptation to become intoxicated by the thrill, hope, and sheer spectacle of it all, which can make it difficult to get at what transformation actually is. You might say that we can easily confuse the rose with its perfume. These emotions that are associated with transformation, which are what I'm calling the perfume, are a very important part of the rose. However, if you have an actual interest in bringing transformation about in relationship to yourself or others, then it's very important to separate the rose from the perfume. Because the emotions and the experience, the gratitude or the terror, associated with transformation are very different from what transformation actually is. To look at transformation itself requires us to make a shift that can initially feel dry because we're tending to its analytic dimension as opposed to its aesthetic dimension. And to make this analytic shift, I think it's useful to think about the word *transformation* itself. At the heart of the word is "form." So if you're interested in the analytic side of the rose, not only the perfume, then you can't even begin to engage the question of transformation without asking a very simple question, which is: What form is transforming? What is the form that is undergoing some gradual or dramatic reconstruction of its parts into what is really a new whole?

Transformation entails a reconstruction of basic forms of the distribution of energy or information or production. Take, for example, the cooling of the universe since the big bang—you have a redistribution of energy that changes how the universe hangs together. Or take the transformation of the written word—beginning with manuscripts inscribed by hand on parchment and preserved in urns in the possession of a very tiny priesthood, then to the Gutenberg revolution of the printing press that made possible the mass production of text, and now to the instant distribution of language through a keystroke on a computer—this is the reconstruction of the very form in which information can be composed and distributed. So, first of all, you have to put a stake in the ground and name what form you are following in looking for transformation. And that requires you to have

some grasp of the internal architecture of that form and also of the process by which it comes apart and re-forms itself.

So, with that said, let me go back to your starting question about stages of human development and transformation.

WIE: *And from what you've just said, I understand that we have to identify what "form" in human consciousness transforms in development.*

RK: Yes. And if I look at the discussions about transformation and the ways in which people talk about its practice, I'd say that the piece that I can add to the story here—and it's just a piece, but it is too often missing—is what comes from thinking more seriously about the activity of our knowing, which, in philosophy, is the world of epistemology. Epistemology, which is often considered a very dry and analytic topic, is actually a very dynamic thing. It is, after all, not about what we know but about the process by which we *make* reality, the process by which we *create* knowledge.

This is simultaneously a rational and passionate matter. All kinds of emotions are associated with having a given way of knowing the world and being identified with it as well as with the process of transition from one way of knowing to another. Why? Because we take our way of *composing* reality to be *reality*. The great embarrassment or liberation of transformation itself is the recognition that what we have been taking as reality is actually only a *construction* of reality.

THE SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP WIE: *How do we construct our reality? This must be an extremely complex process.*

RK: Well, actually, simplicity is the key to understanding this process. I think it was Oliver Wendell Holmes who talked about the simplicity on one side of complexity and the simplicity on the other side of complexity. The simplicity on the wrong side of complexity is dull and dumb, but when you get to the other side, you have a simplicity that gets elementally to the point. So, in terms of how we make meaning, at its simplest, we are talking about the transformation of the subject-object relationship.

Have you ever heard such a big buildup to the subject-object relationship, which is usually presented as the driest thing in the world? The darling of sophomore philosophy class, it just puts everyone to sleep. But what I'm trying to do is create this recognition that it's a sleeping key to a better understanding of transformation. For the past thirty years, I've been attending to this one thing: the evolution of the subject-object relationship.

So what is the "subject-object relationship"? It is a fundamental distinction in the way that we make sense of our experience—a distinction that shapes our thinking, our feeling, our social relating, and our ways of relating to internal aspects of ourselves. The subject-

object relationship is not just an abstraction but a living thing in nature. What I mean by "object" are those aspects of our experience that are apparent to us and can be looked at, related to, reflected upon, engaged, controlled, and connected to something else. We can be *objective* about these things, in that we don't see them as "me." But other aspects of our experience we are so identified with, embedded in, fused with, that we just experience them as ourselves. This is what we experience *subjectively*—the "subject" half of the subject-object relationship.

What gradually happens is not just a linear accretion of more and more that one can look at or think about, but a qualitative shift in the very shape of the window or lens through which one looks at the world. A given subject-object relationship establishes the shape of the window. Thus, for a certain period of time, a particular distinction between what is object and what is subject persists. Then you know the world through that system,

and while your knowing gets increasingly elaborated, it all goes on within the terms of that system. So, for example, when you get to be what we call a "concrete thinker," usually between the ages of six and ten, you are able to learn facts, more and more facts, but you're still just learning the facts. Children at this age and stage collect baseball cards, bugs, leaves from trees—they come to understand the world around them by identifying, naming, and labeling the objects in it. But you have to make a qualitative move to transform the subject-object relationship before you are able to *organize* these facts into bigger abstract ideas, themes, and values. This, then, becomes the next epistemology. Each qualitative move takes a whole mental structure that had been experienced as subject and shifts it so that it becomes seen as object.

If you study the processes of the forming and re-forming of ways of knowing from childhood right through adulthood, you come to recognize a rhythm in this process. We start from a position, in earliest infancy, where there's absolutely no subject-object distinction at all, because the infant's knowing is entirely subjective. There's no "not me," no internal vs. external. There's no distinction, for example, in the source of the discomfort caused by bright light or hunger in the belly. There's no distinction between self and other.

WIE: *And what is the ultimate extension of this process? The evolutionary goal?*

RK: The ultimate end state of this story—of this process of gradually but qualitatively shifting more and more of what was subject to object—would be a state in which the subject-object distinction comes to an end again, in the *opposite* direction than in the first minutes of life. You know, in the sixties, Alan Watts was fond of saying that his baby was a buddha. But that showed a total misunderstanding. There are two different ways that you can get out of the subject-object split. One way is by being entirely subject with no object—that was Watts' baby. And the other way is through the complete emptying of the subject into the object so that there is, in a sense, no subject at all—that is, you are not looking out on the world from any vantage point that is apart from it. You're then taking the world's perspective. That's the Buddha. There's an enormous difference between the adualism of an infant and the adualism of the Buddha.

The ultimate state of development would have to do with some way in which the self has become entirely identified with the world. It would be the recognition essentially of the oneness of the universe, which is something we have heard over and over again in wisdom literatures of the East and West, but which usually goes in one ear and out the other, because what does it actually mean to most people?

WIE: *That's true. But this would have to be more than a recognition or idea of oneness. As a stage of development, it would mean that one's ongoing state of consciousness would transcend the limitations of the subject-object relationship itself. As far as I understand it, however, this ultimate state is not one of the stages of development that you have identified in your research—not yet, at least. But you have observed that there is a regular pattern to the way that our experience of what is subject and what is object changes over the life span, moving in the direction of greater objectivity.*

RK: Yes. At each point in time or development, what gives a form of psychological meaning-making its integrity is that there is a definable, literally namable, distinction being made between what is subject and what is object. These forms have a temporary durability, if you can accept that contradiction in terms, because each

sustains itself for some period of time.

AN EVOLUTIONARY TRUCE WIE: *In your book The Evolving Self, you call this an "evolutionary truce."*

RK: That's right. And that's what creates a stage of development. In using the word "truce," I am pointing to the fact that this process of formation and re-formation of these natural epistemologies is very dynamic. So, when I say we're constructing reality, I don't mean it in the sense of constructing a house so that we can live in it for the next four or five years with no attention to the continuous constructing and preserving of the house. My hope in choosing a word like "truce" was to suggest that it has to continuously maintain itself. When you keep balance, you are always going out of balance and back in balance, continuously. But when you have a hardy capacity to maintain a balance at a given point of equilibrium, it looks like there is a stability.

For example, when you see someone walking across an expanse, what you are mainly impressed by, if you are really thinking about it, is the stability of that very extraordinary gymnastic activity called walking. And if you have ever lived with an infant and watched him or her gradually acquire this capacity, you come to appreciate this. Because in walking, with each leg, with each foot, you push and propel yourself off that foot and you throw yourself out of balance. You *must*, in order to move forward. And then, with the other foot, you simultaneously correct yourself and throw yourself out of balance again. You continuously do this, and when you get good at it, what it looks like is a tremendously stable dynamic motion of balance. But it actually is a continuous imbalance and restoring of balance, according to a single principle. Similarly, to maintain a certain evolutionary truce, or stage of development, there is this continuous balancing, a setting

and resetting of the distinctions between what is subject and what is object.

WIE: *This sounds similar to the balancing mechanism that you call "dynamic equilibrium," which is something that you say impedes transformation. Could you speak about how this works?*

RK: Okay—but first some context. I've always liked what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said about the two great forces of the universe: One is what physicists would basically call *entropy*, which is essentially the loss of focus, and dissipation of energy, and increasing randomness, and so on, and the other is the opposite of entropy,

or *negentropy*, which means becoming more complex, having more focus, and operating at a higher harmonic or concentration of energy. He was impressed with the way in which everything in the universe, living and nonliving, was participating in one process that had to do with entropy and then also has the possibility of participating in the opposite process—not just "running down," but "running up," so to speak.

The study of development, at least as I see it, is an *attending to*—both a reverencing and a seeking to support—the negentropic processes of increasingly concentrated energy or increasing focus. Now, in actual practice, when you're trying to be a part of supporting these processes, you pretty quickly come up against a third force that Whitehead never talked about. This force is not about things running down or running up, or even being still—it is a *dynamic*. There's a lot of energy and movement in it, but because it involves energy and movement

in countervailing directions, the *effect* is a balance, or a tendency for things to stay pretty much as they are. And that's what we call *dynamic equilibrium*.

Now described analytically from the outside, a dynamic equilibrium *is* an evolutionary truce, which essentially can be described as an epistemology. It creates a boundary between what can be seen (object) and what one is identified with (subject)—and so it names a way of structuring or shaping the world. From the inside out, described phenomenologically, this equilibrium is a truce between what we call *basic life commitments*. On the one hand, you have those commitments that you have and can name—that are the objects in consciousness. But if you work with people enough, and you gain their trust and help them find a language for it, they can begin to name not only the objective commitment they *have*, but the commitment that *has them*. The commitment they're subject to, that they are not even aware of. For example, a leader who has a commitment to giving up hierarchical forms of leadership may also have a competing commitment to maintaining control, or to being loved and admired, to being the "big daddy" who dispenses all the goodies. So these two very powerful commitments create a conflict, which leads to a living contradiction. The dynamic equilibrium is itself a contradiction that is maintaining itself, which we are caught up in. And in a way, you can say that growth and development is a process by which, instead of being caught in the contradiction, we have a bigger space where we can look *at* the contradiction. This gives us the chance to move to some new equilibrium or some new epistemology.

DO ADULTS TRANSFORM?

WIE: *What capacity do we adults show for transformation? In his new book, Boomeritis, Ken Wilber writes, "Psychologists who track adult life-span development find that most individuals go through a series of major transformations from birth to adolescence, whereupon transformation tends to taper off. Although many horizontal translations subsequently occur—the 'seasons of a person's life'— vertical transformations to higher levels tend to completely stop. From age 25 to around 55, very few vertical transformations occur." His conclusion is: "It's almost impossible to get an adult human being to transform."*

RK: Ken and I have talked about this *exact* question on numerous occasions. If you tend to focus only on adulthood, as he is doing, you can tend toward a somewhat discouraging conclusion about how rare development is after we've reached our full physical

We need to keep in mind that every adult has a history of a number of extraordinary developmental transformations, and each transformation builds a more complex and elaborated edifice. The process of its undoing—the capacity of the universe to win through these increasingly complex defenses that have better and better ways of deluding us into the belief that we have grasped reality as it actually is—gets harder and harder to do. For example, there's a dramatic transformation from birth to about twenty-one months. In not even two years, a tremendous transformation takes place from having almost no distinction between subject and object to the beginning of a distinction between what is me and what is not me. The child becomes a member of a social world! That's an enormous transformation. But the next transformation takes maybe twice as long, and then the following one takes twice as long as that one, and so on. So then looking at adult development, you could say,

"My goodness, things have really slowed down." There's a way in which that's true, but there's another way in which, if you step far enough back, it's understandable that it takes more time.

The great glory within my own field in the last twenty-five years has been the recognition that there are these qualitatively more complex psychological, mental, and spiritual landscapes that await us and that we are called to after the first twenty years of life. Much of my time in this period has been spent following the development of people exactly between the ages that Ken was talking about there. And if you revisit people systematically every three years for twenty years, and then put the different pictures together, the amount of development is actually very impressive.

WIE: *Could you speak about what those transformations in adulthood look like?*

RK: In adolescence and early adulthood, a transformation occurs in which we essentially develop the complexity to internalize and identify with the values of our surround—an epistemology that enables us to be truly a socialized member of the tribe. Socialization, from a psychological point of view, is the process by which we become more a part of society because the society actually becomes more a part of us. Thus, the self feels whole, connected, and in harmony through its identification with a set of values and beliefs that both make the self up and simultaneously preserve its intimate connections—

relationships to the bigger tribe or to the culture of which one is a part. So a person who has reached this level is able to think more long term, more abstractly. Based on the particular tribe or culture, one constructs a set of values with which one is identified. And we call this the *socialized mind*, or third order consciousness.

Now, the transformation that is most common to the period from twenty-five to fifty is a move out of this orientation of being shaped by one's surround to become what we call *self-authoring*. This is fourth order consciousness. While this particular transformation doesn't happen for everyone, it does take place with considerable density. In our highly pluralistic postmodern world, we do not have a homogeneous definition of who we should be and how we should live. We're living in the midst of a rapidly expanding pluralism of tribes, which means that there are competing demands for our loyalty, faithfulness, time, money, attention, and so on. Thus, the stance of being shaped by our surround is actually insufficient to handle modern life. Rather, we are called on to have an internal authority by which we ourselves are able to name what is valuable, or respond to the claims and expectations on us, sort through them, and make decisions about which ones we will and will not follow. So we are not just made up by or written on by a culture, but we ourselves become the writer of a reality that we then are faithful to. Within a Western context, this move is often characterized in terms of personal empowerment. This transformation, to the fourth order, is enormously powerful and has a captivating perfume. It is, in fact, a highly prevalent and dramatic transformation between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. But it's not the transformation that people who think about higher stages of consciousness are interested in.

AN UNPRECEDENTED COMPLEXITY

WIE: *But it's the foundation for a transformation to higher levels of consciousness. Moreover, the transformation you have just been describing from third to fourth order, from the socialized to the self-*

authoring mind, is what enables us to live successfully in a changing pluralistic society. This relates to a question that I have about our rapidly changing present moment. Dee Hock, a leader in organizational change, told us that "life is eternal becoming, or it's nothing." In other words, he's saying that change is the very nature of life. So, because of the rapidity of change in our lives, we're all under a different kind of pressure than human beings have experienced before. What effect does our current historical context, which is characterized by change in a way that is different from ever before, have on our development?

RK: In my book *In Over Our Heads*, I'm basically addressing a rather similar question, which is: What is the nature of the mental demands that modern life makes on us adults? If you think of the culture itself as a school in which every adult is compulsorily enrolled and the subjects of the school are our various roles (spouse, parent, worker, etc.), then what you find, over and over again, is a demand for a particular order of consciousness that is of unprecedented complexity. The order of complexity that is actually being demanded is probably pretty close to the GREEN meme [see article on Spiral Dynamics, "The Never-Ending Upward Quest," in this issue], or what I have just called the self-authoring mind or fourth order consciousness. In fact, I think if we are to overcome the

tribal hostilities and the big lesions in the human family, then more and more people need to develop fourth order, self-authoring consciousness. That is the modal growing edge of the species as a whole.

However, some people who think a lot about consciousness and transformation see the fundamental growing edge as the move *beyond* the GREEN level to a recognition of the limitations of one's own self system, which in my lingo would be a move to the fifth order or the *self-transforming self*. This is a very important transformation that some small, very small, percentage of the human population is working on. But the data across a number of studies suggest that a majority of even well-advantaged, well-positioned adults haven't yet reached even the self-authoring mind, fourth order consciousness. This means that they do not have the capacities that would enable them to *thrive* within today's increasingly pluralistic world that requires individuals to exercise a kind of authority that, throughout human history, human beings have never had to do. In fact, pooling lots of different studies, we found that 58 percent of a composite sample of people, who were middle-class and most likely had the great advantages, had *not* reached the self-authoring level or what would be a pretty good correspondence to the GREEN meme in Beck's system.

WIE: *So, this is 58 percent of a selected sample who have not reached the self-authoring level, or the GREEN meme. What about in the population as a whole?*

RK: Among a composite sample of people from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds in the U.S., 79 percent have *not* reached the fourth order. This means that 21 percent of the sample reached the self-authoring level or beyond. And only a tiny percentage of people in the studies are *beyond* the fourth order.

WIE: *So what about that tiny percent of people beyond self-authoring, or fourth order— what are the characteristics of the next, fifth order of consciousness?*

RK: When you get to the edge of the fourth order, you start to see that all the ways that you had of making

meaning or making sense out of your experience are, each in their own way, partial. They're leaving certain things out. When people who have long had self-authoring consciousness come to the limits of self-authoring, they recognize the partiality of even their own internal system, even though like any good system, it does have the capacity to handle all the "data," or make systematic, rational sense of our experience. In the Western world, we often call that "objectivity." But just because you can handle everything, put it all together in some coherent system, obviously doesn't make it a truthful apprehension—or truly objective. And this realization is what promotes the transformation from the fourth to the fifth order of consciousness, from the self-authoring self to what we call the self-transforming self. So, you start to build a way of constructing the world that is much more friendly to contradiction, to oppositeness, to being able to hold on to multiple systems of thinking. You begin to see that the life project is not about continuing to defend one formation of the self but about the ability to have the self literally *be* transformative. This means that the self is more about movement through different forms of consciousness than about the defending and identifying with

any one form.

WIE: *I think Don Beck would call your fifth order of consciousness a move to the Second Tier, which is an evolutionary transformation that takes us beyond survival mode to a more integral perspective on life.*

RK: Yes. And it is also important to keep in mind that in this move from the fourth to the fifth order, from self-authoring to self-transforming, you have very important distinctions between those who are in the earlier process of that transition and those in the later stages—who have actually achieved the fifth order. So, there's a critical distinction between on the one hand, a negative postmodernism that is all about trashing any ideological form, which is only deconstructive and is all about a fatigue with and critique of the ideological, and on the other, what I call a more reconstructive postmodernism that is not just about trashing. When you get to the other side of this four to five shift, and you've moved to this more reconstructive or transformative side, then there's a whole capacity for reconnecting to these ideologies and recognizing that each of them is partial. You're building relationships among them rather than holding on to one and projecting the other. It's a much more positive spirit.

GOD & THE FRONTIERS OF DEVELOPMENT

WIE: *For my last few questions, I'd like to step back from where we are now developmentally to look more at the motivation behind and future possibilities of human transformation. First, a fundamental question: What drives the movement of development?*

RK: Well, that's a very good question essentially for getting at what a person's beliefs are. I can give you a domesticated answer that has a certain surface integrity to it. Something like: Organisms organize, that is their nature, and they are drawn to experiences of discrepancy in order to give them form. We have all kinds of good empirical evidence that shows how we seek to give order to things. And so you could posit that there is a "drive" within living forms, including humans, to shape reality and create ever more satisfactory connections or relationships to the universe. So a given truce is a good enough way of putting the world together for a certain period of time, because we not only put the world together that way, we then defend it. But this domesticated

response still begs the heart of your good question. It's like pulling a rabbit out of a hat and just saying, "There is this drive."

So, then you have to ask, well, what's the source of this "drive"? Now you really are asking a religious question about what is the nature of life itself, or energy itself, this intelligent energy that forms and re-forms itself. At another level, I could just as happily answer the question by saying God. God moves all this—where God is the name of the ceaseless, restless, creative flow of energy in the universe. I'm Jewish by upbringing so that's my first lens. I also feel very attached to many Eastern approaches, but my introduction to anything spiritual was as a Jew. There's a very central prayer in the Jewish

liturgy that has to do with declaring that God is One. *Echad*. One. And what that means to me today is a transcendent affirmation that this intelligent energy, this restless, creative flow that we can follow within any one single life, is actually something in which the universe as a whole participates. It's really one energy that's running through the whole thing. It's not something we *share*, so much as it is something that *shares us*.

If you ask me about ultimate motives, I would say that it's all going somewhere. The process by which each living thing in the universe organizes and reorganizes itself—which is transformation—is a process by which each living piece, or part, is, in a certain way, better recognizing its true nature. And this is a declaration of faith here—its true nature is ultimately its participation in a single intelligent whole. Prayer is sometimes described as an expression of our dependence on this force that is bigger than ourselves. And that may be so, but our own transformation is an expression of God's dependence on *us*. That's what we are called to do, what the universe needs of us. And each living thing in the universe has the opportunity, through the process of transformation, to move toward a more complex form. This creates a trajectory that you start to see reflected in both Eastern and Western conceptions of higher stages of consciousness, a convergence of thought that has to do with forms of increasing complexity that move you toward a summit of complexity, or a summit of this special simplicity that recognizes the whole.

WIE: *So, from this, then, what is ultimate human maturity?*

RK: Well, it's a big risk to think about maturity as only the highest state of complexity or something that's just entirely within each person, decontextualized from the world in which one lives. Maturity has something to do with the fit between the person and the nature of the demands of the surround. Otherwise, the question of what is full maturity is essentially tautological with the question of what is most complex. The most complex would just be the most mature, by definition. But I think maturity is a more interesting and more psychosocial phenomenon. So, for example, if you were living in the eighteenth century, in a traditional homogeneous culture in which there is no real need to be able to stand over against the culture, I would call a person fully mature who is able to be a responsible member of the tribe and internalize the beliefs of that tribe.

Also, you have to think about what it means to actually be more complex than what your culture is currently demanding. You have to have a name for that, too. It's almost something beyond maturity, and it's usually a very risky state to be in. I mean, we loved Jesus, Socrates, and Gandhi—after we murdered them. While they were alive, they were a tremendous pain in the ass. Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr.—these

people died relatively young. You don't often live a long life being too far out ahead of your culture.

WIE: *For my last question, I'd like to ask you a little about what we are exploring here in our community, because we have been wondering about the developmental implications of what we are discovering together. What we are finding is that when a group of individuals come together as One, and in surrender to that intelligent energy that you described as animating the One, something miraculous happens. It feels almost like a call from the future, a glimpse of another level of development or evolution. It seems to lead to the emergence of a collective spiritual being—something beyond just a group of individuals sharing an experience. This emergence, which our teacher Andrew Cohen has called Evolutionary Enlightenment, has the potential for combining the most radical autonomy—what you might call ultimate self-authoring—with profound communion. Our experience suggests that the individuals involved move beyond a focus on individual survival to another order of collective being that is neither traditional hierarchy nor pluralism.*

RK: Well, this is a delicious taste of something. Or, to some, a worrisome narrative that sends up alarms. When you follow the story of development, you can already see there's a rhythm in it. And your description has a lot of music in it that I think is very resonant. The elements seem to be present that one would need to orchestrate an intelligent conversation about these kinds of things, or to begin to get a picture of them. If you just follow the logic of the rhythm, it's going to lead to something like what you've described, where those are the kinds of words that you have to use—union and oneness, autonomy and communion, and connection.

To my mind, the big question is: What does it actually *mean*? You know, what does it actually mean to live it or to experience it, as opposed to just talking about it? Do we actually have the language to speak about it? Because language has all these constraints built into it, where much of the language we use may make it impossible to talk about these notions of union and oneness. But I know your own work is not just talking about it, it's about the *practice* of it and how one brings it about. And, in a certain way, that's where the "proof of the pudding" all rests.

Now I think what you're describing are post fifth order apprehensions. It's hard enough, at least for me, to fully grasp the fifth order. And this is language about a development that I think most people are either never going to be at the edge of, or, if they are, it's going to be much later in their lives. But I do think that it's worth thinking about ways of being more receptive to the momentary glimpses of these other ways of constructing the world, which I think people do have. In Abraham Maslow's work in the sixties, he created a space for people to talk about experiences that just did not fit in with their normal way of understanding themselves, the kind of experiences that we tend, therefore, to discredit or just leave out. And he was saying that maybe those are little messages from our future. We have all kinds of ways of screening out these little messages that come from the future. It's not a future that none of us have actually been in, but a future that every one of us probably *has* been in that is outside the ways we construct reality. If we can find ways to actually start listening to these messages even though we cannot quite make them fit in to our current way of constructing the world, they might be of enormous value.