

Towards an Integral Perspective on World Politics: Secularism, Sovereignty and the Challenge of Global Ecology

Karen Litfin

Modernity's emblematic faith in technology, the doctrine of progress, the centrality of instrumental reason, the sanctity of individual freedom, the denial of the sacred – all of these have been suggested as sources of an environmentally destructive cultural tendency. The common ground uniting all of these beliefs is the secular worldview, a historically specific story about reduction of reality to matter, the triumph of human reason over the vagaries of nature, and the colonization of space and time by material progress. Rather than reverting to a pre-modern worldview or promoting a deconstructive postmodernism that would reduce all worldviews to mere discourse, I draw upon the neglected understandings of evolutionary idealism to move towards a new story. Starting with the premise that consciousness is ontologically prior to action, I draw upon the works of G.W.F. Hegel, Sri Aurobindo, Jean Gebser and Ken Wilber to trace the outlines of an alternative metaphysic to secularism. The integral worldview, which understands history as Spirit in the process of becoming, offers such an alternative, one that moves beyond but also includes the secular story within its scope.

Anthropologists tell us that every culture is built upon and lives out a story about the place of humans in the cosmos. A culture's daily life, its rituals and modes of reproducing itself, its language and art, its forms of political organization and economic practice — all are expressions of a central cosmological story about the relationships between people and non-human nature and forces. While people generally root their personal sense of meaning in their culture's story, that story's metaphysical underpinnings tend to be accepted tacitly and

I am grateful to John Barry, Bindu, Fred Dallmayr, John Dryzek, Robyn Eckersley, Naeem Inayatullah, James Meadowcroft, Chris Uhl, Anya Woestwin, and three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

unquestioningly. Much like the revolutions in scientific paradigms described by Thomas Kuhn, a crisis occurs when developments in the world undercut the credibility, and thus the legitimacy, of the traditional story. Because this sort of crisis threatens a culture's entire worldview, it unfolds on a time-scale of generations rather than the weeks or even years we typically ascribe to crisis situations. Like any crisis, however, the potential unravelling of a culture's cosmological story presents a situation of both danger and opportunity. Our culture of modernity, rooted in a secular story about the nature of the cosmos and humanity's place in it, is currently facing such a legitimation crisis. Because that culture is assuming planetary proportions, the scope of both the danger and the opportunity is also global.

As people see, so shall they act; if vision is flawed, action will be out of synch with the world and therefore destructive or ineffective. Modernity's emblematic faith in technology, the doctrine of progress, the centrality of instrumental reason, the sanctity of individual freedom, the denial of the sacred – all of these have been suggested as sources of an environmentally destructive cultural tendency. The common ground uniting all of these beliefs is a secular worldview that has its roots in Western modernity, but which is becoming an increasingly global perspective. Secularism may be understood as a historically specific story that reduces reality to matter, foresees the triumph of human reason over the vagaries of nature, and encourages the colonization of space and time by material progress. The secular is concerned with the worldly, as opposed to the sacred. Its Latin root, *saecularis*, refers to the temporal and material, as opposed to the eternal and spiritual.¹

The sustainability of secularism as a globally viable cultural story is called into question by a planet of six billion people deploying reason in the service of desire. Increasingly, the dark side of secularism is inescapable: in the ever-deepening contrast between conspicuous consumption in the North and gruelling poverty in the South; in the myriad forms of pollution that threaten air, land and sea; in the mass extinction of species; and in the feverish pursuit of security that seems to generate only greater insecurity. Whereas from a conventional international relations perspective these general problems are taken as distinct fields of study, they may also be understood more systemically as interrelated symptoms of 'the global problematique'. Ernst Haas

1. Mircea Eliade contrasts profane linear time, a central aspect of secularism, with sacred cyclical time or timelessness. His keen observation that the sacred is present in the profane, though in distorted form, is consistent with the perspective of evolutionary idealism developed here. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1987).

conceptualizes the global problematique as 'the problem of all the problems, not merely the sum of the problems of pollution, war, famine, alienation, resource depletion, urban crowding, and exploitation of the Third World by the First. It is a systemic construct that assumes causal connections among these problems, connections that amplify the disturbance of the meta-system'.² From the integral approach taken here, the global problematique is rooted in a mode of consciousness that is becoming increasingly recognized as dysfunctional. Yet it is global ecology in particular, with its recognition of a larger cosmos in which humanity is embedded, that most clearly highlights the defects of the secular story. For the first time in history, humanity has become a geophysical force capable of undermining Earth's life-support systems.³

This article links international relations theory with green theory by situating sovereignty within the larger context of the secular worldview, and showing how contemporary ecological problems pose fundamental challenges to that worldview. In this sense, I agree with those radical political ecologists who problematize modernity. Yet I part company with those who would characterize modernity as somehow a mistake, and who would advocate a return to simply local forms of social and political identity, to an undifferentiated oneness of humanity with nature, or to pre-rational modes of consciousness. I also agree with constructivist international relations theorists who understand sovereignty as a historically variable set of norms and practices that is capable of mutating in response to new social conditions. Yet while sovereignty is a social construct, and can therefore be reconstructed into new forms, it has real material consequences. The specifically modern version of sovereignty embedded in the secular worldview is premised upon the quest for material progress through the mastery of nature, and thus the valorisation of human reason and autonomy. Rather than advocating a return to pre-modern understandings and promoting a deconstructive postmodernism that would reduce sovereignty to mere

2. Ernst Haas, 'Words Can Hurt You: Or, Who said What to Whom About Regimes?' in *International Regimes*, ed. Stephen Krasner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 39.

3. A strong scientific consensus anticipates that in the coming century, the Earth will warm by 1.5 to 6°C as a result of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions. As a benchmark for comparison, the difference between the present warm period and an ice age is about 6°C. See Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Biologists believe that in the coming century, half of all existing species of life will be extinct as a result of human activities. See E.O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) and Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *The Sixth Extinction* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

discourse, I draw upon the neglected understandings of evolutionary idealism to move towards a new story, which I understand as an integral worldview.

A key feature of an integral vision is that it embraces apparently disparate truths and synthesizes them into a larger and more compelling whole. While I draw upon the central insights of constructivism, depicting sovereignty as a historical construct and characterizing secularism as a story or a discourse, I am developing a rather different perspective here: an integral view of the world as the unfolding of spirit. Constructivism represents an important moment of truth for an integral vision in its recognition of the interpretive and intersubjective dimensions of reality. Secular materialism, by reducing the world to what is objectively observable, has chronically neglected the internal subjective aspects of reality. Consequently, an integral approach understands the emergence of constructivism and postmodernism at this historical juncture as part of a larger subjective turn that is seeking to counterbalance the excesses of materialism and move humanity towards a deeper exploration of consciousness. As I will propose below, the integral approach apprehends both constructivism and materialism as representing important stages in the evolution of consciousness. Drawing from the idealist philosophical tradition, I characterize this approach as *evolutionary idealism*.⁴

4. In addition to global ecological degradation, the worldwide resurgence of religion also represents a deep and wide questioning of secularism, a development that is beginning to gain the attention of IR scholars. See the *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* Special Issue on Religion and International Relations, 29, no. 3 (2000); Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jeff Haynes, *Religion in World Politics* (London: Longman, 1998).

5. I use these latter terms interchangeably, recognizing that the reality they seek to convey ultimately cannot be conveyed in language because it transcends the limits of the intellect. We may have rare and profound glimpses or intuitions of it that are perhaps alluring, mystifying, or bewildering, and still seek to speak meaningfully about it as people have done for millennia.

6. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 19.

7. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 1959).

8. James E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1998); Anne Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science* (London: Routledge, 2000).

I use this term with a dose of caution. It is intended to suggest a metaphysics premised upon the progressive unfoldment of consciousness; it is not meant to entail any specific evolutionary mechanism like natural selection, nor does it understand idealism in terms of utopian quest or the unimportance of material reality. Rather, evolutionary idealism is an integral worldview that understands the universe as a revelation or manifestation of consciousness, Spirit, or intelligence.⁵ The integral worldview draws no dichotomy between matter and spirit, nature and humanity, objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, mind and matter are two dimensions of a single reality that expresses itself in the self-organizing processes of the universe. From an integral perspective, the human is 'that being in whom the universe celebrates itself and its numinous origins in a special mode of conscious self-awareness'.⁶ The integral worldview displaces secularism's story of the human as appropriator of the world with a story of people as evolving co-creators of the world. Aspects of this new story find expression in process philosophy and theology⁷, Gaia theory⁸, and constructive postmodernism.⁹

If the story implicit in modern secularism is ecologically unsustainable, there is an enormous need to move towards a new story. Starting with the premise that consciousness is ontologically prior to action, I draw upon the works of G.W.F. Hegel, Sri Aurobindo, Jean Gebser, Ken Wilber and others to trace the outlines of an alternative metaphysic to secularism. The integral worldview, which understands history as Spirit in the process of becoming, offers such an alternative — one that moves beyond, but also includes the secular story within its scope.

Unlike the secular stance with its materialist sociopolitical and metaphysical premises, an integral approach foregrounds consciousness in both senses. First, from the perspective of social and political practice, a deficient human consciousness engenders ecologically unsound practices. Recognizing that the old story is out of synch with the world we now inhabit, we turn our attention to our individual and collective (un)conscious in order to decipher that story and move towards a new one that will entail new practices. From an ontological and metaphysical viewpoint, the integral story understands the universe as an unfoldment of consciousness, a perspective that can potentially synthesize the pre-

9. David Ray Griffin, ed. *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

modern Great Chain of Being with contemporary science.

This story has several remarkable advantages over secularism. On a conceptual level, it overcomes both the matter/ spirit dichotomy and the human/ nature dichotomy. It is a story that combines some of the key insights of science and religion, suggesting a possible marriage of these two realms that were divorced under the secular worldview. While the integral story conflicts with the mechanical reductionism of secular science, it is remarkably consistent with recent depictions of nature in physics, cosmology, and biology. In terms of its historical and political orientation, the integral worldview is able to incorporate a critique of secularism while salvaging its positive aspects; modernity is understood as a developmental stage rather than a tragic error. Perhaps most important from the perspective of addressing the ecological crisis in pragmatic terms, it offers a story of hope: one which acknowledges humanity's embeddedness in nature, but which also recognizes our special position and our unique responsibility at this historical juncture.

Because it frames global environmental degradation as a crisis of consciousness, an integral approach can help bridge the gap between the emphasis on collective values and institutions in political and IR theory and the focus on individual responsibility in environmental ethics. If addressing the global macro-problem requires a new mode of consciousness, then the onus is heavily upon us as individuals to consciously evolve. Yet both the study and practice of world politics are embedded in the larger culture's cosmological story. Therefore, as scholars and teachers of international studies, we have a special responsibility to bring our awareness to that story and its implications. Once we begin to grasp the destructive consequences of the old story, we also have a responsibility to move our own thinking in the direction of a positive alternative. And if we want our process, and not just our theorizing, to reflect our integral approach, then we must close the gap between our knowing and our being. In Gandhi's words, 'we must be the change we want to see in the world'.

Secularism and Sovereignty: Privileging Man and Matter

Before exploring the secular worldview as a story about the relationships between humanity and nature, citizens and political authority, reason and progress, it is first helpful to grasp something of its cultural context. Secularism began as a historically specific development tied to the separation of political and religious authority in early modern Europe, and if eventually expanded into a comprehensive ontological and epistemological worldview. The primary significance of the Treaty of Westphalia, which marked the end of the Thirty Years War and is commonly cited as the birth of the nation-state, was that it established a

realm of political authority distinct from the ecclesiastical authority of Rome. As such, the Treaty represented a critical incursion into the medieval fusion of political and religious authority, and therefore a key step in the emergence of a secular worldview. Yet, by granting political rulers 'free exercise of Territorial Right, as well as Ecclesiastick' (Article LXIV), Westphalia enshrined and fused the political and religious authority of monarchs within their own jurisdictions. With the basis of territorial exclusivity established, religiously motivated foreign intervention was delegitimized, but the modern norm of religious tolerance within the domestic realm — a norm that is generally associated with secularism — only gradually took root. The separation of church and state was an epochal process that transpired over the course of centuries in Europe, spreading across much (but not all) of the planet during the twentieth century.¹⁰ Yet even where that separation is not fully embraced, other key aspects of the secular worldview have been accepted.

Secularism's story, because it is so widely embraced, is a familiar one, but by clearly articulating it we can perhaps become more reflective. It is a story about the triumph of human reason over dogma, myth, and superstition; about knowledge as power; about the mastery of nature through science and technology; about history as a progressive march towards the material liberation of humanity; about the individual citizen as the source of political authority; and about the sovereign state as the collective expression of the ideals of reason, progress, and liberty. The fundamental idea of secularism is 'that man and not God must be the central focus of all development; his earthly freedom, well-being, progress and perfection of his body, life and mind and not some heavenly post-mortem salvation of his soul must be the aim of life'.¹¹

Although this story had its origins in pre-modern Western history, it did not become globalized until the modern era. The secular worldview had some of its early roots in the following strands of Western culture: the Hebrew espousal of a transcendent monotheistic God removed from the cosmos;¹² the Judeo-Christian notion of linear

10. While secularism was originally a specifically Western development, its essential tenets (an emphasis on the worldly as opposed to the transcendent, a faith in reason, the doctrine of material progress) have been effectively globalized. Thus, it makes sense to analyse and apply it within the general scope of global environmental politics. Nonetheless, we should note that secularism has 'mutated' in various cultural contexts, taking on somewhat distinctive meanings.

11. Gupta, G.P and Srinivasan, *Sri Aurobindo on Democracy and Secularism*. (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 2000), 15.

12. Herbert Schneidau. *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

time, its teleology of progress, and its associated conception of nature as given to the service of a God-like humanity;¹³ the Sophists' contention that 'man is the measure of all things'.¹⁴ Ironically, it appears that Western secularism has a religious heritage. Within the popular imagination of the twentieth century, the scientific conception of evolution was grafted onto these earlier Western motifs, adding to the secular story of modernity the popular belief that human beings somehow represent the pinnacle of biological evolution.

Yet only gradually did secularism become fused with materialism. In its early formulations during the transition from medievalism to modernity, secularism entailed the differentiation of political and religious authority; not the utter denial of the latter. Indeed, many of modernity's primary architects, including Descartes, Newton and Locke, were greatly concerned with upholding the validity of the transcendental even as they simultaneously promoted secular values of reason, liberty, and progress. Eventually, however, 'Reason, History, the sovereign state, the sovereign individual' became 'the great secular substitutes for God' in modern thought.¹⁵ Faith in a transcendent Divinity was displaced onto faith in reason¹⁶ and/ or faith in the nation-state.¹⁷ The organic worldview of the medieval period, which understood humans as embedded in a Great Chain of Being extending from inanimate matter to God, was superseded by a mechanistic worldview which saw the universe as a great machine to be discovered and exploited by human reason. According to secular materialism, all levels of reality, all dimensions of experience, could be reduced to matter alone. Thus, the modern West became the first major civilization in human history to deny substantial reality to the Great Chain of Being.¹⁸ The pragmatic and ethical implications of this shift were enormous — behaviour that was taboo for people inhabiting a living and sacred Earth did not apply in a universe of inert matter.¹⁹

The medieval story of salvation through faith in Divine grace was

13. Lynn White. 'The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' *Daedalus* 1967: 1203-1207.

14. Daniel A. Kealey, *Revisioning Environmental Ethics*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 14.

15. R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20.

16. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. (New York: Free Press, 1990).

17. Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. (London: Verso, 1983).

18. Ken Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 13.

19. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

displaced by secularism's story of salvation through material progress,²⁰ which in turn would be procured by mastering nature through the application of reason. As reason overcame superstition, and science was liberated from religious dogma, humanity would fulfil the Baconian injunction 'to bind Nature to your service and make her your slave'.²¹ The quest for truth shifted from knowledge of God to knowledge of the physical universe. Man, rather than God, became the measure of all things; worldly time (*saecularis*) replaced other-worldly eternal time. The story of humanity came to be seen as a march of progress through linear time, towards greater liberty and ever more commodious living. The medieval faith in God was displaced by a secular faith in reason and empiricism,²² even to the point that modernity's relationship to technology resembles a religious faith.²³ From the seventeenth century onward, and from Left to Right across the political spectrum, Western thought has been characterized by an overarching faith in science. The belief in science's ability to improve human life is perhaps the quintessential hallmark of modernity; a belief that is reinforced by the material achievements of industrialization.²⁴

The nation-state played a crucial role in transforming medieval religious society into a secular one by serving a quasi-religious function.²⁵ With the emergence of a system of relatively autonomous states, individual identity shifted from serf to subject, and eventually to citizen. Europe's political revolutionaries and her other new humanists hoped that through 'the glory of the state, earth might more approximate the perfection of heaven'.²⁶ As the king lost his connection to God, the nation itself was imbued with divine status.

The desacralization of politics was mirrored in the changing meaning of sovereignty. Historically, the institution of sovereignty originated in medieval Europe as an attribute of God and his Papal delegate. Beginning in the absolutist period, divine authority devolved first to monarchs and subsequently to the bureaucratic, territorial and

20. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons. (New York: Scribner, 1958).

21. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 36.

22. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*.

23. David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. (New York: Knopf, 1997).

24. Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus: Science and the Transformation of Contemporary Democracy*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

25. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

26. *Ibid.*, 416.

more or less democratic states associated with modernity.²⁷ The carving up of Europe, and eventually the entire planet, into a patchwork of mutually exclusive territorial states is modernity's political rendering of nature. By itself, the Westphalian model of the territorial state (or city-state) did not articulate a fully modern conception of political authority. Rather, the grand ideals of the Enlightenment — reason, progress, and liberty — eventually found their collective expression in notions of popular sovereignty and self-determination. Secularism's story of worldly progress finds its political expression in the modern democratic state, elected by prudent and rational individuals. From Hobbes onward, the basis of political authority has been explicated in terms of consent of the governed. The material basis of this consent was conceived in terms of a range of goods that the state could be expected to provide to the individual, especially property rights, prosperity, and common defence.²⁸ Eventually, the bureaucratic state would become adept at deploying reason on behalf of these secular goals. The radical individualism implicit in the secular understanding of domestic political authority is mirrored in an international system comprised of mutually exclusive sovereign states. The story of secularism therefore has a crucial political dimension: the sovereign state is a primary vehicle for the attainment of salvation through material progress.

Under the secular worldview, the ideal-types of the sovereign state and the individual citizen are analogous; they are atomistic, autonomous, acquisitive, materialistic, rational sources of their own authority. Given that these foundational social and political conceptions were part of a larger secular worldview, it is not surprising that they resonated with emerging scientific understandings. Thus, the Newtonian image of particles in motion was the guiding metaphor in the secular formulation of 'possessive individualism',²⁹ an image that characterized both the modern citizen and the modern state. The bounded individual, possessing his [*sic*] own person and property, found its collective counterpart in the territorial sovereign state, having jurisdiction over citizens and resources within its borders.³⁰

27. Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. (New York: Norton, 1988).

28. Karen Litfin, 'Environment, Wealth, and Authority: Global Climate Change and Emerging Modes of Legitimation', *International Studies Review*, (2000): 129.

29. C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

30. On the close relationship between the emergence of private property and state sovereignty, see Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Of Systems, Boundaries and Territoriality: An Inquiry in the Formation of the State System', *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986): 27-52.

As John Ruggie observes, these political expressions ‘mirrored a much broader transformation in social epistemology that reached well beyond the domains of political and economic life’.³¹ Indeed, they reflect a specific structure of consciousness associated with the discovery of a single-point perspective, a development that was replicated in aesthetics and psychology as well as in social and political life. Ruggie cites various expressions of the rise of perspectivalism: the fixed viewpoint of Renaissance art, the growing dominance of the ‘I-form’ of speech, and the spatial and psychological differentiation of private from public spheres. The concept of sovereignty, therefore, should be situated within a larger secular worldview as ‘merely the doctrinal counterpart of the application of single-point perspectival forms to the spatial organization of politics’.³²

The model for sovereignty is the single-point perspective of the autonomous individual with authority over himself, in control of his own destiny, and legitimated by his own rationality. At the level of the individual, the single-point perspective is represented by the insatiable consumer living out the story of secularism: the universe is a collection of objects to be consumed. Despite the obligatory and largely symbolic bows to ‘family values’ and other non-material sources of meaning, the dominant story being disseminated globally is that affluence, consumption, and technological mastery are the primary objectives of human life. Economic growth is presumed to be good. Jobs are the principle basis for individuals’ relationship to society, and to this end, the education system is there to assist them. This story of secularism is so deeply entrenched in the collective psyche that the continual influx of information about the devastating ecological and human consequences of our way of life seems to have little impact.

Yet it is becoming increasingly difficult to turn a blind eye to the shadow of the old story. In particular, the emergence of transnational and global environmental problems offers a strong challenge to both the single-point perspective and the secular worldview in which it is embedded. Secularism’s core presumptions — its implicit humanism, the mastery of nature through science and technology, the march of material progress, the single-point perspective of individual citizen and the sovereign state — all of these are called into question by the limits of the Earth. At issue is whether a secular world can survive its own implications. The dark side of secular humanism includes the massive extinction of non-human species, ruined soils, depleted aquifers,

31. John Gerard Ruggie, ‘Territoriality and beyond: problematizing modernity in international relations’, *International Organization* 47, no.1 (1993): 158.

32. *Ibid.*, 159.

polluted ecosystems, and global climate change. A finite planet of six-plus billion 'possessive individuals' seeking unbounded affluence is simply unsustainable.

This logic is increasingly recognized as anachronistic in an interdependent world. The dawning recognition of interdependence, manifest in a host of international institutions and transnational social movements, suggests that the old story is gradually being displaced. These developments represent a 'contagion of re-perception'.³³ Yet the full acceptance of interdependence has yet to permeate our consciousness and inform our lives. Our knowing is out of harmony with our being; hence, most of us pursue our atomistic lives while paying lip-service to interdependence. On one level, we see the destructiveness of our behaviour, yet we continue to live out the old story because we have not yet learned and embraced a new one.

The single-point perspective of modernity appears untenable in the face of the emerging planetary economic, social and ecological networks. If the story of secularism is fractured by the global problematique, it is imperative that we reconsider it and move towards a richer, restorative, and more comprehensive story.

An Integral Worldview: Evolutionary Idealism

The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human, at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story, and shared dream experience.³⁴

For integral thinkers, the secular worldview belongs to a historically specific stage of human development that manifests itself in a mental structure of consciousness. Whereas a secular worldview privileges the exclusive single-point perspective of the individual subject, whether the individual ego or the collective 'ego' of the state, an integral worldview synthesizes all perspectives into a coherent whole, neither privileging nor sacrificing any of them, and thus discloses both cosmos and internal reality as a multidimensional tapestry. In this sense, then, the integral is not merely multi-perspectival, as a postmodern stance would advocate, but it is an aperspectival mode of consciousness that moves beyond monological rationality and is capable of

33. Willis Harman, *Global Mind Change: The Promise of the Last Years of the Twentieth Century*. (Indianapolis: Knowledge Systems, 1988).

34. Berry, *The Great Work*.

synthesizing massive interrelationships.³⁵ By reintroducing Spirit into an alienated secular ontology, by including secularism's story within its own developmental conception of humanity, by integrating the supposed dichotomies of matter and spirit, by postulating an essential oneness between subject and object, and by reconciling rationality with heart and soul, the integral worldview offers a story that is at once comprehensive and more hopeful. Yet it is a story that is profoundly challenging, since it compels us both as individuals and collectivities to take up the responsibility of conscious evolution.

For many people, the notion of 'Spirit' is inescapably problematic, either because it is inherently meaningless within a secular worldview or because it means such different things to different people. Yet despite the fact that the term is taboo within secular discourse, much of both pre-modern Western thought and non-Western thought has accepted Spirit as the fundamental reality. Indeed, most cosmological stories from cultures around the world depict the material universe as emerging from some supra-physical entity or process. The Latin root, *spiritus*, is breath, suggesting a living self-animating universe, as opposed to the lifeless world of secularism. Because of its incorporeal nature, the notion of Spirit eludes easy definition and is best approached through metaphor. If the metaphor for the secular worldview is the billiard-ball model of inert monads in a random universe, the metaphor for the integral worldview might be the seed, with its inherent fecundity and self-generative capacity.

Evolutionary idealism proposes that an animating intelligence underlies the development of not only life forms, but of all creation — from galaxies to human forms of social and political organization. Hegel, the first widely-read proponent of evolutionary idealism in the West, argued that if we are willing to observe an intelligent pattern of development in nature, then we should be open to the possibility of such a pattern in the historical movement of human thought and action. As he remarks, 'it is unreasonable to believe that reason only is in Nature, and not in Mind'.³⁶ Dialectical reason, as we shall see, is different from the mechanical reason of secularism, because it entails an imminent self-generative capacity.

35. Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, translated by Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 97-102.

36. G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), vol. 1, 35. While Hegel equated reason with the dialectical movement of Spirit in history, I steer away from that term because of its association with monological rationality under the secular worldview.

Millennium

Most variants of idealism, going back to Plato and the Illusionist school of Hinduism, prioritized the trans-physical ideas or consciousness and thus tended to drive a wedge between spirit and matter by positing a static world of spirit separate from, and even opposed to, a degraded world of matter. Consequently, liberation from the shackles of matter through transcendence became the ultimate goal of human existence. The traditional metaphysics of idealism was dualistic; matter and spirit were seen as fundamentally different realities.

Evolutionary idealism, by way of contrast, integrates Spirit and matter by understanding the material universe as an unfoldment of consciousness. Evolution, in this view, is Spirit in the making, manifest in the phenomenal world, as is implicit in the title of Hegel's magnum opus, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel,

Everything that from eternity has happened in heaven and earth, the life of God and all the deeds of time simply are the struggles for Spirit to know itself, to make itself objective to itself, to find itself, be for itself, and finally unite itself to itself; it is alienated and divided, but only so as to be able thus to find itself and return to itself. Only in this manner does Spirit attain its freedom.³⁷

But this freedom, of which the individualistic ego promoted by secularism is just a distorted and temporary expression, is won only through a long strife against its own immature subjectivity. Self-transcendence is a struggle that necessarily entails the passing away of previous forms of existence; a dialectical movement from fragmentation to integration, from alienation to integration of an omnipresent Spirit. This dialectic is not applied to inert matter from some external force or intelligence, 'but is matter's very soul putting forth its branches and fruit organically'.³⁸ Hegel's dialectical logic is wonderfully prescient of systems theory, Gaia theory, and other recent developments in ecological thought.³⁹

Given the close relationship between economic injustice and the domination of nature, one might wonder why we should take an idealist

37. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 23.

38. *Ibid.*, 34.

39. Hegel's master-slave dialectic and his description of humanity's domination of nature are strikingly applicable to contemporary ecological realities. In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel describes the process by which humanity leaves its primal state of innocence and constitutes its subjectivity by setting itself against, over and above Nature. This breach is healed only when the subject/object dichotomy is healed, when the rift between master and slave is bridged, and Mind (or Spirit) comes to know itself as universal and free.

rather than a materialist approach. In a nutshell — why Hegel and not Marx? To fully answer this question goes beyond the scope of this essay, but a few general comments about Marxist metaphysics and social theory might be helpful. First, Marx rejected idealism, which was the central principle in Hegel's entire philosophy, yet Marx's theory of dialectical materialism is internally inconsistent and ultimately falls back upon the same assumptions as evolutionary idealism. Materialism typically understands matter to be inert, animated by mechanical means rather than by any inherent consciousness or intelligence. Marx claims that his materialism is dialectical, not mechanical, so that development occurs through an inner movement within matter itself, a movement which drives human history inexorably towards socialism. While his later followers revised Marx's claims of inevitability and softened his economic determinism, they evaded the deeper metaphysical question: how can a material universe move in a purposive direction unless it is constituted by some innate animating intelligence — what Hegel would call Spirit? According to scientific materialism, 'matter being inert and passive cannot possess self-conscious free will and purpose'.⁴⁰ Moreover, since dialectical movement always proceeds by a struggle between opposites, Marx's dialectical materialism does not provide any means for change unless there is some principle within matter that somehow opposes it.

In contrast to Marxism, evolutionary idealism articulates a principle of dialectical movement: the infinite, absolute and universal Spirit has infused itself within the finite, diverse and particular forms of Nature. The disclosure of Spirit on Earth proceeds by the incremental expansion of consciousness, from matter to life to mind. Evolution is a process of transcendence and inclusion; earlier forms never fully disappear, but are elaborated, made more complex and gradually emerge into new forms. Second, Marxism (and its later variants) offers an important critique of and a strong humanizing influence upon capitalism, but it is ultimately embedded in the same secular worldview that gave rise to capitalism. Marx correctly observes that the economic motive is primary under capitalism, but then erroneously universalizes that claim to all societies throughout history. As Sri Aurobindo observes, 'commercialism is a modern sociological phenomenon; one might almost say it is the whole phenomenon of modern society'.⁴¹ In past societies, the economic dimension of life has not occupied people's thoughts or dominated the whole tone of social life as it has under

40. Kishoo Gandhi, *The Fallacy of Karl Marx* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1992), 25.

41. Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), 216.

modernity. It is interesting to note that those variants of Marxism that have most influenced ecological thought soften Marx's economic determinism and shift the analysis towards questions of consciousness. Social ecologist Murray Bookchin, for instance, disavows the traditional Marxist faith in material progress and embraces the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental rationality.⁴² From the dialectical perspective of evolutionary idealism, Critical Theory grows out of a secular worldview beginning to come to terms with its own internal contradictions.

Evolutionary idealism thereby signifies the transcendence and inclusion of modernity, rather than its outright repudiation. It simultaneously embraces and redefines secularism's doctrine of progress; its quest for freedom, knowledge, and equality; its respect for the rights of the individual; and its recognition of the importance of material reality. An integral approach transcends secularism by re-situating its core values within a wider view of Earth and humanity as evolving expressions of Spirit, while also recognizing secularism's immense contribution to that evolution. In promoting the perfectibility of humanity and earthly life as practical aims rather than deferring paradise to the afterlife or doomsday, secularism signified an important evolutionary advance over the pre-modern modes of thought.

Representing the emergence of self-conscious Spirit, humanity therefore has a special role in the terrestrial evolution. Yet if the unfoldment of Spirit is the secret of evolution, humanity as it stands cannot be its apex. The dark side of secularism has become too evident, the internal contradictions too dangerous, for any reflective observer to conclude that we have come to the end of history. Rather, we have come to the end of the old story, but a new one has not yet been fully articulated and widely embraced. The dawning recognition that the mundane realism of the secular worldview is neither inwardly satisfying nor outwardly sustainable is opening the door to a new story, a revived idealism that gives primacy to consciousness while salvaging the progressive aspects of the old story.

While the new story must offer a radical departure from the old one, it need not represent a wholesale rejection of its predecessor. Thus, evolutionary idealism simultaneously builds upon and transforms the secular worldview. To be truly integral, the new story must somehow *include* the old story within itself; to truly represent a developmental advance, it must also *transcend* the old story. Thus, the integral story understands secularism as part of the larger story of the self-

42. Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1995) and *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto: Cheshire, 1982).

manifestation of Spirit. Moreover, the growing awareness of global ecological degradation and the cosmological story of contemporary science denote an important threshold in the telling of that story. The emergence of self-consciousness has precipitated a crisis: in seizing upon life and matter to make them instruments of the human will, secular society endangers the planet and alienates itself from the rest of nature. By simultaneously transcending and including the old story, the integral worldview finds within its own perspective a special place of meaning for modernity.

For many radical political ecologists, a full reckoning of the 'disaster of modernity' leads to a rejection of modernity and, for some, a call for a return to pre-modern modes of living. Like integral thinkers, they understand environmental degradation as symptomatic of a deficient worldview, although they take a rather pessimistic view of history. Witnessing the social and ecological wreckage engendered by the reckless quest for material progress, these thinkers reject the notion of progress altogether. Consequently, some deep ecologists uphold the hunter-gatherer lifestyle as an ecological ideal,⁴³ embrace a principle of biocentric equality which recognizes no greater or lesser value to any life forms, including humans,⁴⁴ or advocate small-scale, decentralized 'bioregional' modes of social organization.⁴⁵ Rooted in the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century, these thinkers hope to heal the violent fragmentations of rationality and modernity with intense feeling and a return to oneness with the web of life.⁴⁶

Evolutionary idealism concurs with these radical political ecologists in lamenting the unprecedented ecological destruction engendered under the secular worldview. It acknowledges that this destruction stems from an 'arrogant humanism' that has sought to deploy reason in the domination over a desacralized nature. Yet, the uni-

43. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Layton, UT: Peregrine Smith, 1986).

44. John Livingston, *One Cosmic Instant: Man's Fleeting Supremacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

45. For a critique of deep ecology from an integral perspective, see Daniel A. Kealey, *Revisoning Environmental Ethics* (Albany, State University of New York Press: 1990), 26-34. Kealey claims that deep ecology is rooted in a pre-modern magical worldview that rejects the mental structure of consciousness, along with its anthropocentrism and utilitarian ethics, in favour of a more undifferentiated understanding of the world. While Kealey's view represents an important moment of truth, it misses some of the ways that deep ecology leans towards the integral rather than the pre-modern. See Pramod Parajuli, 'Learning from Ecological Ethnicities: Towards a Plural Political Ecology of Knowledge' in *Indigenous Traditions in Ecology: the Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*, ed. John Grim (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 557-589.

46. Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, 93-95.

perspectival mode of consciousness and the secular worldview in which it is embedded, for all their limitations, should not be dismissed as a massive mistake. Progress and individualism should not be rejected outright, but rather redefined and revitalized in light of an understanding of the universe as an unfoldment of consciousness.

Secularism can thus be reframed within a larger story that understands the arc of evolution as a movement from pre-rational to rational to transrational modalities of consciousness. Such a recasting recognizes and seeks to move beyond 'the disaster' of modernity without relinquishing its dignity. Even while rejecting the secular worldview, the integral approach or vision recognizes 'the enormous, indispensable utility of the very brief period of rationalistic Materialism through which humanity has been passing'.⁴⁷ In Europe, secularism brought the aim of freedom not only to political, economic and social life, but also to religious life, thereby contributing to the self-manifestation of Spirit both by turning humanity's consciousness earthwards and also making room for freedom of spiritual expression, as opposed to conventionalized religion. Thus, the impulse towards mastery of the environment should not be dismissed as a historical blunder, but grasped more broadly as an immature expression of a yearning towards inner mastery and self-transcendence.

Secularism, while outwardly rejecting the infinitude of Spirit, itself represents a distorted and externalized quest for infinity in its unbounded pursuit of economic growth and technological progress. The impulse towards self-manifestation and mastery is turned outwards upon a supposedly inert world of land, water, air and other life forms. Objectively, the world bites back in the form of ecological devastation. Subjectively, happiness eludes us with every new advance; the inherently boundless character of desire engenders a perpetual state of dissatisfaction. From the integral perspective, consumption and the domination of nature are revealed as a perversion of a latent yearning for oneness. By possessing and consuming what is external to us, we seek to expand ourselves; in a distorted way, we become one with that which we acquire. From the integral perspective, the ego, rather than being a mistake or an aberration of nature, is recast as a temporary vessel, or even a shell of protection, in which a growing consciousness can evolve towards integrality. Thus, the possessive individual of secular society represents a developmental stage in humanity's self-finding, and not merely the cancerous contagion it appears to be.

The uni-perspectival mode of consciousness was an evolutionary advance in that it gave rise to an unprecedented respect for the freedom

47. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 1998), 10.

of the individual. Similarly, the sovereign state is understood as a necessary, albeit temporary, intermediary between the individual and a universal humanity. As Hegel rightly observes,⁴⁸ the state expresses the universality of Spirit, but as a host of developments in late modernity (including the reconfiguration of sovereignty in the face of global environmental problems) indicate, it is not sufficiently universal.⁴⁹ In the integral worldview, secularism along with all of its psychological, political, and ecological instantiations are themselves expressions of the unfoldment of Spirit.

Cultural stories tell their participants what sorts of behaviours are morally acceptable. Under the secular worldview, anthropocentric utilitarianism has been the dominant ethical orientation. According to this orientation, instrumental rationality should be applied to obtain the greatest good for the greatest number, where 'good' is defined in material terms as comfort, efficiency, and longevity. In the past, the sovereign state was taken as the container in which this good was to be evaluated. More recently, the twin problems of global inequality and ecological finitude are casting doubt upon both utilitarian ethics. In this context, the temptation to reject an anthropocentric stance altogether is understandable. Yet we should temper that urge. Because an integral worldview accepts all manifest forms as emanations of Spirit, it therefore (like deep ecology) acknowledges the intrinsic value of all living things, but it also allows for value distinctions that ground a coherent environmental ethos. Representing the emergence of reflective self-consciousness in the evolution of spirit, the integral worldview sees humans as 'first among equals'.⁵⁰ This position accords with our basic moral intuition that in the pursuit of our vital needs, we should consume or destroy as little complexity and depth of consciousness as possible.⁵¹ Moreover, in acknowledging humanity's unique role at this evolutionary juncture, an integral worldview stresses our special ethical responsibilities at least as much as our special rights.

In the new story, secular rationality is not displaced in one fell swoop, but is rather integrated into a wider vision incorporating cosmological time scales. Reflecting upon the fact that for the first time in its history, the human species has become a geophysical force capable

48. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942).

49. The same observation can be made with reference to virtually every facet of world politics, from questions of war and peace, to human rights, to economic globalisation.

50. Kealey, *Revisioning Environmental Ethics*, 81.

51. Ken Wilber, Tony Schwartz, and Dan Spinella, eds. *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001), 334-35.

of irreversibly changing the Earth, we must consciously deploy rationality and critical thinking to forge an alternative path. That path will entail social, political, technological, economic, aesthetic and psychological dimensions. The secular mind, having reached the end of its tether, does not disappear. Rather, it participates in finding a new home for itself in a re-enchanted universe.

Paradoxically, scientific reasoning and empirical observation have themselves generated the contemporary cosmological story of the universe as evolutionary process. Secular science tells us that each atom in each molecule of our brains and bodies was born billions of years ago in colossal supernova explosions.⁵² Science reveals that the Earth itself has evolved its own biological, chemical and physical systems to work together as a kind of giant homeostatic organism.⁵³ Science also tells us that human activities are increasingly interfering with those systems in irreversible and potentially catastrophic ways. The secular world dislocated mythical and cosmological time-scales in favour of the primacy of 'man'. Secularism has created the conditions for its own destruction, yet it has also given us some of the tools for finding our way out: a deeply ingrained orientation towards progress, empirical observation, critical reflection, and freedom. The new story will not abandon these qualities, but will rather hone them in a new direction and awaken other repressed or latent aspects of our being. Science alone cannot re-enchant the world, but when joined with our capacities for wonder and awe, when linked to our sense of beauty and our heart's longing for wholeness, it participates actively in forging a new story.

So long as we remain solely in a mental structure of consciousness, however, our moral intuitions will overreach our capacity for action. We may deploy an ever-growing array of rules, regulations and other ego-restraining measures, yet if the root of our environmentally destructive behaviour is a worldview that is out of synch with the world, then these measures can never be sufficient to the task. And if the integral worldview is indeed correct in its understanding of evolution as Spirit in the making, then the apparently deficient secular worldview must give way to a more embracing mode of consciousness. If such a shift is occurring, we should expect to see it at the level of both the individual and the collective. However, given that individuals are conscious subjects in ways that social groups are not and that groups, by virtue of comprising a multitude of different people at varying stages of development, will have a more inertial tendency, we should not expect the most rapid shift to occur at the level of the collectivity.

52. Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

53. James Lovelock, *Homage to Gaia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Addressing Secular Concerns: Teleology, Observability, Rationality and Hierarchy

Because the integral perspective runs up against prevailing norms of acceptable scholarship, I wish to explicitly address the primary concerns that are likely to arise. Although those objections are rooted in a secular ontology and epistemology, it is nonetheless possible to offer coherent and reasoned responses to them rooted in the new story. In the end, we must acknowledge that evolutionary idealism does not offer an empirically verifiable worldview. Yet, despite its posturing otherwise, neither does the secular worldview. Worldviews are inherently unverifiable. Ultimately, the question of which one to accept must be answered on grounds of pragmatic and moral consequences, intellectual coherence, personal experience, and aesthetic appeal.

First, to interpret evolution as Spirit-in-the-making entails a teleological understanding of the world, which is viewed with almost universal disdain among contemporary intellectuals. To posit an end towards which creation somehow strives seems to suggest a purposive *deus ex machina*. Since neither the purposive creator nor the end towards which creation moves can be perceived, materialists believe it is meaningless to invoke them. In lieu of an intelligent universe, secularists propose a random world in which the manifold order of the cosmos emerged by happenstance. Yet the fact that the secular worldview has not even come close to altogether displacing religion, but rather continues to co-exist with it as a strange bedfellow, suggests that randomness is not a satisfactory stance for most people. One of the merits of the integral worldview is that it integrates the key insights of evolutionary thought with the spiritual grounding of the Great Chain of Being.⁵⁴ Rather than proceeding by random combinations of brute matter, nature is understood as being suffused with a self-expressive force moving towards greater complexity and consciousness. This evolutionary understanding accords with the cosmological reading of 'the participatory universe'.⁵⁵ In keeping with the dimension of Spirit as mystery, the unfoldment of Spirit need not be understood as directed towards any specific and knowledgeable endpoint. The participatory universe is teleological, in the sense of being a purposive self-revelation, without necessarily entailing any ultimate, identifiable *telos*.

A second objection is that Spirit is not observable. In response, we must admit that neither is much of what we take to be 'reality' directly

54. Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*.

55. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (Bell Tower, 1999); Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story*. (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1984).

observable: gravity, black holes, power, discourses, states, etc. We nonetheless take these things to be real because we can observe their effects. The question, then, is whether what we observe can be taken as the effects of an unfolding Spirit. Again, the plausibility of this story will depend upon the individual's judgment. It is perhaps significant that most cultures throughout human history believed the world was either created or inhabited by Spirit, or both. A worldview that understands nature as sacred, or as imbued with Spirit, would most likely be more ecologically friendly than one that reduces nature to a useful tool for human consumption. If ecological degradation is symptomatic of a deficient worldview, then it is incumbent upon us to revise our worldview. Yet, even if the integral worldview is more ecologically harmonious, some minds will still remain unconvinced; for these, greater external harmony does not necessarily entail greater truth. The appeal of evolutionary idealism will then depend upon its internal coherence, its ability to account for external phenomena, and the sense it makes of the world.

A third objection is that since an integral perspective transcends the rational structure of consciousness, it is impossible or nonsensical to attempt to engage in intelligent discourse about it. While this objection contains an important moment of truth in recognizing the limitations of language and reason in the face of Spirit, it should not be taken too far. In one form or another, much of the history of ideas has been about Spirit. Indeed, the modern era seems to be an aberration in this regard. As noted earlier, while the secular worldview grew up during early modernity, theological questions and assumptions were widespread among the scientists, philosophers, and political thinkers who framed secularism. Some of the most influential systems of thought are premised upon Spirit or some other modality of consciousness beyond the linear rationality.⁵⁶ While the subjective experience of others cannot be taken as final evidence, it is noteworthy that many people who are considered the greatest exemplars of humanity, including the leaders and founders of all the world's religions, confirm the reality of Spirit. All of this affirms that, although Spirit is beyond mind, we can still think and talk sensibly about it.

Finally, there is the specific objection to *evolutionary* idealism, as opposed to other variants of idealism — that it is hierarchical. Deep ecologists who promote biocentric equality will object that humans should not be given any kind of ethical or ontological privileged

56. In Western thought, idealists include Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, and Hegel. Both Kant and Descartes, widely viewed as the fathers of modern philosophy, were greatly concerned with offering rational arguments for a transcendental reality.

position. Egalitarian humanists may take offence to the notion that some individuals are 'more evolved' than others. As we have seen above, however, biocentric egalitarians are caught in the dilemma of their own humanness; their thinking will be inescapably anthropocentric because thinking itself is a human activity. Life requires the taking of life for its self-perpetuation, and deep ecologists are compelled, like the rest of us, to make everyday decisions about how to live. Yet their principles offer no coherent grounds for making one decision over another. An integral environmental ethic, as we have seen, offers coherent grounds for making decisions on the basis of intrinsic value and depth of consciousness.

The concern of the egalitarian humanist is somewhat more difficult to address, but because the integral perspective attaches no great privilege to being 'more evolved', perhaps the question is less important. In standard versions of elitism, those who are at the top of the hierarchy are typically entitled to more material goods or other similar rewards. Evolutionary idealism moves in a rather different direction, suggesting that a person who lives in a greater sense of oneness with the whole of creation will be less acquisitive, less driven by desire and the quest for material security, and more responsible in her actions — in short, less egoistic. Indeed, responsibility, not privilege, seems to be the corollary to a more evolved consciousness. Or, rather than the burdensome notion of duty associated with our ideas of responsibility, perhaps we should say *responsibility*, since a more integral consciousness is identified with a wider expanse of reality and therefore has a greater motivation and capacity to respond. In either case, at least part of the egalitarian humanist's objection should be addressed by the absence of material perks attached to evolutionary development.

Beyond the more general concerns about evolutionary idealism, there is the narrower objection that since it is about the development of consciousness, which occurs only in individuals, we cannot properly apply this worldview to collectivities in general, and the nation-state in particular. First, we should note that the practice of ascribing identities, preferences, intentions, and other attributes of consciousness to the state is commonplace in international relations. More pointedly, however, this objection misses the key premise of the integral worldview: if all of phenomenal existence is the unfoldment of Spirit, then all forms of creation — galaxies, rocks, plants, people, and nation-states and corporations — are expressions of consciousness. Therefore, it makes as much sense to investigate the evolutionary status of social collectivities as anything else.

Towards an Integral World(view) in Global Environmental Politics?

As argued above, the single-point perspective of secularism finds its psychological expression in the egoistic mental consciousness of the individual, politically in the singular and exclusive sovereign state, aesthetically in perspectival art, and epistemologically in monological rationality. Recently, that perspective is being challenged by developments in all of these fields. In international relations, John Ruggie finds evidence for the emergence of multi-perspectival institutional forms in the global system of economic activity, in the normative shift towards greater collective legitimation of the use of force, and in new principles of international custodianship within the realm of global ecology and argues for the central importance of planetary politics.

In other words, holism and ecological interdependence represent a challenge to the single-point perspective of the sovereign state, though documenting that challenge empirically is itself a challenge. However, if such a shift from a single-point to a universal social episteme is occurring, we should expect to see evidence in new spatial ordering principles, new temporal understandings, and new norms of legitimation. In this section, I will cite evidence for all of these developments, suggesting that we are witnessing the first halting steps towards an integral approach to planetary politics. While there is a real danger of wishful thinking, we must admit that these developments are clearly inconsistent with sovereignty as it was understood under the secular worldview. The question, then, is: What story best makes sense of these trends?

First, and most obvious, is the dramatic proliferation of international agreements on environmental issues since 1970. Joint choices, which are the essence of international cooperation, necessarily preclude full autonomy for sovereign states. Although states retain legal sovereignty and are free to abrogate their agreements, there are definite costs in doing so. The environmental arena in particular involves dynamics and mechanisms that challenge state autonomy. Consider, for instance, the graduated approach, from 'framework convention' through a series of increasingly stringent regulatory protocols, which has become a hallmark of environmental treaty-making. By committing themselves to abstract principles of environmental protection, states open themselves to pressures from internal and external sources to adhere to those principles. International agreements, whether binding or not, establish collective norms that reduce the state's ability to decide and act autonomously. From an integral approach, the single-point perspective of the sovereign state is being transformed into multilateral governance, a multiperspectival form of organization. We are still far from an aperspectival embrace of oneness, but there seems to be

movement in that direction. The emergence of 'the global' within the past two decades suggests a movement beyond the multiperspectival to a planetary holism more characteristic of an integral worldview. We should note that the evolutionary shift towards the integral would not be served by any kind of globalism that entailed the colonization of the parts by the whole; it must be a movement of transcendence and inclusion. Likewise, the current shift in the meaning of sovereignty away from a sole emphasis on rights and towards an incorporation of accountability and responsibility also suggests that secularism's single-point perspective is giving way to more inclusive approaches.⁵⁷

A second critical development is the extension of 'rights' to nonhuman species, a development which represents a rudimentary yet significant departure from secularism's self-consciously human-centredness. While the threat of massive species extinction continues apace, moves to protect endangered species, both in domestic legislation and international treaties, indicate a growing recognition that other species also deserve to exist. In many cases, it is an instrumental anthropocentric rationality that seeks to protect other species because of their utility to humans, rather than an acknowledgement of the rights of other species. Yet this deployment of instrumental rationality itself represents a significant departure from secularism's presumption of human domination, for it recognizes the web of interdependence among species and the embeddedness of humans within that web. That recognition, while not alone representing an integral worldview, may be nonetheless an important step in that direction, because it undercuts the anthropocentric presumptions of secularism. We should also note that since the project of universalizing humanity — a latent dream of secularism — is still under way, we should not expect to see any full-scale shift towards an integral perspective of the biosphere anytime soon.⁵⁸

Yet there is an intriguing sense in which the project of universalizing humanity is being furthered by international environmental responses. As noted earlier, sovereignty is a historically variable set of norms and practices, with a locus that has changed from God and His delegates, to the monarch, to the people. Popular sovereignty entails a fundamentally secular notion of political authority

57. Paul Wapner, 'Reorienting State Sovereignty: Rights and Responsibilities in the Environmental Age' in *The Greening of Sovereignty in World Politics*, ed. Karen T. Litfin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 275-298.

58. With respect to a different issue, human rights and military intervention, Martha Finnemore documents the increasing universalization of 'humanity' since the 19th century. See 'Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention' in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 153-185.

rooted in the consent of the governed. Modernist accounts of authority in terms of contemporary self-interested citizens do not take into account the 'consent' of future generations. However the principle of intergenerational responsibility is either explicitly or tacitly accepted in many environmental regimes, particularly those addressing issues with long temporal horizons, such as climate change, ozone depletion, and the extinction of species.

Efforts to address global environmental problems are also giving rise to alternative forms of authority and identity beyond the single-point perspective of the sovereign state. Because of the long-term nature of many environmental problems, science has become a primary source of a legitimacy and authority.⁵⁹ Moreover, the emergence of global civil society points to a shifting of identities beyond that of mere citizenship. For many, transnational environmental activism, or even moving towards ecological mindfulness, entails new forms of political identity beyond that which is contingent upon a secular conception of sovereignty.⁶⁰ These might include 'planetary citizen' or 'Earth steward'. As Nicholas Onuf argues, 'majestas', or that which commands a sense of majesty or awe, has always been an important attribute of the sovereign.⁶¹ In this sense and others, secularism has never fully escaped its religious heritage. With the globalization of environmental concern and the ability to observe the Earth from space, we may be witnessing the emergence of an alternative, more holistic locus of 'majestas' beyond the nation-state.

Another aspect of secularism, its orientation towards mastery of nature through deployment of reason, is being revised in light of global environmental politics. As I have argued elsewhere, environmentalism

59. Karen Litfin, 'Environment, Wealth, and Authority: Global Climate Change and Emerging Modes of Legitimation', *International Studies Review* (2000): 119-148.

60. Interestingly, this kind of shift also involves a blurring of the boundaries between private and public, as one's private life is always considered in the context of its global ramifications. Especially among the affluent, there is a sense in global environmental issues more so than in other issues that 'we have met the enemy and the enemy is us'. Thus, one's private life, reflecting one's consciousness, takes on a global importance.

61. Nicholas Onuf, 'Sovereignty: Outline of a Conceptual History' *Alternatives* 16, no. 2 (1991): 420-442.

stands in an ambiguous relationship to science and technology.⁶² On the one hand, the modernist legacy of knowledge as power has engendered a host of problems; on the other hand, scientists often bring these problems to light and champion environmental causes. Secular reason is both culprit and saviour. Yet global environmental responses represent a significant shift away from secularism's Promethean impulse. The precautionary principle, for instance, is finding its way into both domestic and international environmental law. While the precautionary principle does not pose any significant challenge to scientific rationality, it takes a more sceptical stance with regard to instrumental reason and, most importantly, adopts an attitude of humility that is contrary to that of secularism. This increased sense of humility represents a more holistic orientation to science and technology, one that decentres humanity to some extent and acknowledges our inability to grasp the complexity of nature.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore all developments that might offer evidence for the emergence of multi-perspectival or aperspectival modes of global environmental governance.⁶³ In citing certain trends, I do not pretend to offer conclusive evidence, but only to contribute some comments suggestive of the plausibility of an alternative story to that of secularism. Rather than debating theoretical models, I have intentionally cast this discussion in terms of alternative stories because I am seeking a larger sense of meaning in which to contextualize world politics. I believe that stories have greater facility in this area than theories because they are more oriented towards questions of meaning than fact. Yet I have also presented the integral approach as a story about what *is* and what *could be*, rooted in an ontology of consciousness rather than inert matter.

There is some risk in attempting to convey in intellectual terms what is beyond words and secular rationality, yet the mind can perhaps recall glimpses of a magnificence and mysterious wonder beyond the ordinary perception; a moment of meeting between nature and spirit that might open the door to larger possibilities. In painting the outlines

62. Karen Litfin, 'The Gendered Eye in the Sky: A Feminist Perspective on Earth Observation Satellites', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* XVIII, no. 2 (1997): 26-47.

63. The growth of global civil society in general, and Internet-based activism, are suggestive in this regard. Other such developments might include the drafting of the Earth Charter by religious, scientific, and other nongovernmental organizations around the world, which expresses an integral vision. The framers of this seminal document intend to bring it to the United Nations for adoption as a framework for global environmental governance much like the Universal Declaration on Human Rights has been. See Peter Miller and Laura Westra, eds. *Just Ecological Integrity: The Ethics of Maintaining Planetary Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

Millennium

of such a 'half-luminous image', evolutionary idealism offers a story of hope and responsibility.

To take a larger view and understand the current situation as stemming from our collective immaturity, rather than any inherent defect within us, engenders a sense of hope. Yet it is not a hope that can simply stand aside from the global problematique and complacently wait for a collective maturation process to occur. It is a hope that requires a deep soul-searching and responsible action. For if we are honest with ourselves, we each recognize our own complicity in replicating the social structures which threaten to unravel the planet's life-support systems. Rather than succumbing to despairing passivity or guilt-ridden activism, the new story challenges us to integrate mind, heart, body, and soul around the project of conscious evolution, both as individuals and collectively. If 'the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk,' then perhaps the creeping planetary crisis comes as the greatest of teachers.

*Karen Litfin is Associate Professor in the
Department of Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle*
