

# **Holism and Self-Transcendence**

## **Investigating Our Planetary Destiny**

**Prof.Glen T Martin**



**World Constitution and Parliament Association  
India Chapter**

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Each of us carries within ourselves the capacity for perpetual self-transcendence. I want to try to summarize this idea, which is fundamental to my forthcoming book called *Global Democracy and Human Self-Transcendence* (Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2018). The book is in many ways about the glory and ecstasy of being human. It places the ordinary “development” model of human growth into the dynamism of so-called integral evolutionary mysticism.

Standard accounts of personal growth describe a movement from the egoism of childhood and youth, to the group oriented egoism of the ethnocentric stage (when we identify with our group, nation, culture, race, or class) to the maturity of a world-centric orientation in which we identify, with compassion and grace, with all humanity and the Earth’s other living creatures. Scholars of human self-transcendence, such as Ken Wilber (2007), identify any number of further levels of spiritual development into an awareness that is often called “kosmocentric” or “integral.”

At the higher, “kosmocentric” levels, the

masculine and feminine elements in us harmonize, and we continue to live with an ever-greater direct awareness of the holistic, ineffable depths of existence. Many of us understand that this movement can be enhanced through meditation and mindfulness in everyday existence. Meditation and mindfulness, however, are often taught in terms of a dualism between mind and body, between temporal and eternal, or between finite and infinite. In my forthcoming book, on the other hand, I attempt to elucidate dimensions of the process of a more holistic self-transcendence that are not necessarily emphasized in these dualistic meditative traditions.

This new holism includes the dynamics of human temporality—the fact that each of us lives within a dynamic present that brings a remembered past to bear on a future toward which we orient and project ourselves. As I said above, many of us who take the meditative traditions seriously develop a kind of ontological duality between the eternal One, outside of time, and the finite self, bound in time between past, present, and future. We often feel a tension and struggle between these apparent two sides of our existence. I am suggesting that this tension may often be

needless and ill-conceived. We do not need to marginalize our temporal existence of moving from the past toward an ever-better future. We can live as a single, holistic reality that includes both time and eternity.

Consider the choices each of us makes daily. We exist as a consciousness that uses its memory of the past within a dynamic present to project itself toward a future that it envisions as better than the past and the present. We decide to do more physical exercising because we think it will be better for us. We decide to take a break by going to the countryside for rest and relaxation. We decide to embark on a course of study to establish a better future of knowledge, understanding, or opportunity. We may decide to take political action because we wish to change society for the better.

Each willed action that I take includes both actual and ideal dimensions, because each willed action is not only a fact of my life but pursues some good that transcends the facts in pursuit of its ideal. I strive to be a just or loving person precisely because this ideal transcends what I am in the living present in accordance with these higher future possibilities. The future animates our lives from within. It operates as a fundamental component within

our present reality. As we grow through the worldcentric level of identification with all other persons and the Earth's other sentient beings toward the kosmocentric level in which we intuit the holism of the cosmos and begin living as embodiments of that holism, we can discover the horizon of a future that calls to us from the kosmos itself, or if one prefers, that calls to us from the Ground of Being or God. Spiritual thinker Marc Gafni speaks of a similar dynamic of the "return of the self" in "integral evolutionary mysticism." The meditative traditions often focus on liberation from the self; in Buddhism one must experience anatta (no self). Indeed, we must awaken to our false selfhood, move beyond our false ego-identifications, and discover our deeper "true self." But our unique selfhood does not disappear, it simply becomes distinguished from what is false in us. The great depth psychologist Carl Gustave Jung spoke of overcoming the ego-self through integrating and centering toward a deeper selfhood that embraces the unconscious as well as consciousness. Indeed, however today we are beginning to discover the emergent holism of the universe itself as it manifests in the human phenomenon.

Gafni writes: "What I termed Evolutionary

Unique Self is the personal face of the process living in you, as you, and through you" (2014, 99). Here is the source of the glory and ecstasy of being human, the "process" lives in us, as us, and through us. Similarly, spiritual thinker Raimon Panikkar declares that, "Man has suddenly found himself bound to the Earth, joined with it in a communal destiny, playing his part in a cosmic whole of which he is the awareness" (1979, 452). In these thinkers, we find the insight that I attempt to express in my book concerning human self-transcendence. Our part in the universe is to live each of our lives as a unique awareness of the cosmic whole.

Human beings are self-aware manifestations of the cosmic whole. We are manifestations of the holism that contemporary science has discovered so profoundly through relativity and quantum physics, made clear to us by thinkers such as Ervin Laszlo (2016). The universe has become self-aware in us, and therefore we live as a key to its evolutionary and self-transcending character. As Teilhard de Chardin put it, we are "the axis and the leading shoot of evolution" (1959, 36).

One of the great divides between "East" and "West," it has been said, is the following:

the Western religions (such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) maintain a radical distinction between the world, God, and human beings (who are made in God's image). The Eastern religions (such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism), on the other hand, see the oneness and identity at the heart of all things, including God, the world, and human beings. The new emergent evolutionary holism understands that both traditions are correct. Time and eternity, finite and infinite, body and spirit are emergent, temporalized expressions of the holism of all things, the unity in diversity of the dynamic, living now of things, of which we are "the axis and the leading shoot."

Love, in all its dimensions, animates this holism. As I declare in *Global Democracy and Human Self-Transcendence*: "From within the mysterious divine source, associated with the quantum plenum, the cosmos flows out in an astonishing, extending evolutionary flaring forth, a world holistically integrating all its particulars, and all the while retaining its primal unity. We experience this "swinging outward" as emergent process, order, and structure. Many wisdom thinkers have called this "love." Teilhard speaks of "love, the higher, universal, and synthesized form of

spiritual energy, in which all other energies of the soul are transformed, and sublimated, once they fall within 'the field of Omega'" (1970, 122-23). The "field of Omega" is the emergent holism of the kosmos actualized in us.

Love is a pervasive context for all our knowing, caring, and being, for through it human consciousness can manifest the creative joy in simply being. Knowing as ecstatic consciousness: "Inspired by the breath of the universe," Tagore declares, "the heart, like a reed sings" (2011, 158). Love in its multiple forms expresses itself in wonder, pursues understanding and knowledge, unites what is separated, draws us toward a liberating future, and fills our lives through the simple joy in living, a joy that is often at the same time an intuitive awareness, what I have called an "integrative mysticism" (Martin 2005, chap. 5). Love is fundamental to the process of continual self-transcendence that characterizes human life and reflects our infinite dignity.

As the universe has become conscious of itself in us, it has transcended its evolutionary process and actualized human freedom, creativity, and love. As free, creative, loving

beings, we no longer simply evolve toward ever-greater holistic harmony. Our mission is to create harmony, to establish a world of peace, justice, freedom, and sustainability. Our kosmocentric consciousness is not simply awareness of a non-temporal divine ground. It is the promise of human self-transcendence and a transformed future. I call this our “utopian horizon.” The universe has created for us (and itself) a utopian horizon in which an inadequate past and an unsatisfactory present demand loving transformation into the holistic harmony of peace, justice, sustainability and creative freedom.

We no longer need to emphasize a model of escaping temporality through meditative practices that seek timelessness. Our meditative practices and mindfulness, rather, should seek to actualize the divine principles of freedom, creativity, and love that have emerged in us. To do this we must abandon the false self of egoism as well as the collective selfhood of ethnocentrism. We must grow beyond these limitations into a selfhood and individuality that expresses through freedom and love the transformative quest for peace, justice, and sustainability. Each of us should ask his or herself: If I am a unique embodiment of the emergent self-awareness

of the kosmos, what should my mission or destiny be as I envision the future? What is my utopian horizon?

To me, the Constitution for the Federation of Earth ([www.earth-constitution.org](http://www.earth-constitution.org)) symbolizes, in many ways, the collective utopian horizon of our common humanity. It can serve as a blueprint as well as an ideal for the transformative struggle of the kosmos to actualize ever-greater freedom, creativity, and love through us. It establishes a World Parliament predicated on peace, justice, freedom, and sustainability, and it designs the practical procedures for making this work effectively. That is why my book is named “Global Democracy and Human Self-Transcendence.” The goal of our freedom and love is to unite all humanity as brothers and sisters on this beautiful, resplendent planet. The Earth Constitution represents the next step in human growth and self-actualization. Actualizing this vision and this process in ourselves expresses the glory and ecstasy of being human.

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