
Muhammad Naeem

The Graduate Center, City University of New York
INTEGRAL THEORY, POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, AND SACRED TEXTS OF THE WORLD: A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY

by

MUHAMMAD NAEEM

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2016

by

Muhammad Naeem

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

David Forbes
Thesis Advisor

Date

Matthew Gold
Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT


by

Muhammad Naeem

Advisor: David Forbes

This thesis puts into sharp focus the nature of war, violence, and conflict in contemporary societies through interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, contextual, textual, political and historical prisms. Echoing my existential angst, as a meaning-seeking student of life, the thesis also examines the predicaments, quandaries and the resultant miasma in order to understand the fundamental causes behind violence in the human condition. The thesis also attempts to demonstrate the paradoxical and deeply humane scope for peace along with the pursuit of what is true, good, and beautiful, and a realization of a higher order consciousness, knowing and being, and moral thinking, with an altruistic vision. Finally, it offers my personal educational horizon clamoring for restitution of pertinent pedagogies with integrated secular and sacred epistemologies echoing a voice across time and bridging cultures.
Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Professor David Forbes for his invaluable suggestions, time, encouragement, and advice I availed throughout the process of conceiving, developing and writing the thesis. My gratitude also goes to Professor Matthew Gold, the Executive Officer, and Professor Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, the Deputy Executive Officer, of the M.A. Program in Liberal Studies, at The Graduate Center, CUNY, for their extraordinary support and understanding during the entirety of my studies. Similarly, my sincere thanks to the Assistant Program Officer of the MALS program, Ms. Katherine Koutsis, who tirelessly welcomed and helped me at any time I needed assistance. My appreciation also goes to all my professors from whose teachings I gleaned inspiration in making better sense of knowing, being and becoming.
Dedication

I dedicate my work to the loving memory of my late parents who helped me cultivate the love of reading and pursuit of truth.
## Table of Contents

1. Introduction

2. Texts, Truth and Development
   - 2.1 Textual Addictions and Abstentions
   - 2.2 Ken Wilber and Stages of Development
   - 2.3 Mark Twain and Search for Truth
   - 2.4 Socrates and Liberal Education
   - 2.5 Narcissism and Free Will
   - 2.6 Ken Wilber and Free Will
   - 2.7 Truth, Familiarity and Authority
   - 2.8 Truth, Controversy and Self-Expression
   - 2.9 Truth, Identity and Interpretation
   - 2.10 Truth, Self-Insight and Self-Deception

3. Three Types of Information
   - 3.1 George Lakoff, Information and Free Will
   - 3.2 Baruch Spinoza, Information and Free Will

4. Conceptualizing the Nature and Effects of Information
   - 4.1 Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus and Choices
   - 4.2 Michel Foucault and Power/Knowledge Regimes

5. The Sacred, the Banned and the Censored

6. New Kind of Education

7. Information in Circulation and Clash of Civilizations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Integral Theory and Human Development</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Quadrants</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Stages/Levels</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Lines</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>States</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Types</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Truth and Integral Methodological Pluralism</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Structuralism</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Hermeneutics</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Ethnomethodology</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Autopoiesis</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Empiricism</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>Social Autopoiesis</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>Systems theory</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>Holons, Hierarchy and Great Nest of Being</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>Wilber-Combs Lattice, Shadow, and Evolution of Consciousness</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.13</td>
<td>Martin Seligman, Positive Psychology, and Sacred Texts</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Interpretation of Sacred Texts</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Stages of Development, Self-Expression and Interpretation</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mystery of Life and Education for 21st Century</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Chomsky, Arendt and Contemporary Propaganda</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Truth, Goodness and Beauty</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lists of Tables and Figures

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Data, Information, Knowledge and Wisdom----------------------- 18
Figure 2. Integral Theory: Four Quadrants------------------------------------------ 34
Figure 3. Integral Theory: Lines and Stages of Development----------------------- 35
Figure 4. Stages/Levels of Development: Individual and Collective--------------- 36
Figure 5. Lines and Stages of Development and Interdisciplinary Research-------- 37
Figure 6. Integral Theory: Individual Lines of Development------------------------ 38
Figure 7. Integral Theory: States------------------------------------------------- 39
Figure 8. Integral Theory: Types--------------------------------------------------- 40
Figure 9. Integral Theory: Integral Methodological Pluralism---------------------- 41
Figure 10. Holons and the increasing complexity and capacity---------------------- 44
Figure 11. Integral Theory: The Great Nest of Being------------------------------- 48
Figure 12. The Great Nest of Being in World’s Religions, by Huston Smith--------- 49
Figure 13. Integral Theory: Wilber-Combs Lattice---------------------------------- 53
Figure 14. Holons, Quadrants, Great Nest of Being and Integral Methodological Pluralism------------------------------------------ 54
Figure 15. Character Strengths and Virtues (Positive Psychology Program Resource-- 56
Figure 16. Four Quadrants: Truth, Goodness and Beauty------------------------------- 72
Table 1. Character Strengths and Virtues in World’s Sacred Texts------------------- 58-60
Table 2. Some verses which mention compassion in 8 Sacred Texts------------------- 60-61
Synopsis

[Part One] I navigate the meaning and conceptual clarification of the idea of “information” with the theoretical insights of Bourdieu and Foucault, among others, which have increasingly become central in major discourses in the 21st century, in various academic disciplines—sciences, social sciences, and humanities. I also discuss truth, identity, the unconscious with respect to views of Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, Will Durant, Ken Wilber, and Socrates.

[Part Two] I am indebted to the Platonic ideas of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and acknowledge influences of unconscious. However, the forces of the unconscious bring into focus the challenge and the mystery, and the need for education, pedagogies, and reflective and meditative practices. We are faced with ubiquitous phenomena of narcissism, which require deep discernment, genuine introspection and sustained mindfulness.

[Part Three] The question of the discernment of truth, and paradoxes of free will axiomatically follow from the above analysis of the structures of human consciousness and unconsciousness. George Lakoff underscores the paradoxes of “free will” in his exposition of the nature of human mind and brain, and the internally organized and structured conceptual frames, which determine the scope of an individual's thinking and will. This demonstrates that any claim of free will and one's autonomy is conditioned biologically, culturally, ideologically, politically, and religiously.

[Part Four] I strongly propose an educational philosophy based upon the ethics of “cosmopolitan habitus,” a paradigm that is cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, with the sense of sacred featuring centrally as reclaimed ground of being and becoming, as opposed to the binary of science and humanities. This education model recovers the scope of peace through promoting human rights, evolution of consciousness, world citizenship, and hence bridging the divisions of the East and the West through the study of sacred texts, philosophy, literature, and the arts—and emphasizing a global education approach. It also demands vastly different pedagogies and epistemologies for evolution of one's being, knowing and becoming. I draw upon Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy and Seligman's Positive Psychology who bring into focus human unity and pluralism through interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches, as opposed to relativist theorist such as Samuel Huntington, who suggest the higher probability of clash of civilizations.

[Part Five] In order to demonstrate the commonalities among diverse sacred texts, I have developed a digital database of 8 searchable texts with the intent of creating unifying bridges and removing ideological walls.
Integral Theory, Positive Psychology, and Sacred Texts of the World:  
A New Philosophy of Education for the 21st Century

Introduction

According to a January 2016 report in the online magazine, *Foreign Policy*—every year since 2010 has brought more deadly “conflicts, more war, more people displaced.” In an article titled “Conflicts to Watch in 2016,” the writer, Jean-Marie Guéheno, president and CEO of the Brussels-based International Crisis Report, declared that “It is war, not peace, that has momentum.”¹ But is there a way to reverse this trend? Might a radically different approach to global education be part of the solution? In this thesis, I argue that this is indeed the case. The interdisciplinary and cross-cultural evidence I have marshalled, strongly supports the idea that a revolutionary new approach, in which school children are introduced, in a developmentally appropriate manner, to the sacred texts of contemporary world religions—instead of just their own—and are taught the essential principles that unify all religions, and are further schooled in science, philosophy and art, and taught skills of critical, creative and “integral” thinking, and are encouraged to cultivate practices of introspection, contemplation and meditation—can produce human beings who are truly free from the cultural biases and prejudices that set the stage for war, violence and conflict. We can begin to see how we might develop a practical approach to education that engenders in children the kind of thinking that leads to wise decisions and actions that will promote positive living, healthy relationships and ultimately, world peace.

Texts, Truth and Development

Henceforth, this thesis presents my current understanding of human consciousness and human cultures with special reference to two salient concepts: “information in circulation,” on the one hand, and “stages/levels of development,” on the other. Stages/levels of development could refer to individual development as well as cultural. Furthermore, I will argue that “information” in wider circulation, both in the East and the West, is often significantly influenced by texts held sacred within a given culture, and the specific philosophy/worldview promoted by those texts.

In other words, once we know the sacred books circulating in a particular culture, we can also understand the social, political, psychological and textual forces behind the canonical, banned and bestselling books of that culture. As the French Nobel Laureate in literature François Mauriac said: “Tell me what you read and I'll tell you who you are’ is true enough, but I'd know you better if you told me what you reread.”²

Textual Addictions and Abstentions

From a librarian’s point of view, individual and cultural growth are inextricably intertwined with what is read, reread, rarely read or never read, across cultures. From my personal empirical observations, I will argue that when members of a culture—be they Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Taoist etc.—reread the same book for centuries, that can create a socio-psychological collective condition what I call “cultural addictions.” To put it differently, my view is that “textual addictions” are a form of “ego-ethnocentricity,” and often a

product of parochial political propaganda, and such “addictions” are as widespread on this planet as “textual abstentions,” be it East or West.

**Ken Wilber and Stages of Development**

In this context, “ego-ethnocentricity” and “textual addictions and abstentions” are best stipulated and explained in the following quotes from Ken Wilber and Mark Twain, respectively.


As we look at infants at birth, they have not yet been socialized into the culture’s ethics and conventions. This is called the preconventional stage. It is also called egocentric, in that the infant’s awareness is largely self-absorbed. But as young children begin to learn their culture’s rules and norms, they grow into the conventional stage of morals. This stage is also called ethnocentric, in that it centers on the child’s particular group, tribe, clan, or nation, and it therefore tends to exclude care and concern for those not of one’s group. But at the next major stage of moral development, the postconventional stage, the individual’s identity expands once again, this time to include a care and concern for all peoples, regardless of race, color, sex, or creed, which is why this stage is also called worldcentric. Thus, moral development tends to move from “me” (pre-conventional, egocentric) to “us” (conventional, ethnocentric) to “all of us” (post-conventional, worldcentric)...In the great developmental unfolding from egocentric to ethnocentric to worldcentric and higher, 70% of the world’s population has not yet stably made it to worldcentric, postconventional levels of development.³

**Mark Twain and Search for Truth**

If Ken Wilber emphasizes the developmental levels in moral choices, Mark Twain identifies the influence of religious identity, and political affiliations, in choice of books and newspapers. In his critically acclaimed essay, *What is Man*, Twain states:

If you know a man’s nationality you can come within a split hair of guessing the complexion of his religion: English--Protestant; American--ditto; Spaniard, Frenchman, Spanish, Italian, Frenchman, Hebrewman, and so on.

---

Irishman, Italian, South American, Austrian--Roman Catholic; Russian--Greek Catholic; Turk--Mohammedan; and so on. And when you know the man's religious complexion, you know what sort of religious books he reads when he wants some more light, and what sort of books he avoids, lest by accident he get more light than he wants. In America if you know which party-collar a voter wears, you know what his associations are, and how he came by his politics, and which breed of newspapers he reads to get light, and which breed he diligently avoids, and which breed of mass-meetings he attends in order to broaden his political knowledge, and which breed of mass-meetings he doesn't attend, except to refute its doctrines with brickbats. We are always hearing of people who are around seeking after truth. I have never seen a (permanent) specimen. I think he had never lived. But I have seen several entirely sincere people who thought they were (permanent) Seekers after Truth. They sought diligently, persistently, carefully, cautiously, profoundly, with perfect honesty and nicely adjusted judgment—until they believed that without doubt or question they had found the Truth. That was the end of the search. The man spent the rest of his life hunting up shingles wherewith to protect his Truth from the weather. If he was seeking after political Truth he found it in one or another of the hundred political gospels which govern men in the earth; if he was seeking after the Only True Religion he found it in one or another of the three thousand that are on the market. In any case, when he found the Truth he sought no further; but from that day forth, with his soldering-iron in one hand and his bludgeon in the other he tinkered its leaks and reasoned with objectors. There have been innumerable Temporary Seekers of Truth—have you ever heard of a permanent one? In the very nature of man such a person is impossible.  

**Socrates and Liberal Education**

The power of identity—and its cultural and individual variations—as emphasized by Ken Wilber and Mark Twain, is a formidable force in human affairs, and understanding of that power has helped me immensely in making sense of self, texts, consciousness, and the world. And I tend to agree with what contemporary Turkish poet Murathan Mungan said about identity: “Identity is a concept of our age that should be used very carefully. All types of identities--

---

ethnic, national, religious, sexual or whatever else, can become your prison after a while. The identity that you stand up for can enslave you and close you to the rest of the world.”

However, I fully acknowledge that to make sense of such complex and intertwineldimensions of identity and choices, is an ambitious if not a delusional undertaking, for even the experts and PhDs vehemently differ in their points of view about such perennial issues. I am neither a PhD nor an expert in any subject but the writing of the final thesis in liberal studies education is high time for giving an honest account of my worldview, opinions, values and choices, of my affiliations and allegiances, of my biases and blind spots, in intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual realms and domains. As Socrates, the father of philosophy famously remarked: “An unexamined life is not worth living.”

I, therefore, ask myself what use has been my liberal studies education in the living of an examined life? Am I just another run-of-the mill nationalist, religionist, ego-ethnocentricist, narcissist, and yet believe that I have “free will” in the realms of what I read, reread, rarely read, or never read; where and how I live, what causes I support, whom I befriend, mate and associate with, and cheer and vote for? I am doubtful whether “free will” exists when I witness the centuries old conflicts among major religions and nations of the world, conflicts that are largely renewed in every generation, by individuals on all sides of the conflict, who subscribe to the concept of “free will.” Can “free will” perhaps be a product of tribal propaganda and hence continuation of “ego-ethnocentricity,” or innate narcissism by more subtle and disguised means? But what is narcissism, and what is its relationship with “free will”?

Narcissism and Free Will

The idea of narcissism — “obsession with self, self-importance and perfection” etc.,—has prompted publication and popularity of a variety of books in the last few years in America. John Miller in his *Egotopia: Narcissism and the New American Landscape*, argues that “in trying to achieve self-perfection we fail to realize that perfection is only an illusion, not a reality. In our obsession with self-perfection, we deny history, for history informs us of our imperfections.”

As well as, Christopher Lasch in his bestselling book, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, argues that “Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations… To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity. We are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future.”

The notion of narcissism originally stems from the Greek myth of the beautiful youth who after “seeing his own reflection in water cannot take his eyes off himself; unwittingly, he desires himself; he praises, but is himself what he praises, and while he seeks, is sought.” The mythic character of Narcissus, after many telling and retellings, is fraught with many ironies and paradoxes, and has now emerged into a psychological concept. In the voluminous literature on the psychology of narcissism, there is “large scale agreement that the concept of narcissism is

---

10 Ibid., 5.
one of the most important contributions of psychoanalysis.” However, analysts use the term in a variety of ways: to refer to a special type of object choice; to an early non-differentiated stage of development; to a mode of relating to others; and to a personality disorder.

*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5,* defines narcissistic personality disorder as:

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following: (1). Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements (2). Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love (3). Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions) (4). Requires excessive admiration (5). Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations (6). Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends (7). Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others (8). Is often envious of others or believes others are envious of him or her (9). Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

But narcissism can be quite unconscious in individuals or cultures, and I am firmly persuaded that nothing less than moment to moment mindfulness will suffice in taming the tyranny of the “ego.” Some of the signature attributes of narcissism—"lacking empathy, and taking advantage of others, sense of entitlement, arrogant, haughty attitudes”—in addition to individual behavior, also shed light on the exploitative nature of politics among nations and the ironic denial of that truth. As acclaimed political philosopher Hans Morgenthau said: “The

---

11 Ibid., 18.
12 Ibid., 20.
human mind in its day-by-day operations cannot bear to look the truth of politics straight in the face. It must disguise, distort, belittle, and embellish the truth—the more so, the more the individual is actively involved in the processes of politics, and particularly in those of international politics. For only by deceiving himself [sic] about the nature of politics and the role he plays on the political scene is man able to live contentedly as a political animal with himself and his fellow men.”

But have human beings been using religion and tribal and national identities as fronts for narcissism and power politics, and have not seen the ironies inherent in that self-deception for millennia? A cursory study of religions, be it history or modernity, attests to the enormity and frequency of violence based on religious identity. Just take the example of Abrahamic religions. Given the amount of resources that Jews, Christians, and Muslims choose to spend on technologies of violence inter-generationally, one wonders how the “free will” of individuals in each generation, gets co-opted by parents, priests, educators, and politicians to support such conflicts.

I will argue that preparations for religious identity-based wars and violence persist in most nations with the support of ego-ethnocentric ideologies in circulation. How individuals on all sides of the conflict with all their “free will” statistically significantly choose the same kinds of texts, mates, friends, enemies, politicians, priests and news, for generations after generations, is not evidence of “free will” but of ego-ethnocentricity and narcissism and self-deception, in action. Where has this power of conscious deliberation, and the power to have done otherwise (i.e., free will), been for centuries, I wonder? The narcissistic attachment to tribal texts and

---

identities, seems to trump the power of reason. From a librarian’s perspective, ethnocentric narratives in “circulation,” will inevitably create an “ethnocentric will,” not “free will” in a significant majority.

My point is that, consider someone who is currently at the egocentric level of moral development. He or she cannot, for instance, suddenly and spontaneously start making moral choices (in a sustainable fashion), which usually emerge at a post-conventional level—*without first having diligently done some kind of necessary and sufficient “inner work”*\(^\text{15}\) for the evolution of consciousness. Hence, moral responsibility cannot be properly conceived without first identifying the essential existing level of consciousness development, which in turn cannot be understood without fully describing the “causal nexus” (especially long-term) at work, within and without. In other words, among the many “equally probable” alternatives open before us, we do make substantive choices, but those choices are usually mediated by our personal and cultural unconscious, on the one hand, and the corresponding *specificities* of information-in-circulation, and existing developmental level i.e. egocentric, ethnocentric, worldcentric, or higher, on the other.

**Ken Wilber and Free Will**

Ken Wilber further explains the relationship between “free will” and developmental levels and structures, in his following claim about individual choices:

> Worse, he can introspect all he wants, and yet he still won’t realize this. He is simply a mouthpiece for a structure that is speaking through him. He thinks he is original; he thinks he controls the contents of his thoughts; he thinks he can introspect and understand himself; he thinks he has free will and yet he is just a mouthpiece. He is not speaking, he is being spoken. The same is true for dozens of other aspects of subjectivity and

---

\(^{15}\) Practitioners of Jungian psychology call the systematic effort to access unconscious phenomena as “inner work.”
awareness: they are the products of impersonal structures and intersubjective networks and worse, structures and networks that cannot themselves be seen by subjectivity or awareness (not directly anyway). By midcentury, an enormous understanding of these impersonal structures and intersubjective networks has been gained, particularly in linguistics, grammar, syntax, structures of consciousness, and developmental a priori structures. And they all pointed to one thing: the subject of awareness is the product of intersubjective networks about which he suspects little, knows less.  

**Truth, Familiarity and Authority**

So whose mouthpiece am I? Have I been able to understand the impersonal structures and intersubjective networks relevant to my thoughts and values? All things considered, the pressing questions I ask myself after years of liberal studies education, and more than half a century of living in the East and the West, are these: What do I consider, true, good, and beautiful—and why? Are my intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual choices merely a product of my race, class, creed, gender, sacred texts, nationality, sexuality, ethnicity, historicity, language, age—and the tribal propaganda I imbibed? Are there unconscious forces at play of which I am not aware? In what significant ways have I included and/or transcended the sacred, canonical and bestselling texts of my religion, nation, class, ethnicity or language? Are my substantive choices a reflection of “free will” or simply that with which I am familiar, and with which I identify? As Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman said in his bestselling book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: “A reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition, because familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth. Authoritarian institutions and marketers have always known this

---

fact.” After all, the Hilters, Bin Ladens, Saddams and Stalins of the world were never without followers who, if asked, would have said they were acting from “free will.”

**Truth, Controversy and Self-Expression**

These perennial issues and controversial questions might not have any final answers but as I continue to ponder about them, I am grateful to two modern writers in particular: Virginia Woolf, who has written eloquently on the difficulties of discovering truth around controversial subjects; and Will Durant, who, offering a broad historical perspective, addresses philosophical questions, perceptions and interpretations.

To begin with, I concur with the following statement from Virginia Woolf, which appears in her book, *A Room of One’s Own*: "When a subject is highly controversial...one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker.”

**Truth, Identity and Interpretation**

If Virginia Woolf has inspired me to cultivate courage and humility in search for truth, and self-expression, and resilience and openness in the face of mystery and controversy, Will Durant, who wrote eleven volumes of *Story of Civilization*, warned me about the subtleties behind personal limitations, prejudices and idiosyncrasies, specially their relationship to the “identity” of the reader and the writer, and how religious, racial, and national identity can influence human perceptions and hence a particular human hermeneutic response.

---

Durant admitted to the difficulties inherent in the perceptions of the Oriental by the Occidental mind, as he wrote in the preface to the first volume, *Our Oriental Heritage*: "Every chapter, every paragraph in this book will offend or amuse some patriotic or esoteric soul: the orthodox Jew will need all his ancient patience to forgive the pages on Yahveh the metaphysical Hindu will mourn this superficial scratching of Indian philosophy; and the Chinese or Japanese sage will smile indulgently at these brief and inadequate selections from the wealth of Far Eastern literature and thought."19 He returns to that theme again in his *Lessons of History*, when he writes: “Our knowledge of any past event is always incomplete, probably inaccurate, beclouded by ambivalent evidence and biased historians, perhaps distorted by our own patriotic or religious partisanship…Even the historian who thinks to rise above partiality for his country, race, creed, or class betrays his secret predilection in his choice of materials, and in the nuances of his adjectives.”20

**Truth, Self-Insight and Self-Deception**

These insights from Virginia Woolf and Will Durant duly prepared me to be conscious of the unconscious influences and identities—especially religious and national—in search for truth, in selections of texts, in perceptions of meaning, and in choice of descriptors. However, this is not an easy task, as psychologist David Dunning observes in his book, *Self-Insight: Roadblocks and Detours on the Path to Knowing Thyself*. Dunning describes, with clarity, the psychological barriers that can misinform, misguide, or prevent individuals from achieving self-insight about their ability and character. He writes:

---

It is surprisingly difficult to form accurate impressions of self. Even with all the time we spend with ourselves and all the motivation to achieve accurate understanding, we reach flawed and sometimes downright wrong conclusions about ourselves. If self-insight is a destination we all desire, we face many roadblocks and detours along the way, and each of us fails to reach that destination in some important fashion. No matter how useful and accurate self-vision would be, and no matter how motivated we are to attain it, this accuracy is a commodity that elusively remains outside our reach.21

Hence, the eternal need for vigilance and humility in the journey to deeper self-awareness. But perhaps by becoming more cognizant about the workings of the unconscious, and the information at work therein, one can make the unconscious continually more conscious, one’s will progressively more free, and thus attain relatively greater freedom—which the great psychologist of unconscious and narcissism, Sigmund Freud, would certainly appreciate and approve. In short, committed and informed efforts towards inquiry and growth, and respect for reason and evidence are essential if one wants to rise above the constraints of contingent identity and the limits of cultural conditioning, especially the kind I call unconscious narcissism.

With this backdrop, I will now proceed to the foregoing analysis to discuss how I came to formulate the opinions that I hold about universal questions, such as what constitutes truth, goodness, and beauty; what characterizes evolved human beings and cultures; and what conditions are necessary in education to promote true thoughts, good choices, and wise actions. And I will also discuss how those opinions have shaped my life. In essence, most of my opinions are largely a product of my love of reading and contemplation. In the libraries and bookstores of Pakistan, Canada and the United States of America, and in my work as a public librarian in New York, I have encountered some of the greatest philosophers, artists, saints,

21 David Dunning, Self-insight: Roadblocks and Detours on the Path to Knowing Thyself (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), pg. 3.
scientists, mystics, poets and literary geniuses of East and West. Thanks in part to my background in library and information sciences, and the access to books it afforded me as someone who has worked for almost 16 years in a major New York library, I have passionately pondered upon the meaning of texts—sacred, banned, bestselling—and their selection, reception and circulation.

**Three Types of Information**

And I have done so through the perspectives of someone who has lived in the East and the West, and also through the perceptions created by my travels, schooling, self-education, work and experience. Given that, I will argue that in order to make better (although partial) sense of texts, self, culture, consciousness, existence, and the world and the dynamic, inter-dependent relationships of all of these, it is important to understand, first and foremost, the crucial role and mutual interactions of the *specificities* of at least three types of “information”: genetically transmitted (DNA), culturally induced (propaganda), and personally acquired (self-education).

It is also essential to think of the specificities of these three types of information—biological, cultural, and personal—*simultaneously*, along with the “stage of development” attained by the individual, in order to understand his or her values, choices, worldview, and will, as these informational specificities are constantly interacting in complex, knowable, and unknowable ways, at conscious and unconscious levels. For instance, if some individual converts to Judaism in Mecca, or embraces Jainism in Moscow, it is not because of culturally induced, state-sponsored propaganda or information in wider circulation, nor due to influence of the acknowledged sacred, canonical, and bestselling books of those cultures, but most probably due
to some complex interactions of genetic predispositions and more importantly, due to personal informational experiences of the individuals in question.

George Lakoff, Information and Free Will

“Personal informational experiences” can also help transcend genetically transmitted and culturally induced information, if consciously cultivated with respect for reason, search for truth, and desire for freedom. As George Lakoff, professor of cognitive science at the University of California, Berkeley, argues in his work on the idea of freedom, that all thought uses “conceptual frames” which are mental structures of limited scope, with a “systematic internal organization,” and presence of “specific unconscious knowledge [i.e. information]” about the world. If one is unaware of one’s “deep frames and metaphors,” then one is unaware of the basis of one’s choices. Besides, the deep frames and metaphors define “the range within which one’s free will operates. One cannot will something that is “outside one’s capacity to imagine.” Lakoff further explains:

Free will can operate only on ideas in our brain; it cannot operate on ideas we do not have. Free will is thus not totally free. It is radically constrained by the frames and metaphors shaping one’s brain and limiting how we see the world. Those frames and metaphors get there, to a remarkable extent, through repetition in the media. Cognitive science, by making us at least aware of alternative frames and metaphors, acts in service of extending the range of free will.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
Baruch Spinoza, Information and Free Will

Although George Lakoff is a contemporary, his thoughts on “free will” are not that far apart from those of the great 17th century philosopher, Baruch Spinoza:

The decisions of the mind are nothing save desires, which vary according to various dispositions…There is in the mind no absolute or free will; but the mind is determined in willing this or that by a cause which is determined in its turn by another cause, and this by another, and so on to infinity. Men think themselves free because they are conscious of their volitions and desires, but are ignorant of the causes by which they are lead to wish and desire...Will and intellect are one and the same thing; for a volition is merely an idea, which by richness of associations or perhaps through the absence of competitive ideas, has remained long enough in consciousness to pass over into action. Every idea becomes an action unless stopped in the transition by a different idea; the idea is itself the first stage of a unified organic process of which external action is the completion.27

The “richness of associations” and “absence of competitive ideas [i.e. information]” in Spinoza’s claim underscore the significance of the “information equation”—culturally induced information (socio-political), or personally acquired information (self-education). Moreover, one of the leading neuroscientists in the world, Antonio Damasio, claims in his book, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*, that Spinoza anticipated some of major finding of contemporary neuroscience by focusing on the importance of physiology behind human thoughts and emotions.28

Physiology is an unconscious dimension behind choices but so are cultural and racial identities as they significantly influence the way one perceives the world. As Emily Balcetis and Daniel Lassiter in their book, *The Social Psychology of Visual Perception*, claim that perceptual

---

experiences are partially shaped by “chronic states of perceivers” (Spinoza would say, “absence of competitive ideas”). In that book, they also highlight the role that “stable and consistent membership in groups, including ones formed through racial and cultural divides, play in shaping perception.” Subscribing to a particular group identity also influences an individual’s expectations. In contemporary, reader-oriented approaches to literature, Hans Robert Jauss has pin pointedly stressed the “horizon of expectations” that we bring to our perceptions, interpretations and aesthetic judgments. Given the workings of the unconscious narcissism, cultural reinforcements, and complex brain, memory and perceptual systems (and a host of other known and unknown factors), it is difficult if not impossible to “shake off the weight of history, escape the allegiances of one’s own memory, or forswear one’s cherished notions and beliefs.”

As can be seen, “cherished notions and beliefs” are often based on repeated interactions of information based in genes, culture, but can be mediated and even transcended by personally acquired information. In the following section, I will seek to define the concept of information for the purposes of this thesis.

**Conceptualizing the Nature of Information**

Richard Rubin, in *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, traces the lengthy etymological history of the concept of information. Early on, according to Oxford English Dictionary, the term involved a “forming” or “moulding of the mind” or it was “the pattern of

---

30 Ibid., 11.
organization of matter and energy.” The verb form of the term, “the action of informing” or the “communication of the knowledge or news of some fact or occurrence,” suggest both an active process and the object being communicated.  

Another useful way of conceptualizing the idea of information is to consider the hierarchical relationship of concepts such as symbols, data, information, knowledge and wisdom, as portrayed in the pyramid below:

![Hierarchy of Data, Information, Knowledge and Wisdom](image)

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Data, Information, Knowledge and Wisdom

At the base of the pyramid are representational symbols such as letters, numerals, or other signs, which are sensed and combined according to some rules and conventions to create *data*, which represent observed facts. The next level is *information*, which is aggregated data that becomes information when they are processed by human mind or machine. And further up the hierarchy, integrated information becomes *knowledge*. At the apex, *wisdom*, on the other hand,

---

can be fully appreciated as knowledge applied to human ends, and based on values, virtues and vision to benefit the world.\textsuperscript{35}

Given the centrality of the concept of information in an age which is often called the Information Age, and the concept’s association with computer and cognition, many universities in several countries have created schools of Informatics or Information Sciences, as Pieter Adriaans and Johan van Benthem describe in their book, \textit{Philosophy of Information}. In that book, the pair suggest that “information is a unifying notion across the sciences and humanities.” Major contemporary philosophers such as Frederick Dretske or John Perry have argued that “perennial questions of epistemology and other core areas of their field can be solved, or at least taken much further, from an information-oriented stance.”\textsuperscript{36}

Several other researchers have defined information in the context of their domains resulting in a variety of definitions. Some of them, and I quote here from Lester and Koehler’s \textit{Fundamentals of Information Studies},\textsuperscript{37} are as follows: Marc Porat defines information as “data that have been organized and communicated.” Richard Derr defines it as “a record of resolved uncertainty.” According to International Standards Organization, information is the “meaning that a human assigns to data by means of the human conventions used in their representation.” Debons, Horne, and Cronenweth focus on the cognitive state of awareness (as being informed) given representation in physical form (data). Allan Pratt defines information as a process that occurs that shapes our inward images, and the shaping that takes place is dependent on the current shape of the image and each “information event” is different, even though it may have

\textsuperscript{37} Lester and Koehler, \textit{Fundamentals of Information Studies}, pg. 16-23.
been occasioned by the same “information artifact.”\textsuperscript{38} Besides, Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon in \textit{Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response}, emphasize that “reading a story is an astonishing feat of information processing requiring the reader to perform complex operations at a number of levels.”\textsuperscript{39}

Similarly, information theorist Dan Schiller\textsuperscript{40} delineates the radical shift of the concept of information in English language since Chaucer’s time. He notes that “Information Theory” promised to unlock the inner workings of diverse systems—collections of related entities—“from steam engines to human societies.”\textsuperscript{41} Earlier, in 1950, an article in \textit{American Scientists} declared that “consideration of the effects of information storage and information transfer on physical, chemical, biological, psychological, and sociological systems might help in understanding and predicting many of the aspects of our universe.”\textsuperscript{42} Early confirmation of the value of this approach appeared in a contemporary breakthrough in biology: the discovery of the precise sequence of the DNA molecule, which forms “the code which carries the genetic information.”\textsuperscript{43} When a researcher suggested that “without materials there is nothing, and without energy nothing happens,” another countered that “without information, nothing has meaning: materials are formless, motion is aimless.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 32.  
\textsuperscript{40} Dan Schiller, \textit{How to Think about Information} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pg. 4.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 6.  
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 7.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 9.
Still another researcher, Charles Seife, author of *Decoding the Universe: How the new science of information is explaining everything in the cosmos from brains to black holes*, delineates the “omnipresence” of information in the scheme of things:

The laws of thermodynamics—the rules that govern the motion of atoms in a chunk of matter—are, underneath it all, laws about information. The theory of relativity, which describes how objects behave at extreme speeds and under the strong influence of gravity, is actually a theory of information. Quantum theory, which governs the realm of the very small, is a theory of information as well. The concept of information, which is far broader than the mere content of a hard drive, ties together all these theories into one incredibly potent idea. Information theory is so powerful because information is physical. Information is not just an abstract concept, and it is not just facts or figures, dates or names. It is a concrete property of matter and energy that is quantifiable and measurable. It is every bit as real as the weight of a chunk of lead or the energy stored in an atomic warhead, and just like mass and energy, information is subject to a set of physical laws that dictate how it can behave—how information can be manipulated, transferred, duplicated, erased, or destroyed. And everything in the universe must obey the laws of information, because everything in the universe is shaped by the information it contains.45

Furthermore, in *Perspectives on Information*, editors Ramage and Chapman note that Claude Shannon (whose paper, “The Mathematical Theory of Communication,” published in 1948 marked the birth of scientific study of the concept of information), was relevantly cited in computer science and engineering, and also in disciplines as diverse as ethics, archaeology, sport sciences and art.46

From the myriad definitions and details offered above, one can readily infer that what is perceived as information or more precisely “in-formation,” and how it is perceived, is related to

the discipline [hence the significance of specificity] in which one is operating. For example, in the biological model, DNA is the basic information unit, the building block of the information system in living organisms. Genetic messages are sent (information transfer occurs) to provide instructions to build the organism in a specific way. In the legal environment, information is perceived as property. In economics, information is perceived as a commodity. In philosophy, information is perceived as what can be known.

In a similar fashion, contemporary information philosopher Albert Borgman, author of *Holding Onto Reality: The nature of information at the turn of the millennium*, connects information with meaning and meaning systems and different dimensions of the real world and everyday life:

Meaning systems are made of information. Information can illuminate, transform, or displace reality. When failing health or a power failure deprives you of information, the world closes in on you; it becomes dark and oppressive. Without information about reality, without reports and records, the reach of experience quickly trails off into the shadows of ignorance and forgetfulness. In addition to the information that discloses what is distant in space and remote in time, there is information that allows us to transform reality and make it richer materially and morally. As a report is the paradigm of information about reality, so a recipe is the model of information for reality, instruction for making bread or wine or French onion soup. Similarly there are plans, scores, and constitutions, information for erecting buildings, making music, and ordering society. Signs came to stand apart from things and at the origin of entirely new things. Covenants helped tribes to become nations, plans guided the construction of cathedrals, and scores enabled musicians to perform cantatas. An economy of cultural signs came to enrich the realm of natural signs. Information about reality exhibits its pristine form in a natural setting. Signs contain information as an expanse of a smooth gravel is a sign that one is close to a river. In the original economy of signs, one thing refers to another in a settled order of reference and presence. While natural signs emerge from their environment and disappear in it again, conventional signs have an unnatural prominence and stability.

---

48 Ibid.
Given the promulgation and proliferation of information and information technology in modern cultures, Borgman suggests that representations of reality become “rivals of reality.” Since propaganda (both true and false) is the norm in cultural domains, there is a real concern that propaganda can become the “truth” and hence replace reality. As he explains:

Cultural information through records, reports, maps, and charts discloses reality much more widely and incisively than natural signs ever could have done. But cultural signs also and characteristically provide information for the reordering and enriching of reality. Likewise technological information lifts both the illumination and the transformation of reality to another level of lucidity and power. But it also introduces a new kind of information. To information about and for reality it adds information as reality. The paradigms of report and recipe are succeeded by the paradigm of the recording. The technological information on a compact disc is so detailed and controlled that it addresses us virtually as reality. What comes from a recording of a Bach cantata on a CD is not a report about the cantata nor a recipe—the score—for performing the cantata, it is in the common understanding music itself. Information through the power of technology steps forward as a rival of reality.

The marriage of technology and political propaganda should be a cause for concern as in this rivalry between information and misinformation, nothing less than truth is at stake (i.e. Iraq War could be one example of what Borgmann is pointing out). Specifically, in a psychological context, perceptions of information by the individual are closely tied to memory and meaning. For some theorists, it is a personal construct, or in other words, it is subjectively constructed as part of personal sense making. In this sense, individuals are in a constant state of change. As one incorporates new information, that information interacts with the pre-existing information in the

---

50 Ibid.
brain-mind complex. If the new information is different from the preexisting information, that individual’s state of information changes, altering the “inward image” that Allan Pratt would have suggested. However, even if there is nothing new in the information one receives, and it happens to be a mere repetition, it still reinforces and hence strengthens the preexisting memory pattern at a neurobiological level, a level which is the substrate of the psychological. John Perry Barlow, on the other hand, discusses information as a dynamic relationship between the sender and the receiver, with each interchange being unique. His perception of information is an “action existing in time.”

All things considered, I would say that the thinking of an individual is complex but some broad interacting components could include time, information, consciousness, cognitions, culture, situation, personal values, moral development, motivations, and desires etc.

In *The Philosophy of Information*, Luciano Floridi, a theorist with prolific contributions to information theory, catalogues varieties of perspectives on information, and offers a broad *General Definition of Information* (GDI): “Information = “Data + Meaning.” This definition concisely suggests that information is data that have been processed into a form that is “meaningful” to the recipient, thus moving from syntactical level to the semantic. “Meaningful” signifies that the data must comply with the meanings of the *chosen system, and that system could be a particular discipline, culture, or language* in question. The essential message of Luciano Floridi is that “semantic information is well-formed, meaningful, and truthful data; knowledge is relevant semantic information properly accounted for.”

---

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid., xiii.
The varieties of definitions of information suggest that, in essence, the concept of information is closely tied to its context, and when it comes to culture, it encompasses considerations of repetition and reinforcements, memory, meaning, perception, meaning-making, and hence notions of truth and goodness, along with their opposites—falsehood and evil. By and large, cultures, in the Information Age can also be conceptualized in terms of predominant kinds of “meanings in circulation” that the inhabitants of those cultures are most familiar with (regardless of the truth or falsity of those meanings), as such meaning systems are repeated over and over again and form what the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu would call the “habitus” of individual or culture.

Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus and Choices

The idea of habitus in Bourdieu's exposition, is the producer of actions and reactions, but also a product of the environmental conditions that an individual encounters during “ontogenetic development,” as an individual is bound to internalize the immanent necessities and specificities inscribed in that environment. As a form of internalized necessity, the habitus “biases our implicit micro-anticipations” of the kind of world that we will encounter at each moment, since we expect the future to preserve the experiential correlations encountered in the past. Hence, once we know the habitus or the selected meaning systems circulating in a given culture, meanings that often are derived from the sacred and canonical books in those cultures, we can also make sense of the banned and bestselling books within those cultures. As Bourdieu argues that habitus extends to our “taste” for cultural objects such as art as he connects tastes in

56 Ibid., 362.
art to social class positions, suggesting that aesthetic sensibilities are shaped by culturally ingrained habitus. Basing his research on examining the French class system, Bourdieu concluded that upper-class individuals often have a taste for fine art because they have been repeatedly exposed to and trained to appreciate it since a very early age, while working-class individuals have generally not had access to “high art” and thus haven’t cultivated the habitus appropriate to the fine art.  

Michel Foucault and Power/Knowledge Regimes

But what are the social, political and textual forces behind the creation of a specific habitus? In this regard, Michel Foucault’s writings have offered insightful explanations, as he has convincingly shown how people are unconsciously and unwittingly subjected to discourses of specific “power/knowledge” regimes and how “invisible” such inter-subjective networks are, yet how strongly can they influence everyday thought, in the majority.  

Foucault claims that in every society, the production of discourse [information-meanings-in-circulation] is controlled, selected, and organized according to certain procedures including “selection,” “commentary,” and “fellowship of discourse.” He explains that when an idea appears before us repeatedly through different modalities, we are unaware of the “prodigious machinery” behind it, which is diligently doing discourse selection and dissemination. One rarely encounters a society without its major texts (i.e., Bible, Quran, Bhagavad Gita, Tao Te Ching, Das Capital, Magna Carta,

---

60 Ibid.
Communist Manifesto, US Constitution, Sharia Law, etc.), or narratives and stories which are told, retold and well-represented in diverse domains. Derivatives of those texts are to be part of the commentaries in well-defined circumstances e.g. religious texts, judicial texts, literary texts. Cultural identity, thus, becomes a product of “repetition” and “sameness.”61 Over a course of time, not all areas of discourse are equally open. Moreover, a person must fulfill certain “similarity” conditions before he or she can be admitted in the “inner discourse circle.”62 The function of fellowship of discourse is to preserve or reproduce discourses inter-generationally, and allow them to circulate well within a community. It functions through various schema of exclusivity (e.g., identity of TV analysts and the air-time granted). Interpretive acts takes place within the context of “power relations” (whether of nation, family, gender, class or race) in a historical community.63

The Sacred, the Banned and the Censored

The ideas of Bourdieu and Foucault illuminate the underlying rationale of book banning and censorship practiced in a variety of cultures, and still continue. Specificities of the “information-in-circulation” really matter in power politics as Nicholas J. Karolides, Margaret Bald, and Dawn Sova demonstrate in 120 Banned Books: Censorship Histories of World Literature,64 the complex power politics behind the publication and circulation of Talmud, Bible, and the Quran, among other classics of world literature and philosophy:

61 Ibid.
In 1144 in Paris, the Catholic Church ordered the burning of the Talmud on charges of blasphemy and immorality. The anti-Talmudic campaign reached its height in 1239, when Pope Gregory IX ordered all Jewish books to be burned. Gregory sent letters to the kings and prelates of England, France, Navarre, Aragon, Castile, and Portugal, ordering that on a Sabbath during the following Lent, while Jews worshipped in their synagogues, the books should be seized and delivered to the mendicant friars.65 … In the context of the New Testament of Protestants, Henry VIII had no sympathy with such views and saw Tyndale’s New Testament as Lutheran in its influence. The English bishops saw this as heretical and the copies of the book were publicly burned at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in 1526. In May 1527, church authorities ordered all copies of Tyndale’s translation to be bought up and destroyed… He was the first person to translate the Bible into English from its original Hebrew and Greek and the first to print it in English. His translation of the New Testament, printed in Cologne and Worms, Germany, in 1524–26, was smuggled into England, where the church banned and publicly burned it. His translations of the Pentateuch in 1530, the Book of Jonah in 1531, and a revised New Testament in 1534 were also prohibited and burned.66 In Germany, Hitler’s Mein Kampf was responsible for the banishment of the Bible.67 … The most violently suppressed Bible translation was Tyndale’s who was arrested by authorities in Antwerp, Belgium, tried for heresy, and strangled and burned at the stake near Brussels in 1536 with copies of his Bible translation.68 … Around 1141, Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny, translated the Koran into Latin. Christian hostility toward Arabs and their religion mounted. The church fathers regarded Islam as a heresy, Muslims as infidels. By 1215, the church had introduced legislation severely restricting Muslims in Christendom. The pope ordered the burning of the first Latin translation, which were also prohibited by the Spanish Inquisition, a ban that remained in effect until 1790.69 … Modern government censorship of the Koran has also been recorded in socialist countries. In 1926 in the Soviet Union, government directives to libraries stated that religiously dogmatic books such as the Gospels, the Koran, and the Talmud could remain only in large libraries, accessible to students of history, but had to be removed from the smaller ones. In China during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, study of the Koran and its reading in mosques were prohibited. In March 2001, a group of right-wing Hindus in New Delhi, India, burned copies of the Koran to protest the destruction of ancient Buddhist statues in Afghanistan by the Taliban.70

As viewed above, one culture’s bestseller could be another culture’s banned book, not unlike the notion that one culture’s suicide bomber could be another culture’s freedom fighter.

65 Ibid., 311.
66 Ibid., 192.
67 Ibid. 131.
68 Ibid., 192.
69 Ibid., 263.
70 Ibid., 264.
Tamil Tigers, Taliban Mujahideens, or Kamikaze Warriors etc.,—all exemplify the tribal/narcissistic/ego-ethnocentric stage of development enacted in correspondence with specificities of induced and reinforced information--in the absence of opposing viewpoints—often in service of power politics. The considerations of power are intimately intertwined with information in circulation, and such considerations usually underlie the phenomena of banned or censored books—more so under authoritarian regimes. But even in the United States, although the First Amendment right to freedom of speech exist, yet overt and covert forms of censorship have even been a major part of American history and politics.71

New Kind of Education

Such an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural understanding of the role of information-in-circulation (discourses), an understanding which encompasses insights from the often antagonistic and unnecessarily divided “two cultures” 72—science and humanities—can also inform a new kind of education of our species, a species which has peaceful potentials but an immensely violent history, and unfortunately, continues to spend enormous resources on war, on the one hand, and power-politics-based-propaganda to support such wars, on the other, often in the name of education and self-defense, across nations and civilizations. A new kind of education inspired by human rights, planetary consciousness, critical and creative thinking, citizenship of the world, sacred books of East and West, masterpieces of world philosophy, masterpieces of world literature, masterpieces of world art, masterpieces of world music—in other words, a “cosmopolitan habitus,” is the need of the hour as currently existing religions and education

systems seem not to be working all that well, and mostly produce “ego-ethnocentric” and somewhat “militant mindsets,” who fervently believe in free will. Otherwise, why would the human race still be spending billions on war or preparations for it, not just in authoritarian nations, but even in “freedom” loving democracies, and hence with significant popular support--despite the two most devastating World Wars in the 20th century. American President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a general himself, who had seen much senseless violence, deplored the tribal tendencies with these truthful and world-centric words: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.”

On another occasion, he remarked, “If the mothers in every land could teach their children to understand the homes and hopes of children in every other land—in America, in Europe, in the Near East, Asia—the cause of peace in the world would indeed be nobly served.” I hope Eisenhower’s idea becomes an integral part of educational curriculum and parenting practices, somewhere in the world.

Information in Circulation and Clash of Civilizations

Not unlike Eisenhower, H. G. Wells, the great English author, who was nominated for Noble Prize four times, knew the urgency of education and the value of truth when he wrote: “Civilization is in a race between education and catastrophe. Let us learn the truth and spread it

---

74 Quoted in Kenneth Waltz N., Man, the State, and the State System in Theories of the Causes of War (1954), Kindle edition.
as far and wide as our circumstances allow. For the truth is the greatest weapon we have.”

In contrast, another thinker on the subject of civilizations, Samuel Huntington, in his internationally bestselling book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, analyzed the interrelationship between faith, culture, and politics across major civilizations and concluded that the near future was “not likely to be a harmonious peace” and “the next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations.” The article on which the book was based was published in the summer issue of “Foreign Affairs” almost a decade before 9/11, and anticipated the ensuing “war on terror.” Huntington further notes that civilizational identity will be increasingly important and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These civilizations include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly, African civilization. Suggesting that the future conflicts will occur along the “cultural fault lines” separating these civilizations from one another, he offers several reasons why that would be the case:

Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes. Differences do not necessarily mean conflict, and conflict does not necessarily mean violence. Over the centuries, however, differences among civilizations have generated the most prolonged and the most violent conflicts.

---


78 Ibid.
Another reason for the clash of civilizations, according to Huntington, is that since the world is becoming a smaller place, the interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing. Such increasing interactions “intensify civilization consciousness” on the one hand, and awareness of differences between civilizations and commonalities within civilizations, on the other. Such intensification of civilization-consciousness in turn, “invigorates differences and animosities stretching or thought to stretch back deep into history.” 79

Furthermore, as the processes of globalization are intensifying, they are separating people from longstanding well-embedded local identities, and weakening the hold of nation state as a source of identity. In much of the world, Huntington notes that religion has moved in to fill this vacuum, often in the form of movements that are labeled “fundamentalist,” and are found in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. He further suggests that it is not just the poor, downtrodden and dispossessed who are joining these fundamentalist movements across cultures but often young, college-educated, middle-class technicians, professionals and business people. 80 He ends the article by proclaiming that the West will need to “develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests. It will require an effort to identify elements of commonality between Western and other civilizations. In the near future, “there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with the others.” 81

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
The political developments after 9/11 have proven Huntington mostly right as the deadly clashes in the Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Libya, Crimea and Western Europe clearly indicate. He also makes the argument that in today’s inter-connected world, instead of resorting to old fashioned power politics and ideologies, it is imperative to rely on cross-civilizational coalitions based on reciprocal rationality, respect, and restraint in order to manage the relations between nations. But how can such coalitions, respect and restraint come about when, as he says, the people of different civilizations have “different views on the relations between God and man.” However, I will argue that the religious differences between world civilizations are better understood and hopefully antagonisms diminished in the light of Ken Wilber’s *Integral Theory* and Martin Seligman’s *Positive Psychology*.

In addition to recognizing the role of “information in circulation” in mind, brain and culture, and acknowledging the clash of civilization in the modern world, I will also apply contemporary American philosopher Ken Wilber’s *Integral Theory* and *Integral Methodological Pluralism* to delineate the interactions of self, culture, and consciousness—as the theory and the methodologies can greatly help bridge religious differences.

**Integral Theory and Human Development**

Wilber has developed a map of human consciousness and human condition by integrating the commonalities and universalities, but also preserving the unique truths of each, across many of the world’s great wisdom traditions—philosophies, religions, sciences, and the arts. The result is a comprehensive map of human capacities that Wilber calls *AQAL* theory in which *AQAL* is an

---

82 Ibid.  
83 Ibid.
acronym for All Quadrants, All Lines, All Stages/Levels, All States and All Types. Following is a brief description of these five component of the AQAL theory:⁸⁴

![Diagram of Integral Theory: Four Quadrants](https://integrallife.com/)

**Figure 2. Integral Theory: Four Quadrants**⁸⁵

**Quadrants**

Quadrants combine the most fundamental distinctions in the world: interior/exterior and individual/collective. The four resulting intersections give us the interior (subjective) and exterior (objective) of the individual and collective. In the Upper-Left quadrant (I: the interior of the individual), one can find one's thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, memories, all described in first-person terms. When we look at the individual from the outside, not subjectively but objectively, that will be the Upper-Right quadrant (it: exterior of the individual), which can be described in third-person terms such as neurotransmitters, neo-cortex, limbic system, matter, energy, physical behavior etc. We can also observe that every "I" is a member of the many "We's" that represent the collective in a given culture. This is described by the Lower-Left

---

quadrant, “We,” which gives a brief summary of what individuals within that larger collective share, such as values, meanings, identities and languages. Just as the "I" has an interior (subjective) and an exterior (objective), likewise, every "we" has an exterior which is indicated by the Lower-Right quadrant (its: systems, networks, technologies, government, natural environment etc.). Hence, in a general sense, “cultural” refers to the shared collective worldview and “social” refers to the material base of that worldview. In other words, quadrants encompass first person (I), second person (you/we), and third person (it, its) realities, which can be verified in everyday experience as any occasion possesses an inside and an outside, as well as an individual and a collective dimension. More importantly, all four quadrants show growth or evolution, which happens in levels or stages. Just as individual thoughts have brain correlates, similarly, cultural meanings (Lower-Left quadrant) also have correlates in objective social institutions and material social structures (Lower-Right quadrant) i.e. food production, transportation systems, written records, school buildings, geopolitical structures, behavioral actions of groups, written legal codes, architectural styles and the building themselves, types of technology, linguistic structures in their exterior aspects (written or spoken signifiers).
Stages/Levels

Stages (or levels), another component of AQAL theory, are higher order structures that emerge as evolution breaks into new territory. Each level represents a level of organization or, in other words, a level of complexity, and emergence in a given domain of development, termed as line of development. These developmental lines occur in all four quadrants, hence, encompassing individual and the collective. In the context of individual development, ("I" for example), one of the lines—the "self-identity" line—unfolds from egocentric to ethnocentric to worldcentric, or from “body to mind to soul to spirit.” Correspondingly, the felt energy phenomenologically (Upper Left Quadrant) expands from “gross” to “subtle” to “causal” to “nondual.” The levels or

stages can apply to any line of development, such as self, cognitive, emotional, moral, spiritual, values, needs, worldview etc. In the realm of the interior collective (shared values, shared meanings, shared identities etc.), the stages could refer to cultural unfolding in waves, moving from archaic to magic to mythic to mental to integral and higher (Lower-Left quadrant). In the Lower-Right quadrant, the stages can encompass development and evolution in modes of techno-economic production such as foraging to horticultural to agrarian to industrial to informational systems, among other systems. The general idea is simply that of unfolding levels of greater cultural and social complexity.

Figure 5: Lines and Stages of Development and Interdisciplinary Research

---

Lines

Lines, yet another component, are specific areas (cognitive, emotional, inter-personal, moral, spiritual etc.) of our being-in-the-world in which growth and development can occur. They are called developmental lines because they unfold in progressive stages such as pre-conventional, conventional and post conventional. The level of a particular line simply means the "altitude" of that line in terms of its growth and consciousness. Hence, it is only when states are converted into stages of consciousness that genuine development occurs. However, one can be highly developed in one line (i.e., cognitive) and not so developed in another (i.e., moral). Wilber furnishes the example of Nazi doctors as a phenomenon of high development in cognitive line but low in the moral line. He also identifies some 31 specific lines of development, with each line unfolding with respect to stimulation by the corresponding information-energy inputs. For instance, to stimulate bodily-kinesthetic development, one can employ hatha yoga or similar

---

body-based practices. Similarly, to evolve in the cognitive line, one can embark upon extensive reading, reasoning and research, and so on. The 31 lines are: affective/emotional development, altruism, bodily-kinesthetic, care and concern, cognition, communicative competence, conative/motivational drives, creativity, dance, epistemic mode, forms of death seizure, ideas of the good, interpersonal capacity, intimacy, level of defense mechanisms, linguistic/narrative thought, logico-mathematical thought, morals, musical, object relations, openness, psychosexual, religious faith, role-taking, self-identity, self-needs, spiritual development, sports, values/worldviews, and visual-spatial thinking.

Figure 7. Integral Theory: States

**States**

*States*, yet another component of AQAL theory, refer to states of consciousness or subjective realities within us, which could be natural or altered or trained. They could be

---

temporary, changing, and sometimes powerful (especially of the transpersonal realm) forms of awareness, the most familiar being waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. But there are others such as meditative states (induced by yoga, zikr, breath-work, tonglen, contemplative prayer, etc.) and a variety of peak experiences induced by listening to exquisite music, or walking in nature etc. The great religious traditions maintain that the three natural states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, deep sleep—potentially contain a treasure trove of knowledge, experience, and wisdom, only if we know how to train those states of consciousness properly. For instance, Wilber argues that the advanced meditative states of consciousness such as “unio mystica,” “sahaj” or “satori” can “give knowledge or awareness of an ultimate reality.” Thus, states of consciousness can house several different levels (or stages) of consciousness. Besides, states of consciousness come and go but stages of consciousness are permanent.

![Figure 8. Integral Theory: Types](https://integrallife.com/)

**Types**

*Types*, the final component of AQAL theory, are “horizontal typologies” (such as masculine and feminine expressions, yin, yang, or Myers-Briggs, or enneagram etc.). They

---

simply refer to items that can be present at virtually any stage or state. For example, the main types within Myers-Briggs are feeling, thinking, sensing, and intuiting. The main types within enneagram typology are helper, achiever, reformer, and so on. One can be any of those types at virtually any stage of development.

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 9. Integral Theory: Integral Methodological Pluralism**

**Truth and Integral Methodological Pluralism**

In addition to the above five components of Integral Theory, Ken Wilber has also suggested eight methodological families—phenomenology, structuralism, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, autopoiesis, empiricism, social autopoiesis, and systems theory—that are essential for making sense of the multifaceted nature of being in the world, and for delineating

---


the complex inter-connection of consciousness, psychology, sociology, biology, theology, behavior and culture etc.

Let me briefly explain each one of them:

- **Phenomenology** is an exploration of first-person subjective realities (the insides of individual interiors, i.e., introspection, self-inquiry, reflection, prayer, Jungian “inner work” etc.)

- **Structuralism** explores reoccurring patterns of direct experience (the outsides of individual interiors, i.e., interviews, psychological tests, psychometric measures, etc.)

- **Hermeneutics** explores intersubjective understanding (the insides of collective interiors, i.e., focus groups, collective reflection, symbolic-interpretive, etc.)

- **Ethnomethodology** explores recurring patterns of mutual understanding (the outside of collective interiors i.e. participant observer, cultural anthropology techniques, forms of structural analysis, cross-cultural analysis.)

- **Autopoiesis** explores self-regulating behavior (the insides of individual exteriors i.e., imaginatively and scientifically projecting oneself into a biological organism’s perspective, diagramming cognitive inputs and outputs, modeling vision and perceptual systems, identifying pattern recognition capacities of organisms, and mapping structural couplings between organisms/environments etc.)
• **Empiricism** explores observable behaviors (the outsides of individual exteriors i.e. surveys, fieldwork, control group, experimental group, 3rd-person descriptions, charts, statistics etc.)

• **Social Autopoiesis** explores self-regulating dynamics in systems (the insides of collective exteriors i.e., analysis of senders and receivers of data, accounting of the perspective of the observer and the multiple senders and receivers, holonical mapping, diagramming networks and channels of communication, and identifying the binary language structures that allow systems to register and respond to different phenomena etc.)

• **Systems theory** explores the functional-fit of parts within an observable whole (the outside of collective exteriors i.e. mapping, functional fit, input-output analysis, monitoring and evaluation etc.).

According to Wilber, these eight are “apparently irreducible methodologies, injunctions, or paradigms for gaining reproducible knowledge (or verifiably repeatable experiences) and any approach that leaves out any of these 8 paradigms is a less-than-adequate approach according to available and reliable human knowledge at this time… We inhabit these 8 spaces, these zones, these life-worlds, as practical realities. Each of these zones is not just a perspective, but an action, an injunction, a concrete set of actions in a real world zone. Each injunction brings forth or discloses the phenomena that are apprehended through the various perspectives. It is not that
perspectives come first and actions or injunctions come later; they simultaneously co-arise (actually, tetra-arise)."^{94}

![Diagram of holons and the increasing complexity and capacity](image)

Figure 10. Holons and the increasing complexity and capacity^{95}

**Holons, Hierarchy and Great Nest of Being**

The idea of “tetra-arising” is one of the most illuminating concepts in *Integral Theory* as it helps us see why it is necessary to integrate data, information, knowledge, and wisdom from multiple disciplines, and also because it underscores the *specificity* and *simultaneity* of interactions between subjective and objective aspects of individual and culture. The basic tenet of *Integral Theory* is that reality is composed of “holons,” a term coined by Arthur Koestler to refer to an entity that is itself a whole and simultaneously a part of some other whole. For example, a whole atom is part of a whole molecule, and the whole molecule is part of a whole cell, and the whole cell is part of a whole organism, and so on. Each of these entities is neither a whole nor a part, but a whole/part, a holon. Similarly, a letter is part of a word, which is part of a sentence, which is part of a paragraph, which is part of a chapter, which is part of a book. Wilber

---

^{94} Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, pg. 47.
explains the importance of the context in holonic relationships, in his magnum opus, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality:

With reference to the phrase "the bark of a dog," for example, the word bark is a whole with reference to its individual letters, but a part with reference to the phrase itself. And the whole (or the context) can determine the meaning and function of a part—the meaning of bark is different in the phrases "the bark of a dog" and "the bark of a tree." The whole, in other words, is more than the sum of its parts, and that whole can influence and determine, in many cases, the function of its parts. Normal hierarchy, then, is simply an order of increasing holons, representing an increase in wholeness and integrative capacity—atoms to molecules to cells, for example...To be a part of a larger whole means that the whole supplies a principle (or some sort of glue) not found in the isolated parts alone, and this principle allows the parts to join, to link together, to have something in common, to be connected, in ways that they simply could not be on their own.96

In like hierarchical manner, one can think of data as a part of information, which is part of knowledge, which is part of wisdom—with each successive level demonstration increasing asymmetrical complexity, capacity and wholeness—and irreversibility. As Wilber explains:

Hierarchy is asymmetrical (or a "higher"-archy) because the process does not occur in the reverse. Acorns grow into oaks, but not vice versa. There are first letters, then words, then sentences, then paragraphs, but not vice versa. Atoms join into molecules, but not vice versa. And that "not vice versa" constitutes an unavoidable hierarchy or ranking or asymmetrical order of increasing wholeness. All developmental and evolutionary sequences that we are aware of proceed by hierarchization, or by orders of increasing holism—molecules to cells to organs to organ systems to organisms to societies of organisms, for example. In cognitive development, we find awareness expanding from simple images, which represent only one thing or event, to symbols and concepts, which represent whole groups or classes of things and events, to rules which organize and integrate numerous classes and groups into entire networks. In moral development (male or female), we find a reasoning that moves from the isolated subject to a group or tribe of related subjects, to an entire network of groups beyond any isolated element.97

---

97 Ibid.
Here Wilber demonstrates the relationship between *Integral Methodological Pluralism* and holons and quadrants, and being-in-the-world:

Under the enactive potential of various forms of practice—from phenomenology to empiricism to hermeneutics to ecological investigations to contemplative endeavors—various dimensions of a holon are energized: they “light up” in vibratory resonance, enacting a worldspace mutually co-created by the inquiring subject (but not merely created by the subject), and stand forth in the clearing created in part by the form of the inquiry. Thus, when I take a first-person stance to this moment, I light up the subjective dimensions of being-in-the-world, many aspects of which are disclosed by introspective phenomenology. When I take a second-person stance to this moment, I light up the intersubjective dimensions of being-in-the-world, many aspects of which are disclosed by hermeneutics and collaborative inquiry. When I take up a third-person perspective to this moment, I light up the objective (and interobjective) dimensions of being-in-the-world.98

Wilber’s holistic approach to human development, which embraces subjective and objective realms of the individual and the collective and uses methodological pluralism to search for truth, also helps integrate science and religion by creating a space for senses, reason and meditation. Just as a person wishing to get a Ph.D. in physics has to spend a number of years in studying data, information, knowledge and accumulated wisdom in the domain of physics, similarly a person wishing to evolve spiritually and discern matters mystical, has to spend a number of years practicing some kind of meditation/contemplation. As Wilber asserts: “And if you want to know if this data is real, all you have to do is follow the experiment—contemplation—and see for yourself. Of those who adequately do so, the majority report a simple conclusion: you are directly introduced to your True Self, your Real Condition…”99 Such

99 Ken Wilber, *One Taste*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), pg. 44.
meditation/contemplative practices for evolving consciousness are offered in all the major
religions and act as a unifying thread among theistic and non-theistic religions. As Wilber
writes: 100

The mystics ask you to take nothing on mere belief. Rather, they give you a set of
experiments to test in your own awareness and experience. The laboratory is your
own mind, the experiment is meditation... 101 The zikr of Sufism, shikan-taza of
Zen, devekut of Judaism, the Prayer of the Heart, vision quest of shamanism,
self-inquiry of Ramana, vipassana of Theravada, chih-kuan of T’ien T’ai,
centering prayer—the raja, jnana, hatha, karma, and kundalini yogas—the vast
and stunning panoply of the contemplative practices of the world’s great wisdom
traditions—the whole point is to re-member, re-collect, and re-discover that which
you always already are... 102 Indeed, the soul’s duty in this life is to remember.
The Buddhist smriti and sati-patthana, the Hindu smara, Plato’s recollection,
Christ’s anamnesis: all of those terms are precisely translated as remembrance.
And so, the soul that finally remembers all this, and sees it however vaguely, can
only pause to wonder: How could I have forgotten? How could I have renounced
that State which is the only Real State. 103

The essence of all true religions is the discovery of “higher states of consciousness,”
which lie dormant until they emerge through the mediation of disciplined meditation. The same
conclusion is reached by Huston Smith, the renowned scholar of comparative religions, who
summarizes the world’s religions in one phrase: “a hierarchy of being and knowing.” 104 He
created the diagram below, which depicts that hierarchy as explicated in Hinduism, Buddhism,
Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, from material to mystical (also known as the Great
Chain of Being), and the corresponding stages of being and knowing.

---

103 Ken Wilber, *The Atman Project: A Transpersonal View of Human Development* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical
The idea of the *Great Chain of Being* suggests that “reality is not one-dimensional; it is not a flatland of uniform substance stretching monotonously before the eye. Rather, reality is composed of several different but continuous dimensions. Manifest reality, that is, consists of different grades or levels, reaching from the lowest and most dense and least conscious to the highest and most subtle and most conscious. At one end of this continuum of being or spectrum of consciousness is what we in the West would call “matter” or the insentient and the nonconscious, and at the other end is “spirit” or “Godhead” or the “superconscious” (which is also said to be the all-pervading ground of the entire sequence).”

---

105 Ibid., 49.

Similarly, the renowned Indian philosopher of religion, Coomaraswamy, noted that the world’s great religions “in their different degrees represent a hierarchy of types or levels of consciousness extending from animal to deity, and according to which one and the same individual may function on different occasions.”

Hence, as the self evolves, from animal consciousness to deity consciousness, the perception of what is “real” also changes. In an important sense, what is real is a function of which “state-stage of consciousness” one is looking from. In other words, perceptions of reality are usually “state-stage-consistent.” What a mystic of any religion can experience in his or her consciousness, often cannot be experienced by someone at an egocentric or ethnocentric stage of development. As can be noted, “each expanding link in the Great Chain of Being represents an increase in unity and wider identities, from the isolated identity of the body through the social and communal identity of the mind to the supreme identity of Spirit, an identity with literally all manifestation. This is why the great hierarchy of being is often drawn as a series of concentric circles or spheres or “nests within nests.” [So] the Great Chain is actually the Great Nest of Being.”

107 Quoted in Ken Wilber, The Essential Ken Wilber, pg. 51.
108 Ken Wilber, The Essential Ken Wilber, pg. 50.
However, if someone at an egocentric or ethnocentric stage does have a mystical experience, they will often “interpret” it from their existing “stage of development.” This phenomenon is described in “Wilber-Combs Lattice” which is a conceptual model of consciousness and its evolution, developed by Ken Wilber and Allan Combs. It is a grid with sequential states of consciousness on the X-axis (from left to right) and with stages of development on the Y-axis (from bottom to top). This lattice illustrates how each stage interprets experiences of different states of consciousness, including mystical states, in different ways. Wilber explains its groundbreaking, cross-cultural significance in *Integral Spirituality*, offering

---


a treasure trove of wisdom in making sense of the “state-stage” nexus and its contents and discontents: \(^{111}\)

[Wilber-Combs Lattice] allowed us to see how individuals at even some of the lower stages of development—such as magic or mythic—could still have profound religious, spiritual, and meditative state experiences. Thus, gross/psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual were no longer stages stacked on top of the Western conventional stages, but were states (including altered states and peak experiences) that can and did occur alongside any of those stages. The point is that a person can have a profound peak, religious, spiritual, or meditative experience of, say, a subtle light or causal emptiness, but they will interpret that experience with the only equipment they have, namely, the tools of the stage of development they are at. A person at magic will interpret them magically, a person at mythic will interpret them mythically, a person at pluralistic will interpret them pluralistically, and so on. But a person at mythic will not interpret them pluralistically, because that structure-stage of consciousness has not yet emerged or developed. Take a subtle-state experience of intense interior luminosity accompanied by a sense of universal love. Let’s say this person is Western and Christian, so that the Lower-Left quadrant (which is also intimately involved in providing the contexts for interpretation) has primed this experience of interior luminosity to be interpreted as an encounter with Jesus Christ (or the Holy Spirit). That subtle-realm religious experience can occur at virtually any stage—the magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic, or integral—but in each case, it will be interpreted according the basic limiting principles of that stage. Thus (to give some quick and stylized examples), at the magic stage, Jesus is experienced as a personal savior who can miraculously alter the world in order to satisfy my every desire and whim: Jesus as Magician, turning water in wine, loaves into fishes, walking on water, and so on (we are not talking about the ontological content, if any, of the interpretation; Jesus may or may not have walked on water, but at this stage, this is the thing that would mean the most to me). This stage is preconventional and egocentric, so this Jesus cares only about me. At the next stage, the mythic, the same kind of subtle-state experience might be interpreted as communion with Jesus the Eternal Truth bringer. This stage is absolutistic in its beliefs, so you will either believe the Word exactly as written, or you will burn in hell forever. This stage is also ethnocentric, so only those who believe in Jesus Christ as their personal savior can be saved. At the next stage, the mental-rational, Jesus Christ becomes a humanized figure, still fully Divine and fully human, but now fully human in a more believable way, as a teacher of the universal love of a Deistic God. Because this stage is the beginning of the postconventional and worldcentric stages, this is also the first of the stages of development that can find salvation through Christ Jesus but also allow that others might find equal salvation through a different path…Have a series of profound spiritual

---

\(^{111}\) Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, pg. 112.
experiences at the pluralistic stage and you will likely find yourself one of the authors of the Postmodern Bible... The integral stage...is simply the opening to at least four higher structure-stages of development any of which will insist on integrating its experience of Christ-consciousness with other expressions of the Holy Spirit around the world...(Frankly, any earlier/lower stages would simply not find this topic interesting).

The above explanation of stages and their corresponding ways of being and knowing offers a profound insight into the religion-based politics and violence in history and modernity. In other words, I will argue that clash of civilizations is mostly a product of majority of humans being stuck at ego-ethnocentric stage, and such a clash might not be averted unless human beings evolve to higher stages of consciousness—world-centric and integral. As Einstein said: “You cannot solve a problem from the same level of consciousness that created it.”

**Wilber-Combs Lattice, Shadow, and Evolution of Consciousness**

Wilber-Combs Lattice also underscores the idea that habitus, or long-term memory patterns, or “information in circulation” within and without, and states and stages of consciousness are all intertwined (tetra-arise) in specific ways, and need to be understood from multiple cross-cultural perspectives.

Besides, every religion has its rare mystics but majority of that religion’s followers often live in “unconsciousness” and “denial” and “repression,” and “dissociation” and “projection” of what is often called the “shadow,” and Wilber suggests that the great religions of the world don’t offer much help in managing the shadow, and emphasizes the need for Western psychology to heal. As he explains:

---

It’s astonishing that I can deny I. That I can take parts of my self, my I-ness, and push them on the other side of the self-boundary, attempting to deny ownership of those aspects of my self that are perhaps too negative, or perhaps too positive, to accept. Yet pushing them away does not actually get rid of them, but simply converts them into painful neurotic symptoms, shadows of a disowned self come back to haunt me, as I look in the mirror of that which most disturbs me about the world out there, and see only the shadow of my disowned self…The great wisdom traditions, for all their wisdom, have absolutely nothing like this. I know, I’ve spent thirty years checking with students and teachers, and the conclusion is unanimous: an understanding of psychodynamic repression, as well as ways to cure it, is something contributed exclusively by modern Western psychology. Many meditation teachers claim that they offer something similar, but when you look closely at what they mean, it really isn’t this. Consequently, even advanced meditators and spiritual teachers are often haunted by psychopathology, as their shadows chase them to Enlightenment and back, leaving roadkill all along the way…Whenever I disown and project my own qualities, they appear “out there,” where they frighten me, irritate me, depress me, obsess me. And conversely, in 9 out of 10 cases, those things in the world that most disturb and upset me about others are actually my own shadow qualities, which are now perceived as “out there.” It’s that double dose of hatred that shows up as neurotic symptoms, the shadows of a disowned self. If the negative qualities of another person merely inform me, that’s one thing; but if they obsess me, infuriate me, inflame me, disturb me, then chances are that I am caught in a serious case of shadow boxing, pure and simple…In short, in the course of a typical dissociation, when my angry feelings arise, they are converted from my 1st-person anger into a 2nd- or even 3rd-person other in my own awareness. Wilber’s solution to healing the shadow symptom is to convert these “it feelings” into “I feelings,” hence re-owning the shadow. This act of “re-owning the shadow (converting 3rd-person to 1st-person) removes the root cause of the painful symptoms.”

Jeremiah Abrams and Connie Zweig’s Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature describes examples of shadow phenomena from across cultures and traditions. As Carl Jung also observed: “Everyone carries a shadow and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.” And William Shakespeare poetically admitted: “This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.”

---

113 Ken Wilber, Integral Spirituality, pg. 146-147.

114 Ibid.

Wilber’s approach not only helps make sense of the shadow but by integrating the idea of the *Great Chain of Being*, and connecting it with the four quadrants and Integral Methodological Pluralism, his approach can remove the limitations and inadequacies of ego-ethnocentric religious ideologies and practices. The following diagram brings it all together:

---

Figure 14. Holons, Quadrants, Great Nest of Being and Integral Methodological Pluralism\(^{117}\)

As Wilber explains:

The Great Chain is traditionally given as matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit. Many traditions subdivide this considerably. For example, the soul is often divided into psychic and subtle levels, and spirit into causal and nondual. An expanded Great Nest would therefore include: matter, body, mind, soul (psychic and subtle), and spirit (causal and nondual). That is fine. But those levels are supposed to include all of reality. Yet, as stated, they mostly apply to just the Upper Left quadrant (the spectrum of interior consciousness)—and that’s the first inadequacy. Thus, as I have often tried to point out, each of the vertical levels of the Great Chain needs to be differentiated into four horizontal dimensions (the four quadrants). So in addition to the subjective spectrum of consciousness, we need to add objective correlates (the Upper Right quadrant), intersubjective cultural backgrounds (Lower Left quadrant), and collective social systems (Lower Right). Otherwise the Great Chain cannot withstand the blistering critiques that modernity has (correctly) leveled at it.\(^{118}\)


\(^{118}\) Ken Wilber, The Essential Ken Wilber, pg. 108.
By bringing together the subjective and objective dimensions of the individual and the collective phenomena, *Integral Theory* offers a framework for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural unification which coherently encompasses science, philosophy, art and religions of East and West.

**Martin Seligman, Positive Psychology, and Sacred Texts**

Whereas Wilber’s framework offers integration of world religions on the basis of consciousness and its levels, emphasizing meditation, Martin Seligman, one of the founders of Positive Psychology, and former president of American Psychological Association, suggests integration among religions and cultures on the basis of human attributes that he asserts are “ubiquitous if not universal” and often “crucial to human thriving.”\(^{119}\) He emphasized two aims of his research: “First aim was to focus on being interdisciplinary and cross-cultural because the strengths that make for the most exemplary person or lived life involves the realms of philosophy, religion, politics, and education. The second aim was empirical: Would certain virtues, regardless of tradition or culture, be widely valued?”\(^{120}\) And his research lead to the following six core moral classes of virtues. These are:

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge** – Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.
2. **Courage** – Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.
3. **Humanity** - Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others.
4. **Justice** - Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.


\(^{120}\) Ibid.
5. Temperance - Strengths that protect against excess.
6. Transcendence - Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.

While these six classes of moral virtues are a bit abstract, Seligman argues that they are based on 24 specific character strengths that can be measured across cultures.

![Character Strengths and Virtues](https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/classification-character-strengths-virtues/)

Figure 15. Character Strengths and Virtues (Positive Psychology Program Resource)

Strengths that accompany the virtue of wisdom and knowledge are:

1. Creativity
2. Curiosity
3. Judgement
4. Love of Learning
5. Perspective

Strengths that accompany the virtue of courage are:

6. Bravery
7. Persistence
8. Honesty

---

9. Zest

Strengths that accompany the virtue of humanity are:

10. Love
11. Kindness
12. Social Intelligence

Strengths that accompany the virtue of Justice are:

13. Teamwork
14. Fairness
15. Leadership

Strengths that accompany the virtue of temperance or moderation are:

16. Forgiveness
17. Modestly
18. Prudence
19. Self-Control

Strengths that accompany the virtue of transcendence are:

20. Appreciation of Beauty
21. Gratitude
22. Hope
23. Humor
24. Spirituality

Martin Seligman’s work lead to the idea that another possible way, in addition to Wilber’s Integral Theory and The Great Nest of Being, to build bridges among diverse religions could be to discover instances of these character strengths and virtues or their synonyms or semantic similarities in the sacred texts of those religions and bring them together in an interfaith educational curriculum designed for peace and understanding. To accomplish this objective, in a spur of inspiration, I created a spreadsheet (of 102350 rows) in Microsoft Excel of eight
sacred texts: Bhagavad Gita,\textsuperscript{122} Upanishads,\textsuperscript{123} Dhammapada,\textsuperscript{124} Tao Te Ching,\textsuperscript{125} Hebrew Bible,\textsuperscript{126} Christian Bible,\textsuperscript{127} Quran,\textsuperscript{128} and Guru Granth Sahib,\textsuperscript{129} and used a Visual Basic program to search all of them simultaneously with keywords representing universal human qualities and concerns which are acknowledged (to varying degrees), in all major cultures and civilizations. As I had anticipated, all the sacred texts had something to say about most universal human qualities and concerns, as can be observed from the following table:

Table 1. Character Strengths, Virtues and Other Ubiquitous Human Concerns, in Sacred Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.</th>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>QURAN</th>
<th>OT*</th>
<th>NT*</th>
<th>Gita</th>
<th>Dhamma</th>
<th>Tao</th>
<th>Granth</th>
<th>Upanishads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wonder</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soul</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{122} Easwaran Eknath, \textit{The Bhagavat Gita} (Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1986)
\textsuperscript{123} Eknath Easwaran, \textit{The Upanishads} (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1983)
\textsuperscript{124} Easwaran Eknath, \textit{The Dhammapada} (Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1986)
\textsuperscript{125} Laozi et al., \textit{Tao Te Ching: Six Complete Translations} (Radford, VA: & D Pub., 2008)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Loving Kindness</th>
<th>Compassion</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Kindness</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Mercy</th>
<th>Sacrifice</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Charity</th>
<th>Mystery</th>
<th>Integrity</th>
<th>Humility</th>
<th>Spirit</th>
<th>Generosity</th>
<th>Forgiveness</th>
<th>Patience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3327</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Loving Kindness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1105</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>True Self</td>
<td>Quran</td>
<td>The City</td>
<td>[90.17]. Then he is of those who believe and charge one another to show patience, and charge one another to show compassion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Transcend</td>
<td>Old Testament (OT)</td>
<td>Psalms</td>
<td>[4]. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Chapter/Section</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Testament (NT)</td>
<td>Hebrews</td>
<td>[2]. Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagavad Gita</td>
<td>Two Paths</td>
<td>[2]. Do not get angry or harm any living creature, but be compassionate and gentle; show good will to all.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhammapada</td>
<td>Chapter 21</td>
<td>[300]. The disciples of Gautama are wide awake and vigilant, rejoicing in compassion day and night.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tao Te Thing</td>
<td>The Three Treasures</td>
<td>[3]. The compassionate can be brave; the economical can be generous; those who dare not come to the front in the world can become perfect as chief vessels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granth</td>
<td>Khalsa Consensus Translation</td>
<td>Kabeer, the Great Giver is the tree, which blesses all with the fruit of compassion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Upanishads            | BRIHADARANYAKA  | 2 "Have you understood?" he asked. "Yes," they said. "You have told us dayadhvam, be compassionate."
"You have understood, " he said. The heavenly voice of the thunder repeats this teaching. Da-da-da! Be self-controlled! Give! Be compassionate!
All this is full. All that is full. From fullness, fullness comes. When fullness is taken from fullness, Fullness still remains.
OM shanti shanti shanti |

**Interpreting the Sacred Texts**

Although one can find verses for many universal moral virtues, vices, and character strengths in all of the above-mentioned texts, the interpretation of sacred texts, however, has been fraught with difficulties, given the number of translations, which sometimes deeply disagree with each other. Since I grew up in Islamic culture, I have frequently harbored many confusions while trying to make sense of often-contradictory translations. In the context of this thesis, I will argue that to make better sense of some of the verses of the *Quran* one has to first
identify the stage of cognitive, emotional, moral and spiritual development of the author and the audience, prevailing in a given geographical, cultural, social, economic, political, and historical context.

For instance, take the following two somewhat contradictory verses of the Quran regarding Jews and Christians, who were an integral part of the Arabian peninsula at the time of Prophet Muhammad:

(5:51) O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.  

(2:62) Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.  

Since the Qur'an is considered the final word of God by more than a billion Muslims in the world, it is no surprise that the political conflicts between the three Abrahamic religions have endured since pre-modernity. In order to unpack these verses, I have found Wilber’s concept of stages of development most illuminating as he explains in his book, A Sociable God: Toward a New Understanding of Religion:

At stage 1 (egocentric), men are selfish in agentic ways, women are selfish in communal ways (using social ostracism to punish others). At stage 2 (ethnocentric), men extend rights to those of their group, tribe, or nation—but demonize those in other ethnic groups—and women extend love and care to their own group or tribe, but gladly offer up sons to the battlefield to slay the enemy. At stage 3 (universal care or worldcentric), the masculine principle extends rights and justice to all human beings, regardless of race, color, sex, or creed; and the feminine principle extends care and compassion to all humans. At stage 4

---

131 Ibid.
(integrated), the masculine and feminine principles in each person can be integrated in that person, resulting in a union of the contrasexual attitudes in each. In each stage of a developmental hierarchy, the succeeding stage is indeed part of a ‘higher-archy’ because each succeeding stage has more love, more compassion, more care, more justice, more consciousness, more rights, and so on. Far from being a bad thing, nested hierarchies are the means of reducing prejudice, reducing oppression, reducing “isms” of one sort or another (racism, sexism, speciesism, etc.). The higher one is in a growth higher-archy, the more care and the less oppression one is inclined to possess, by definition and by factual research.\(^{132}\)

I am firmly persuaded that for interpreting sacred texts, going verse by verse, and identifying the most relevant perspectives, will yield better interpretations. Giving due respect to the complexity and mystery and historical and political and developmental (individual and collective) context at work behind those verses necessitates an interdisciplinary understanding and methodological pluralism. Hence, in the light of Wilber’s stages of development, I would argue that the prevailing stages behind Verse 5:51 are 1 and 2, or a blend of ego-ethnocentricism as it prescribes to ostracize and demonize those in other religions. In contrast, one can identify universal care and world-centric attitude behind 2:62 as it extends rights and justice to believers of other religions.

In addition, the understanding of political and religious realities prevailing at the time also helps contextualize these contradictory verses. Islamic scholar Sayyid Razwy has noted that Arabian culture in the times of Prophet Muhammad had many tribes or clans including Jews, Christians, and polytheists that struggled for power and maintained their pre-Islamic religions. Muhammad also concluded many peace treaties with a number of them in the light of particulars and pragmatics of the power and identity-politics prevailing at the time. Muslim scholars mostly suggest that as long as the other groups were not aggressive towards the Muslims, a harmonious

relationship existed between the Prophet and these groups; such scholars also maintain that Islam largely spread by good deeds than bloody swords. Hence they claim that Jews, Christians and pagans were all able to retain their religions without intervention.\footnote{Sayyid Razwy, "Arabia before Islam," Al-Islam.org, section goes here, accessed September 04, 2016, https://www.al-islam.org/restatement-history-islam-and-muslims-sayyid-ali-ashgar-razwy/arabia-islam.} But this situation appears to have changed in the year 630 A.D., with the following verse:

\[\text{(9:5) So when the sacred months have passed away, then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captives and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush, then if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, leave their way free to them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.}\footnote{Ibid.}\]

The above verse suggests that the Quran needs to be interpreted with a “context-sensitive” attitude, taking account of cultural and power politics prevailing at the time in Arab culture. But that attitude is not usually possible. I will assert that the above verses of the Quran have been interpreted differently by different scholars and audiences, and such differences in interpretation largely reveal their prevailing “stage of development.” No wonder ego-ethnocentric Osama Bin Laden could quote from the Quran and find many supporters.

Farid Esack, an acclaimed contemporary Muslim scholar, in his \textit{The Qur'an: A Beginner's Guide}, notes that the presence of Christians and Jews in Arab at the time of Prophet Muhammad’s ministry, has led to considerable speculation by non-Muslim scholars about their impact on Muhammad’s ideas and the shaping of the Quran. Some non-Muslim scholars have suggested that Muhammad had “borrowed” his ideas from one or more of pre-existing Abrahamic religions—Judaism and Christianity.\footnote{Farid Esack, \textit{The Qur'an: A Beginner's Guide} (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), Kindle edition.}
Esack, being a devout Muslim, asserts that Quran is “explicit about Muhammad’s message being both a continuation and a purification of the earlier revealed religions.”\textsuperscript{136} So he argues that if Torah could be considered the Old Testament, Christian Bible, the New Testament, then Quran is the “Final Testament” for all mankind from God. Another scholar from the West, Reuven Firestone, notes in his book, \textit{Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam}, that "negative assessments and even condemnation of prior religions and their adherents occur in all three scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam."\textsuperscript{137} This analysis is not surprising, considering ego-ethnocentricity, as a stage of development, is most widespread on our planet (almost 70 percent according to the research quoted by Ken Wilber above), and shows up in overt and covert ways in everyday life. Besides, this stage of development is sustained and reinforced by ethnocentric sermons, parenting, political speeches, mass media and curriculum, across cultures—what Bourdieu would call an “ethnocentric habitus.” Foucault would point out the “prodigious machinery” behind the scenes, which does discourse selection and dissemination. No wonder our species spends billions on technologies of violence, largely supported by propagandized “ethnocentrics” of the world.

Some scholars in Islam, however, are finally moving towards more world-centric attitudes. One of them is Professor Abdullah Saeed of the University of Victoria in Canada. He seems to be a more philosophic and context-minded Muslim scholar, and in his recent book, \textit{Interpreting the Qur'an}, rightly emphasizes the prevailing multiple contexts (social, political, cultural, religious etc.), in which these verses were written. He suggests that the universal values

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

of protection of life and of freedom of belief should thus receive priority over prevailing culturally specific values.\(^{138}\)

Besides the contradictory verses that are the cause of confusion and often violence, the Quran also contains many verses that reminded me of Martin Seligman’s character strengths and virtues, and Ken Wilber’s Lines of Development, such as:\(^{139}\)

So be patient. Indeed, the promise of Allah is truth – Quran 30:60; Indeed, Prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing – Al Quran 29:45; And Say: My Lord, Increase me in knowledge – Quran 20:114; Indeed he does not like the proud – Quran 16:23; Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account—Quran 39:10; So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it—Quran 99:7; Surely, good deeds erase bad deeds–Quran 11:114; And speak to people kindly—Quran 2:83; We will test you in fear, hunger loss of wealth life and fruit but give glad tidings to the patient—Quran 2:155; Indeed, Allah is with those who fear him and those who are doers of good—Quran 16:128; Do what is beautiful. Allah loves those who do what is beautiful (2:195); Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better. Then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become you dearest friend—Quran 41:34; O Mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, The most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you—Quran 49:13; The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception. Quran 3:185; Worship None but Allah and be dutiful and good to parents, and to kindred, and to orphans and the poor, and speak good to people and establish prayer and give charity—2:83. (People), is your creation harder for God than that of the heavens, which He created, raised and established—Quran 79:27. Speak justice—Quran 6:152; Men and women have equal rewards for their deeds—Quran 3:195; There is no compulsion and coercion in regard to religion—Quran 2:256. Whoever kills a person [unjustly]…it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind—Quran 5:32.

---


Stages of Development and Interpretation

There are indeed post-conventional-worldcentric thoughts and verses, not only in the Quran, but also in the works of Islamic scholars, poets and philosophers of past and present. Two worthy Islamic poets, Ibn Arabi and Jalal-ud-din Rumi, penned these most post-conventional, world-centric, mystical verses:

O Marvel! a garden amidst the flames.
My heart has become capable of every form:
it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'bah,
and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Qur'an.
I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take,
that is my religion and my faith.
Ibn Arabi\textsuperscript{140}

In like manner, Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, who is considered one of the bestselling poets in USA,\textsuperscript{141} penned these inspiring verses:

Muslins! What can I do? I have lost my identity!
I am not a Christian, Jew, pagan, or Muslim.
I am neither an Easterner nor a Westerner,
neither a land nor a sea person.
Nature can't fully account for me,
nor can the whirling cosmos.
I don't exclusively belong to earth, water, fire, or air.
I am not of the invisible-ineffable, nor of the dust--
I am not a process or a being.
I am not of this world or the next, and deserve
neither eternal reward nor eternal punishment.
I am not of Adam or Eve,
not of the original Garden nor the final one.
My home has no address; my tracks leave no trace.

I am neither body nor soul--What can I say?
I belong to the Self of the Beloved.
I have laid all "twos" aside:
this world and that world are one.
I search for One, I recognize One,
I see One clearly, and I call the name of the One.
That unnameable One, the breath of the breath,
is the first and last, the outside and the inside.
I identify no one except by "O That... O This!"
I am drunk on the cup of Love
~ Jalal-ud-din Rumi

A quick comparison makes it clear that universal love is one of the most repeated themes in the sacred texts of the world, and also in the writings of the mystics of East and West, but the ego-ethnocentrics of the world are more attracted to ideas consistent with their stage of development. Hence, before one can interpret sacred literature critically, one has to deeply probe into his or her own cultural and personal unconscious, and honestly evaluate stages attained in the relevant lines of development. That is to say, it’s not weather one is a Jew, Christian or a Muslim, but where one is in one’s development, because all these religions contains individuals exhibiting the whole spectrum of development—mostly ego-ethnocentric. Hence, if ego-ethnocentrics try to be critical about sacred literature of their own culture, they often end up with rationalizations rather than critical evaluation, as Will Durant and Mark Twain and Bourdieu among others suggested in their expositions. Belief in sacredness of one book only, as ego-ethnocentric Jews, Christians, Muslims often insist upon, is often a leap of faith, propaganda, narcissism, a function of prevailing “habitus,” and rarely a matter of reason, and research. As Farid Esack notes in *The Quran: A Beginner's Guide*: “Those who claim scholarly ‘disinterestedness’ are loath to acknowledge their own histories for fear of suggesting that the

---

truths that they write about may be relative to those histories. Like other progressive scholars such as liberation and feminist theologians, I insist that scholars do have inescapable histories of class, gender, race, and period.”

However, it is usually not the scholars of religions who are a problem; it’s frequently the followers. Sometimes there is nothing more dangerous than a pathologically narcissistic, misinformed, ego-ethnocentric religious fanatic no matter what his or her religion or nationality. For instance, Hindu Thugs of India are known for killing innocent travelers as human sacrifices to the goddess Kali simply because of their religious belief that suffering pleases Kali. Similarly, John Wilkes Booth, an American Confederate sympathizer, fatally shot President Abraham Lincoln. It was a Buddhist monk who assassinated Bandaranaike, the prime minister of Ceylon (later Sri Lanka). Yitzhak Rabin was shot by a fundamentalist Israeli Jew. Mahatma Gandhi was killed by a Hindu fanatic; Anwar Sadat by an Islamic Egyptian right-wing extremist. Timothy McVeigh of Oklahoma City bombing is another example of this pathological ego-ethnocentric narcissism. Wilber’s Integral Methodological Pluralism will look at this pathological phenomenon from not just the cultural and the psychological but also the

---

cognitive and the biogenetic, hence identifying as many underlying factors as current knowledge and research have made possible in multiple disciplines.

**Mystery of Life and Implications for Education**

The existence of “sacred literature” is almost a universal phenomenon. Humans are naturally inclined to ask fundamental questions about the mystery of life and existence, and such literature alludes to some “authoritative” answers. Where did it all begin? Big Bang of Physics, or Genesis of Bible, or Ra'd (The Thunder) of Quran, or the Unnameable Tao of Tao de Ching etc. Archeologists claim that the human mind is originally a literary mind before it became a reasoning mind.150 Literature, be it Homeric, Biblical, or Quranic, preceded philosophy and science by centuries. It is not uncommon that sacred verses are often misinterpreted and misused as the rise of Talibain, Al Qaida, and ISIS clearly demonstrates.

**Chomsky, Arendt and Contemporary Propaganda**

But I will argue that in addition to teaching great sacred literature of both East and West, education should be comprised of philosophy from early grades, as human beings have an untapped potential for critical, creative and humane thinking, which usually remains underdeveloped in the majority, as forcefully suggested by Noam Chomsky’s observations about “spectacular achievements of propaganda in the world”151 or Hannah Arendt’s idea of “banality of evil.”152 As she wrote in her book, *Origins of Totalitarianism*: “Only the mob and the elite can be attracted by the momentum of totalitarianism itself. The masses have to be won by

---

Indeed, two World Wars could not have been fought without preponderance of propaganda on all sides. Besides, the use of rhetoric to sway the masses has achieved considerable successes in the modern world, an occurrence that reminds me of Plato’s criticism of rhetoric, poets and poetry. He could have said the same for the misuse of language by the modern speechwriters using prose.

**Truth, Goodness and Beauty**

Plato made a case that poetry was not a “rational enterprise,” but that poets compose their works under an “irrational inspiration,” and appeal to the “lower pleasures” rather than higher reason, rationality, truth, and wisdom. However, Plato’s student Aristotle would disagree with his beloved teacher and is known to have said: “Dear is Plato but dearer still is truth.” Aristotle thus considered poetry a “cognitively valuable” practice, a practice that can be a source of “imagination concerning possibilities.” As he put it, “the function of the poet is not to say what has happened, but to say the kind of thing that would happen in accordance with probability or necessity. According to him, poetry tends to express universals.

Whether the medium is poetry, or philosophy, the point of seeking knowledge is nothing but the truth. It is no surprise that the crucial idea of truth has been a recurring focus in the *Great Books of the Western World*, as noted by Mortimer Adler in his *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World*:

---

At certain times it has been thought that the distinction of true from false, good from evil, beautiful from ugly, has its basis and warranty in the very nature of things, and that a man's judgment of these matters is measured for its soundness or accuracy by its conformity to fact. At other times the opposite position has been dominant. One meaning of the ancient saying that man is the measure of all things applies particularly to the true, good, and beautiful. Man measures truth, goodness, and beauty by the effect things have upon him, according to what they seem to him to be. What seems good to one man may seem evil to another. What seems ugly or false may also seem beautiful or true to different men or to the same man at different times.\footnote{Mortimer Jerome Adler, \textit{The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World} (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1955). Kindle edition.}

Adler’s idea is another way of articulating the difference between the objective analysis (reason, science, philosophy) and the subjective (feelings, literature, poetry) dimensions in being and knowing—which are also Wilber’s quadrants, as shown below.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{four-quadrants.png}
\end{figure}

In other words, the conceptions of truth, goodness, and beauty can often change at different stages of development—of individuals and cultures. History offers many examples. Religion and its complex role in history and modernity has often involved violent controversy, especially after the advent of science, beginning in the 17th century, when Galileo offered his verification of the Copernican view that Earth revolved around the sun. His views led to his persecution by the Roman Catholic Church, and he was placed under house arrest until his death in 1642. Although Galileo’s "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems" was removed...
from the list of publications banned by the Church in 1757, it took the Vatican more than 350 years to officially admit that Galileo was in truth.\textsuperscript{159}

Conclusion

As can be seen, the differences of “states of consciousness” (mythic, rational, transcendental) and “contingencies of context” (pre-modern, modern, post-modern), and “stages of individual development” (ego-centric, ethnocentric, world-centric, transcendental) can profoundly influence the receptions, perceptions, and consequences of discovering truth and goodness and beauty, and thus show up in thoughts, feelings and actions. If reality tetra-arises, then all quadrants, all lines, all states, all stages, all types need to be taken into consideration without the need for privileging one—be it objective or subjective.

Given the number of variables at work, within and without, one ought to be mindful in search of knowledge, in the midst of “Infinite Mystery” that surrounds us at all times. As Will Durant also said: “Life is in its basis a mystery, a river flowing from an unseen source; and in its development an infinite subtlety too complex for thought, much more so for utterance. And yet the thirst for unity draws us on.”\textsuperscript{160}

And the Galileos and Newtons and Einsteins of the world have also made it clear with their discoveries that “appearances” are not the whole truth—as Earth seems flat to the naked eye, and the sun seems to revolve around the Earth; but there are more truths to be discovered beyond the five senses, with the help of reason; and then the mystics across cultures (Pythagoras, Pythagoras,


Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, St. Teresa of Avilla, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Buber, Isaac Luria, Bal Shem Tov, Rabia of Basra, Rumi, Ibn Arabi, and so on) will come along and say that even beyond the realms of senses and reason, there are still deeper realities and truths that are waiting to be discovered by any adventurer who evolves enough in consciousness to touch the transcendental dimensions.

Hence, in this perennial mystery of existence, I would argue that it is cardinaly important to think critically, imaginatively, creatively, humanely, and ultimately, transcendentally. Thus, being open to multiple-perspectives and varieties of evidence gained through senses, reason and transcendence, and being cognizant of the methods, processes and limits of inquiry within particular domains and cultures and realms—is of the essence, before accepting anything to be even tentatively true.

Truth is that which corresponds with “the way things really are in actuality” in the “inner” and the “outer” realms, in a “rationally justifiable,” and “independently verifiable” way with the “community of the adepts,” and given the multiple perspectives and methodologies, search for truth requires continual integration of subjective, objective, multi-perspectival, and communal dimensions. Hence, the blending of the subjective and objective needs to be recognized, parsed, and evaluated, context by context, claim by claim, and on case by case basis.

Great progress has been made by science and technology and even when it comes to universal values of goodness and justice, we attest to the fact that United Nations is becoming more and more active, and the powers of the International Court of Justice have increased in recent times. In the realm of values, it is undeniable that compassion is intuitively superior than cruelty, and human rights higher that tribal rights, be it East or West. However, today’s
relativists (post-modernists) tend to think that all opinions enjoy the “same standing” and consider it a license to believe whatever they like and thus feed on superstitions, propaganda, biases, injustices, falsehoods and fallacies and therefore are easily misled by fraudulent priests and Machiavellian politicians, across cultures and nations.¹⁶¹

That is why “re-search” within and without, and “inner work” should never end. The great psychologist of the archetypes and the collective unconscious Carl Jung pointed out correctly: “The best hope for the human race is if enough individuals do their inner work.”¹⁶²

Besides, if one perspective reveals a particular aspect of reality, that does not exhaust the mystery of reality. Other unknown aspects could be discovered through different perspectives. For instance, in the domain of psychology, what could be revealed with phenomenological approach will be different from what is revealed through cognitive neuroscience. But both types of knowledge complement rather than contradict each other.

To offer another illustration, George Lakoff, has argued about the importance of making the “symbolic-semantic-neural” unconscious, conscious:

Language gets its power because it is defined relative to frames, prototypes, metaphors, narratives, images, and emotions. Part of its power comes from its unconscious aspects: we are not consciously aware of all that it evokes in us, but it is there, hidden, always at work. If we hear the same language over and over, we will think more and more in terms of the frames and metaphors activated by that language. Cultural narratives and frames are instantiated physically in our brains. We are not born with them, but we start growing them soon, and as we acquire the deep narratives, our synapses change and become fixed. A large number of deep narratives can be activated together. We cannot understand other people without such cultural narratives. But more important, we cannot understand ourselves—who we are, who we have been, and where we want to go—without recognizing and seeing how we fit into cultural narratives. What is at

stake is the deepest form of freedom, the freedom to control our own minds. To do that we must make the unconscious conscious.\textsuperscript{163}

Lakoff’s idea also alludes to the nature of meaning systems in circulation, in individuals and cultures, and the formidable powers of propaganda in relationship to “truth.” Therefore, one has to wonder why the majority of seemingly “rational” members of successive generations of repeatedly warring religions (i.e., say Jews vs. Muslims) mostly repeat the politics of the previous, and willingly pay taxes and raise children to support unaffordable preparations for war and why these cultures continue the same power politics after centuries upon centuries? Consider, too, the paradox of maintaining such long-term, identity-based conflict despite this unshakeable belief in “free will.” Is that not an urgent question for any educator and parent in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century to contemplate? I emphatically think it is most definitely urgent.

My perspective on why this happens is that the specific "depth" and "breadth" of the propagated and hence familiar meaning system impart corresponding qualities to thoughts, feelings, behaviors and attitudes. To put it differently, information has intrinsic, objective, specific properties which are imparted to thoughts, feelings, behaviors and attitudes, because of frequent repetitions. In other words, a tribal or mythic mindset in human children is created by repeated familiarizations and exposures to selected tribal meaning systems and narratives (information-in-circulation), within and without, be it Palestine or Israel, India or Pakistan. As J.F. Kennedy said: “The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie--deliberate, contrived and dishonest--but the myth--persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the

clichés of our forbearers. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”164

National anthems (tribal meaning systems), on the one hand, and planetary anthems (world-centric meaning systems such as the Declaration of Human Rights, or Rumi’s or Ibn Arabi’s poetry, etc.) on the other hand, are two different kinds of meaning systems in terms of their stage of “development,” depth, breadth, specificity, scope, teleology, embrace. National anthems are ego-ethnocentric, whereas the Declaration of Human Rights is world-centric. When repeated and reinforced, such meaning systems will become familiarized, internalized, and hence turn into the habitus and the cognitive unconscious, and most probably will have corresponding effects in cognition, affect, and thus actions and culture, in a significant majority, unless countered by deeper reason, unbiased research, planetary consciousness and humane and universal ideals.

Hence, a “developmentally appropriate” introduction and inculcation of world-centric meaning systems through parenting and curriculum is the call of the hour. I imagine those innocent children who were brainwashed from early on, in Islamic Madrasas in Pakistan so that they would grow up and fight the invading Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Many of those children are now members of Taliban and ISIS.165 Ethnocentric meaning systems will most likely create an ethnocentric will, be it Nazis or Taliban, not free will.

Literature review of the problem of “free will,” suggests that there are powerful arguments and great thinkers, past and present, on both side of the divide, as the debate is alive.

and evolving in the wake of new interdisciplinary data, information and knowledge, if not wisdom. But I will argue that the problem of problem of “free will” can also be conceptualized as a perennial paradox to recon with. As Wilber has also urged: “Philosophically, we are going to have to face and acknowledge the fact that rational-mental statements about Spirit or Being always eventually degenerate in dilemmas, contradictions or paradoxes.” And has argued that “only with the higher stages of consciousness development—part and parcel of the meditative or contemplative unfolding—does the solution to these dilemmas become obvious. But that is not an empirical discovery nor a rational deduction; it is a contemplative apprehension.” Similarly, Marilyn Ferguson, editor of the science newsletter Brain/Mind Bulletin has insisted: “The brain of each of us is capable of endless reordering of information. Conflict and paradox are grist for the brain's transformative mill. We need only pay attention.”

But without acknowledging the specificities of information, power of the habitus, cognitive unconscious, cultural contingencies, pre-existing bio-genetic factors, personal informational/learning experiences, and a host of other knowable and unknowable variables etc. simultaneously at work, one might not be able to make proper sense of the why and the wherefore of one’s own “free will” or of the “free will” of fellow human beings, in one culture or another, be it Biblical or Quranic.

On the other hand, most importantly, one ought to shoulder full responsibility for one’s own growth and development, and hence one would need to acknowledge the power and presence of “free will,” autonomy and agency, without which one would be nothing but a

“complex automaton,” or a “transiently animated machine.” But by not being mindful of the prevailing influences and propaganda, and the laws of cause and effect as they operate in self, culture, nature and cosmos--the autonomic, self-organizing, unconscious, invisible dynamic systems and structures of language, culture, mind, brain--one remains clueless to the varieties of choices and behaviors. As David Bohm said: “Our fragmented thought tends to approach paradoxes as if they were problems; however, what is required is sustained attention to the paradox itself.” Hence, I would rather hold on to paradoxical tensions, dilemmas and contradictions, without denying the complexity and enormity of the question, if no final answer is forthcoming. As the great German mystic and poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you win then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. Perhaps you do carry within yourself the possibility of shaping and forming as a particularly happy and Pure way of living; train yourself to it--but take whatever comes with great trust and if only it comes out of your own will, out of same need of your inmost being, take it upon yourself and hate nothing.  

In the midst of this mystery and uncertainty, the gifts of consciousness and contemplation and passion and especially curiosity indeed are the greatest gifts. As Will Durant said: “Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance…There are not many things finer in

---

our murderous species than this noble curiosity, this restless and reckless passion to understand.”\textsuperscript{171}

Hence, if this clash of civilizations is to be avoided, there is no time like the present to create systems of education based on an insistence on full human rights for all, and grounded in planetary consciousness.

Einstein expressed similar sentiments in his day, after having witnessed two devastating World Wars:

\begin{quote}
A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.\textsuperscript{172}
\end{quote}

Einstein’s idea of liberation from the self suggests liberation from the ego-ethnocentric narcissistic ego. An education which helps widen the circle of compassion can be found in all sacred texts. Great philosophical questions are perennial but sacred texts of the world also have everlasting value, and serve an indispensable function, by offering an enduring meaning of life, an inspiration for developing character strengths and virtues, and time tested paths to evolution of consciousness, if understood from the universal perspectives of holarchy of being and knowing. Altogether, sacred texts, being such a powerful force in history and modernity, should collectively have an integral place in any school, culture and household, along with philosophy,

arts and the literatures of East and West. Search for truth and transcendence is unending and undeniable human right, and should be approached mindfully through philosophical, literary, artistic, and transcendental modes of consciousness. Senses, reason and transcendence—the eye of the flesh, the eye of the mind, and the eye of the soul i.e. empirical, rational and transcendental—can co-exist and will always complement each other. As Oscar Wilde said: “Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul.” As stated earlier, “without information, nothing has meaning: materials are formless and motion is aimless.” Similarly, without philosophy, literary beauty appears mindless. And without literary beauty, philosophy looks lifeless. Hence, nothing less than the best of East and West, and the highest of being and knowing, will suffice for the flourishing of the individual and the collective.

Bibliography


Waltz, Kenneth N. Man, the State, and the State System in Theories of the Causes of War. 1954.


