

Evolution of Consciousness and Paradigm Change

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Introduction

The evolution of consciousness ... has become a pre-condition of our collective survival. (László, 2006, p. 77).

The last few years have seen leading thinkers in many fields of scholarly endeavour (including complexity science, ecology, education, futures studies, integral studies, philosophy, psychology, spirituality studies and systems theory) claim that the fragmented, mechanistic and materialistic ways of thinking of the last century are no longer sustainable. As Einstein put it a century ago, “the significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.”

Significant early 21st century challenges have included major global economic upheaval coupled with the dawning realisation of the potential threats to the habitability of the earth’s ecosphere posed by severe climatic stress. While the different disciplines push for what is needed from their own perspectives, very few have the breadth of vision to encompass the wide-ranging sweep of deep change that is required.

The complexity of outer trends and global events requires complex, higher order ways of thinking, understanding and action and collaboration among diverse theoretical approaches. Many researchers are now working within and across disciplinary boundaries to identify and encourage new ways of thinking and new knowledge patterns that will lead to the kind of complex understanding and meta-coherence that is needed in this increasingly complex world.

While there has been considerable futures material published in the last few decades about megatrends and drivers of change in the world of external events, the idea of *megatrends of the mind* has been largely ignored, even in the futures literature. In this chapter I will explore research on the evolution of consciousness that points to the gradual emergence over the last century of a significant “paradigm change” or “global mindset change” (Gidley, 2010a).

The paradigm change that we are already witnessing can be mapped at a variety of levels. Firstly, significant developments have occurred in most, if not all, of the major academic disciplines. Secondly, there is a gradual transcending of disciplinary specialisation, via inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary approaches. These developments are *enactments* of new ways of thinking and new knowledge patterns, respectively. At a higher order theoretical level, these developments can be understood as part of the evolution of consciousness (Gidley, 2007). Arguably, the human species is undergoing a new evolutionary leap, of a more complex order than previous developments.

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For the first time in human history, we are becoming conscious of our own evolution. We are also beginning to realize we are responsible for co-creating it, through co-evolution. Co-evolution is both conscious and collaborative. This has very significant implications for scientific and other academic research, for our abilities to have long-range vision and for our abilities to comprehend and work with the complexity and interdependency that our current challenges as a species demand.

In response to these challenges, new theories and bodies of thought have appeared which attempt to articulate the paradigm change and help to further it. Some of the most important terms used in theorizing evolution of consciousness include: *postformal*, *integral* and *planetary*. These are key terms used in research that explicitly *theorises* new stage/s of consciousness development—either individual or socio-cultural.

This chapter begins with a very brief overview of disciplines that have *enacted* major developments in their dominant mode of thinking during the 20th century. This is followed by some major developments in transdisciplinary fields that are *enacting* new knowledge patterns. Finally, I discuss those areas of academic research, which explicitly *theorise* new modes of thinking or knowledge creation by way of the key transversal concepts—postformal, integral and planetary.

Disciplinary Shifts reveal New Ways of Thinking

Major epistemological shifts have occurred within scientific, philosophical and other disciplines since the beginning of the 20th century. These disciplinary shifts have been discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Gidley, 2010a).

Scientific shifts from:

- Classical to quantum physics;
- Closed mechanistic to open biological systems;
- Control and prediction to chaos and complexity, self-organisation and emergentism.

Philosophical shifts including:

- The shift from mechanistic to process metaphors of thinking;
- The *linguistic turn* especially post-structuralism;
- The *historical turn* especially hermeneutics;
- The *religious/spiritual turn* in continental philosophy.

Psychological shifts from:

- Behaviourist to humanist, even transpersonal, psychology;
- Clinical models to positive psychology notions of human potential;
- Formal operations to several higher stages of postformal reasoning.

Educational shifts including:

- The shift from factory model of formal education to postformal pedagogies;
- *The information age*, including Mass Media, WWW and social networking.

Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries to New Systems of Knowledge

In parallel with these disciplinary developments, disciplinary specialisation itself is being transcended via inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary approaches (Klein, 2004; Morin, 2001; Nicolescu, 2002) thus broadening and deepening ways of conceptualizing knowledge. These include macrohistory and futures studies (expanding the temporal dimension) and planetary and global studies (expanding the spatial dimension).

Expanding Disciplinary Boundaries

Several attempts to create *knowledge-bridges* between disciplines have emerged in the second half of the 20th century. These approaches seek to counterbalance the excesses of fragmentation, specialisation and reductionism in the dominant worldview. These include transdisciplinarity, systems theory, aesthetics and others. Integrative fields such as integral studies that explicitly theorise the evolution of consciousness will be discussed below.

There has been a developing transition from disciplinary specialisation to multi-, inter-, transdisciplinary knowledge creation (Klein, 2004; Nicolescu, 2002). The coining of the term transdisciplinarity in the late 1960s has been attributed to Jean Piaget, though others such as Edgar Morin and Erich Jantsch used it around the same time (Nicolescu, 2003). Knowledge-bridges are also created through specific approaches such as Wilber's "methodological pluralism" (Wilber, 2006); Kincheloe's "bricolage" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004); and notions of "boundary-spanning" (Williams, 2002) and "creative marginality" (Dogan & Pahre, 1990).

At around the same time that transdisciplinarity was first being discussed in France, theoretical biologist, Ludvig von Bertalanffy, initiated important developments in establishing a theoretical case that the methods of classical physics were not appropriate for studying biological life (Bertalanffy, 1969/1976). He developed the theory of *open systems*, claiming that traditional *closed system* models based on classical science were "in principle, inapplicable to the living organism...[and] that many characteristics of living systems which are paradoxical in view of the laws of physics are a consequence of this fact" (p. 39-40). Systems science is a theoretical basis of László's integral theory (László, 2007).

There has also been a flourishing of post-disciplinary studies grounded in notions of social justice (such as cultural studies, indigenous studies, queer studies, women's studies/feminism); and other issues of critical importance (such as environmental studies, justice globalism, peace studies, media studies). In relation to the latter the implications of the information age, particularly the world wide web need to be particularly noted for their ubiquitous and controversial effects on other areas of knowledge creation (Gidley, 2004; Healy, 1998; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004).

Expanding Concepts of Time

Another late 1960s development was the gradual transition from emphasis on the past to awareness of the value of foresight/futures thinking. This provided a positive scientific and academic context for futures studies to expand its scope. In addition there has been a

stretching of time periods that can be “legitimately” studied, e.g. macrohistory (Galtung & Inayatullah, 1998) and big history.

Over the last two millennia the linear conception of time—which began as the more formal *measurement* of already-recognized cosmic and natural temporal cycles—became rationally conceptualized as the chronological measurement of change. Since the Industrial Revolution linear, chronological time has further contracted by association with *mechanical* time and *factory* time.

However, the changes to the concepts of time have been even more dramatic in the last century. Einstein’s theory of relativity displaced the Newtonian conception of *objective* time as an unchangeable, permanent ‘place’ upon which the movement or change of things can be measured in discrete, identical fragments (Einstein, 1920/2000). Synchronously, the new philosophical phenomenology of Husserl was positing a *subjective* time—the time of the soul—in contrast to external or objective time (Husserl, 1905/1964).

Further scientific and technological developments in the last century have seen temporal partitioning become exaggerated by increasingly sophisticated scientific and digital means, from one extreme in radioactive half-life, to the other extreme in nanoseconds. Linear time has also become dominated by politico-economic metaphors, exemplified by such phrases as “time is money,” “buying time.” This mechanistic and economic colonization of time has increased exponentially in recent decades, contributing to the *speed addiction* of our present age—demonstrated in fast foods, internet, instant global text messaging, accelerated learning, and the three-quick-steps-to-spiritual-enlightenment culture. Just to cope there are drugs to keep up, such as speed and cocaine; and drugs to slow down, such as alcohol and tranquilizers.

Is it any wonder that there is now an emergent “slow time” movement, and a strong resurgence of interest in traditional values of the past, expressed as a love of retro and vintage styles and modes of living.

Expanding Space: Planetary Consciousness

In parallel with changing ideas about time, there has also been an emerging interrogation of some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of modernist notions of *space*. Postmodern and postcolonial reformulations of space focus primarily on the opening up of cultural and social space. The industrial worldview based on scientific materialism has focused on *outer* space. Alternative framings could include a focus on *inner* space to complement outer space, *soul/spiritual* space to complement physical space, and *planetization* to complement globalization.

In addition, the current notion of geographic space is dominated by the geo-political unit of the nation-state. Yet there is a growing complexity and urgency of planetary issues from socio-cultural, politico-economic and environmental perspectives. Growing mental health problems, inequitable wealth distribution, climate change, mass extinction of species and water shortages all require more than piece-meal, fragmented responses. The complexity of these challenges demand a planetary reframing of human relationship with nature and the cosmos. This shift is reflected in the increasing reference to global and planetary in relation to consciousness, culture and civilisation (Elgin, 1997; Montuori, 1999; Swimme & Tucker, 2006).

New Conceptual Approaches that *Theorise* Paradigm Change

So how do we understand paradigm change? Why is it happening today?

There are two major bodies of research that can throw light on how and why human thinking is changing in significant ways. One body of research comes from adult developmental psychology and the other comes from sociology and cultural history. A small number of theorists acknowledge and theorise the important interrelationships between the two (Gidley, 2007). Part of my endeavor here is to increase understanding of the relationship between individual psychological development and socio-cultural evolution as *two* faces of the *one* evolution of human consciousness.

Adult Psychological Development

Researchers in the field of adult developmental psychology have identified several stages of *postformal* reasoning beyond Piaget's "formal operations." Since at least the 1970s there has been a significant strand of adult developmental psychology research that identifies several stages of *postformal* psychological development. This research is primarily focused on individual psychological development and is discussed below under *postformal*.

Cultural History and Evolution

From cultural history and sociology comes the literature on cultural evolution. Following on from the early 20th century research of Steiner, Sri Aurobindo, Gebser and Teilhard de Chardin, many other researchers from a range of disciplines have identified an emergent stage in socio-cultural evolution. It is often referred to as *integral* or *planetary*, to be distinguished below.

Evolution of Consciousness

Swiss cultural philosopher Jean Gebser wrote extensively in the first half of the 20th century about the shifts occurring in many disciplines, describing it as an indication of what he called a "mutation" to a new structure of consciousness. He referred to the previous structure of consciousness as *mental-perspectival*, and to the emerging structure of consciousness as *integral-aperspectival* (Gebser, 1949/1985). Gebser's detailed examples of the features of the new consciousness—based on almost two decades of transdisciplinary research—provide a significant "academic footnote" to the extensive research on the evolution of consciousness undertaken by Rudolf Steiner and Sri Aurobindo some decades earlier (Aurobindo, 1914/2000; Steiner, 1904/1959, 1926/1966). More recently, several theorists have written on the evolution of consciousness, from a variety of perspectives (Gangadean, 2006; Gidley, 2007; Jantsch, 1980; Russell, 2000; Thompson, 1998; Wade, 1996; Wilber, 1981/1996).

Identifying Transversal Approaches that *Meta-Cohere* New Knowledge

There are three major strands within the evolution of consciousness discourse that attempt to meta-cohere the new ways of thinking and new knowledge patterns. From

differing perspectives they theorise what they claim are entirely new developmental and/or evolutionary emergences. From psychology we have the concept of postformal reasoning. From science, philosophy and transpersonal psychology notions of *integral* and/or *holistic* thinking reflect the movement beyond fragmentation, specialisation and reductionism. Environmental, eco-philosophical, postcolonial, multicultural and some geo-political discourses point to an emerging *planetary consciousness*.

These three major strands of research—postformal, integral and planetary—each have a stronger emphasis in a particular area. The postformal psychology literature tends to focus on empirical and analytic articulation of higher stages of reasoning; the integral literature tends to emphasise the epistemological crisis and to promote integral thinking; the planetary consciousness literature tends to emphasise the urgency of transnational collaboration around our planetary crises: ecological, politico-economic and socio-cultural. My philosophical interest is in *thinking these threads together* as facets of the one emerging consciousness movement. They are three interrelated ways to meta-cohere the new thinking and new knowledge patterns.

Postformal

Postformal is currently the most widely used psychological term to refer to higher order thinking. *Postformal thinking* has been researched by a significant number of North American psychologists working in the field of positive adult development over the last forty years (Commons & Richards, 2002; Cook-Greuter, 2000; Kegan, 1994; Kohlberg, 1990; Sinnott, 1998). These psychologists have been building on the well-known, developmental reasoning theories of 20th century Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Piaget posited four stages of cognitive development throughout childhood and adolescence. He claimed that the fourth stage, which he called “formal operations”, generally emerged in late adolescence/early adulthood and according to his research was the final stage of cognitive development.

What adult developmental psychologists call postformal thinking refers to higher developmental stages beyond Piaget’s formal operations. The psychologists who have identified and articulated postformal thinking have studied very high functioning adults to establish the validity of higher stages of reasoning. Other important influences on the psychological theories of higher adult development include: Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development; Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs; Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development; and Jane Loevinger’s stages of ego development.

The research posits numerous postformal qualities such as: complexity, contextualisation, creativity, dialectics, dialogue, holism/integration, imagination, intuition, paradox, pluralism, reflexivity, relativism, spirituality/higher purpose, values and wisdom. These psychological qualities are still being tested and validated, particularly in terms of their cross-interactions.

The literature on postformal thinking is now quite diverse and has also been taken up by some educational researchers (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999).

Integral

Integral is a widely used term by several different schools of thought. My interest here is to point to the interrelationships among significant integrative approaches that have been

operating in relative isolation from each other. When brought into hermeneutic dialogue with each other, Steiner's integral spiritual science, Gebser's integral-aperspectival cultural phenomenology, and Wilber's integral-AQAL theoretical framework, demonstrate significant convergences in addition to their unique particularities.

Steiner's major contributions were: he was the first to identify in writing, as early as 1904, a new consciousness emergence, and to write and lecture *extensively* on the evolution of consciousness, building on ancient Indian, Greek *and* particularly, German idealist/Romantic lineages; and secondly, he developed and published a comprehensive series of practices/injunctions designed to awaken the new consciousness in humanity—particularly through education, contemplative practices and the arts (Steiner, 1926/1966).

Gebser's major contributions were: firstly, to begin to academically formalize the emergent integral structure of consciousness; and secondly, to observe and note its emergence in the world in various disciplines and discourses in the first half of the last century (Gebser, 1949/1985). Tragically, both Steiner's and Gebser's outstanding contributions have been largely ignored by the Anglophone academic world.

Wilber's major contributions have been: firstly, to synthesize, contemporize and popularize much of the earlier research; and secondly, to theorize a framework—the most recent form of which is AQAL—designed to assist with the application of his integral theory to a range of disciplinary fields (Wilber, 1995/2000). Thirdly, Wilber has popularized the need for injunctions, or *integral life practices*, already emphasized by Steiner and Sri Aurobindo and more recently by George Leonard and Michael Murphy.

In using the term *integral*, I also mean inclusivity, holism, pluralism and reverence. The approaches of Steiner, Gebser and Wilber can be further enriched by other integral (Aurobindo, 1914/2000; László, 2007) and transdisciplinary theories (Morin & Kern, 1999; Nicolescu, 2002). This points towards the possibility of new liaisons between approaches that are: inclusive of the vastness of noospheric breadth (*macro-integral*); that provide rigorous theoretic means for cohering it (*meso-integral*); that attend to the concrete details required for applying the theories (*micro-integral*); that encourage the participation of all aspects of the human being throughout this process (*participatory-integral*); and that are able to traverse and converse across multiple dimensions (*transversal-integral*). These concepts have been discussed in greater length elsewhere (Gidley, 2010b).

Planetary

The term *planetary* is quite common in evolution of consciousness research. It provides a counterbalance to the term, *globalisation*—which has often been limited to politico-economic discourse and processes. Many researchers who use *planetary* have been inspired by Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the *planetization of mankind* (Teilhard de Chardin, 1959/2004). The term, *planetary*—which primarily denotes an anthropo-socio-cultural and ecological framing—is gaining increasing currency as a term to characterize important features of the new consciousness, particularly for those theorists who have a critical sensibility in the light of our complex current planetary situation. In addition to its popular use by environmental activists it is used in academic contexts by a range of philosophers, scientists, educators and sociologists. This critical use of *planetary* has been emphasised in the philosophical writings of Morin who refers to the present times as the *Planetary Era*, which he claims began around five hundred years ago (Morin, 2001; Morin & Kern, 1999).

6. Reflections on Paradigm Change in the Futures Studies Field

Futures studies is an emerging academic and professional field that has been developing for over forty years. Prior to its emergence in the late 1960s significant changes were already underway in science and philosophy—since at least the turn of the 20th century. Although classical science had been rocked to its foundations by Einstein’s relativity theory, quantum physics and open systems theory, and analytical philosophy had been unsettled by process philosophy, futures studies began its life as a positivist empirical discipline in the USA, growing out of war game scenarios. However, in France its counterpart—*prospective*—now often referred to as foresight, grew out of a critical approach to the status quo and the concerns of peace researchers. Over the last four decades the dominant empiricist futures tradition has been influenced by critical theory, postcolonial theory, systems and complexity sciences, transdisciplinarity, action research and integral theories to name a few. Yet futures researchers are barely visible as serious contributors in the journals and conferences of these discourses.

From the other side of the picture more and more researchers are beginning to address the need for long-term futures thinking and foresight—yet often without the depth of understanding of the field that is the fruit of decades of futures thinking, practice and research. If futures studies is to really be a field that represents open futures, then it needs to open out in all possible dimensions to embrace the new thinking and knowledge patterns that are emerging across the breadth and depth of the global knowledge terrain. This chapter is a call to move beyond the “silo of futurism” by being aware of the paradigm change identified here. Similarly integral theories will grow stronger by embracing the diversity of approaches emerging rather than continuing to support rival discourses. This edited volume will go a long way to build those bridges.

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