

THE GRAND SYNTHESIS

Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. It's an old story, espoused by philosophers since the beginning of reflective thinking. From Socrates to Jesus, Goethe, and Hegel, from Karl Marx to the integral world of Ken Wilber, the song of synthesis has been sung again and again. This dialectic is one of the basic rhythms of cultural evolution.

The pattern is clear: we begin with a basic thesis; then split off from it to make something different; then reintegrate with the former thesis again at a higher, more complex level. From the splitting of chromosomes in cell division to the bifurcation of social systems and political movements, evolution proceeds by differentiation and reunification, novelty and confirmation. Each synthesis brings us back to wholeness, to integration, and to the heart.

The mythic overlay of our collective story reflects this dance, cycling through paradigms whose values arise from the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine, in both their static and dynamic aspects. What follows is a brief recapping of this story, looking at the synthesis that will become the ground for the next era of civilization, and era whose values shift from the love of power to the power of love.

We began with a basic thesis, as infants in the primal garden of the Great Mother, living in fused symbiosis with Nature. Her field was all there was. Her rules were absolute; there was no transcending them.

As we matured, we gained small controls over our survival. We could act upon the natural world: planting seeds, irrigating, traveling, building communities. This was our teeming toddlerhood where we crawled across the land, rocked in the cradle of the earliest civilizations. We continued to grow, expanding our numbers and organizing in ever larger communities.

Land and water became treasured commodities; rights to these resources became subjects of conflict, which over time, escalated into warfare of increasing scope and sophistication.

We walled ourselves off from Nature, ostensibly in the name of defense, but this began our differentiation and separation from the primal ground. Defense against Mother Nature was coopted by defense against human nature. A village or city had no choice but to arm themselves or be taken over by the invading enemy—each case leading to a militarism of society.

Still children, with little means to organize tens of thousands of people, this fell

to the “big man” at the top, who rules through hierarchy and control, building empires on the blood of soldiers and the sweat of slaves.

We became ever more distant from our primal ground, instead aspiring to invisible forces from above, lifting ourselves upward toward the heavens. The primal mother was replaced by a distant father. We moved from feminine values to masculine values; from procreation to domination, from the Mother-son motif to that of Father-daughter. We learned to write, calculate, build, mechanize, print, communicate, relay images, and compute information, until we built the means for a complex industrial society with a planetary communication network—a global brain.

Instead of finding our authority from below, we sought it from above. Instead of organic law, we followed written law. We developed democracy, personal rights, individualism and personal autonomy. Through science and industry, we transformed the world and ourselves. We gave birth to the ego. We even learned, as deconstructionists, to step back and critically evaluate our contemporary cultural milieu.

But in this process, we lost our ground, our health, and, many would say, our souls. We still lived as children under parental dictates. By differentiating, we were caught in an either-or paradigm, between the basic thesis and its antithesis, caught between Nature and civilization, instincts and socialization. The antithesis was necessary to develop our freedom and build a knowledge base necessary to understand the Earth as a whole—but we went so far into individualism that we began to sacrifice the whole, so far into reductionism that we became fragmented. We lost our purpose and our collective moral compass.

We adopted masculine values so completely that the feminine was forgotten. Fight and flight took precedence over tend and befriend. Conquest and achievement became more important than nurturing and care. Separation and detachment held higher value than compassion and connection.

Now, as masculine and feminine forces approach a mutual maturity, we are ready again for a grand synthesis. The archetypal Mother and Father have played their roles in our development. We who are alive today are their children, which means that, quite simply: *We are the synthesis*. We are now ready to enter relationships as adult to adult rather than parent to child, maturing to the point where we take back the reins, and steer the course of evolution in a new direction. As Barbara Marx Hubbard has said, we are moving from “procreation to co-creation,” from the primary emphasis on the parent-child relationship, to one of mutual cooperation in the service of co-creating our future.

If the dance of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis has happened repeatedly, what's different now? At our current level of complexity, it is not only a *synthesis of dualities* that is occurring, but a *convergence of plurality*. Today's synthesis is not the creation of a third *thing*, but the process of throwing ourselves headlong into integration itself. Yes, there are many dualities to unite: the politics of left and right, the values of masculine and feminine, the balance between progress and sustainability, civilization and Nature. We must turn *us and them* into *I and thou*, and ultimately *we*. We must integrate mind and body, Heaven and Earth, inner and outer.

But the grandest synthesis in our world today is to to *find a common purpose for a plurality of beings*. This requires that we each retain our diverse natures, yet realize a collective identity as members of a global civilization. This grand synthesis establishes unity in diversity.

Our growth and success as a species has pushed us up against the writing on the walls. For the first time in our history, the entire human population is confronted with a common predicament whose solution requires global cooperation. Just as single-celled organisms once banded together to make complex creatures; just as our ancestors banded together to create the irrigation projects in the Tigris- Euphrates valley; just as there were cooperative efforts to rebuild Europe after WW II; the current crises will call forth global cooperation like never before. It is *only* through cooperation that we will solve our collective crises, create a culture of peace, and begin the era of the heart.

We are hitting the boundaries of a planet of finite resources and infinite possibilities. Boundaries are the means by which we define something, and it is perhaps this very limitation that can give humanity a new definition as an evolving, global system. Our anxiety may be no less than the pressure of planetary convergence breaking down our isolated selves in the global cauldron that's cooking our collective soup for the next banquet of the gods.

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