

# First Principles and First Values of Evolving Perennialism

Forty-two Propositions on CosmoErotic Humanism  
Post-Tragic Memories of the Future  
v.1.0

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**David J. Temple** is a fictional personality created for enabling ongoing collaborative authorship at the Center for World Philosophy and Religion. The two primary authors behind David J. Temple are Marc Gafni and Zak Stein. For different projects specific writers will be named as be part of the collaboration. In this volume Ken Wilber joins Dr. Gafni and Dr. Stein.

**CosmoErotic Humanism** is a philosophical movement aimed at reconstructing the collapse of value at the core of global culture. This movement emerges in response to the metacrisis, understanding existential and catastrophic risks as rooted not only in failures of economics, governments, and technology, but in failed worldviews. The core of CosmoErotic Humanism is a system of first principles and first values that recasts cosmic evolution as a story of value in which humanity plays a unique role. These first principles and first values ground a comprehensive set of theories, including of self and psychology, epistemology, scientific metaphysics, education, theology, mysticism, sexuality, and value. CosmoErotic Humanism thereby offers a new Narrative of Identity (who am I?), a new Universe Story (where am I?), and new vision of Ethics (what ought I do?). These are some of the first words on the possibilities of a world philosophy adequate to our time of civilization transformation. What is offered by CosmoErotic Humanism is a new story of value—eternal yet evolving value—and a universal grammar of value that can serve as a context for our diversity, finally allowing us to speak of humanity as part of a shared story of evolving cosmic value.

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## **1. A New Set of First Principles and First Values Must Be Clarified in the Context of the Second Shock of Existence and the Meta-Crisis**

The propositions and notes collected here unpack the urgent moral need to articulate a new vision and theory of value. These propositions state the ground of a universal grammar of value, shared by all humanity, and shared by humanity with all of reality. This grammar provides a way to speak and live that responds to the looming threats of catastrophic and existential risk, born of this unique historical moment, as we face unregulated exponential technologies and a global intimacy disorder.

I have gathered this material from the internal writings of the Center for World Philosophy and Religion, a think tank co-founded and led by two old and dear friends, Marc Gafni and Zak Stein, together with Ken Wilber. Its mission has been to evolve the source code of consciousness and culture as the primary response to the looming threat of existential and catastrophic risk. Core to evolving the source code is the articulation of a universal grammar of value, which is rooted in First Principles and First Values, which themselves are embedded in a cosmic story of value. Zak and Marc, along with Ken, knowing my love of writing and my alignment with the urgency of the project, have turned to me, asking if I might become at least one of the public voices of CosmoErotic Humanism. They will—all three of them, along with their students and colleagues—continue to write tracts of CosmoErotic Humanism under their own names, and in various permutations of authorship.

The foundational texts I have been asked to write will be under my name, David J. Temple. I have agreed to do so because of my love for and trust in them, the originality and integrity of their work, and because of the overriding moral imperative of the project itself. Henceforth, I will write from the collective “we” voice, which includes the aforementioned main authors (Gafni and Stein), as well as many of their colleagues (Ken Wilber, Barbara Marx Hubbard, etc.).

Taking the form of forty-two telegraphic propositions, this extended monograph provides a brief unpacking of CosmoErotic Humanism’s First Principles and First Values. We are not making our full arguments here; these will appear in longer forthcoming volumes. Please read through the propositions themselves. Skip ahead to those most interesting to you, those that elicit the most desire. Review the First Principles and First Values now (see pages 48-49) and try to hold the whole before beginning to read through them in sequence. Here we are putting it all on the table, as it were, so that as we begin to publish more and elaborate these themes there is no confusion as to where we stand. Thank you, dear reader, for giving us the benefit of the doubt.

A response is needed to the likely self-induced extinction of our species (the second shock of existence). And it must be found in the context of cascading and interrelated crises across all major sectors of civilization (the meta-crisis). A profound return to reality is at hand, as humanity is once again brought back in touch with how the universe works, for better and for worse.

For now, suffice to say that we understand from complexity theory and evolutionary biology that a simple, limited set of First Principles can generate an emergent self-organization of highly complex systems with a virtually unimaginable number of parts. Basic patterns establish the possibility space into which chaotic emergence evolves, as seen in everything from cellular automata to game theory. In other words, we realized many years ago that just as simple First Principles and First Values organize *exterior* realities into complex and coherent wholes, so too do interior First Principles and First Values organize the realities of value and consciousness into complex and coherent wholes.

In effect, First Principles and First Values are the plotlines of evolution's conscious unfolding. Conscious evolution, as we have reframed it, is not when evolution becomes conscious of itself through us. There is much scientific data that ascribe intelligence and consciousness to evolution, well before humanity. Conscious evolution is rather when a species becomes aware that evolutionary processes live in it, as it, and through it—and can then choose to align with the inherent First Principles and First Values embedded in the larger evolutionary story of value. This new understanding of conscious evolution serves as the key to our CosmoErotic Humanism. We return to the themes of conscious evolution below in the context of the First Principle and First Value of Story.

## 2. The Source Code of Culture Involves the Evolution of Superstructure, Social Structure, and Infrastructure

Allow us to position our work and the goals of our project in terms of a sociological “theory of change.” The question naturally arises: “What does writing books about metaphysics and value have to do with the meta-crisis?” My dear reader, please let us explain.

Jurgen Habermas's widely influential reconstruction of historical materialism can be evaluated in the light of Marvin Harris's language, giving us a non-reductive model for the evolution of social systems split into three levels: superstructure, social structure, and infrastructure. This should not be confused with Wilber's quadrants or Bhaskar's “Social Cube”—although all three models can be productively interincluded.

**Superstructure** includes the set of worldviews, ideas, philosophies, gnosis, realizations, stories, wisdom, and values that animate a society.

**Social structure** includes the agreements, legal systems, contracts, business models, and governance structures of society.

**Infrastructure** includes the physical built environments and technologies that provide for the material needs required by the social structure and superstructure.

This model animates the strategic drive of our writings on CosmoErotic Humanism, which are an attempt to help lay a new superstructure for society. CosmoErotic Humanism is a philosophy that offers a new story of value capable of reorienting our

fltering civilization. We are seeking to spark and inspire a broader movement of culture, much like Existentialism or Romanticism in their day. This is our hope, anyway. We add our voice to those co-operating to steward humanity's cultures through what will be their most perilous times.

We naturally recognize that superstructure, social structure, and infrastructure are mutually interdependent and continually co-arising. At the same time, it is our view that superstructure—the story we tell about the universe, how we make our identities and communities meaningful—must be understood as the root cause of society's formation. This means that if one desires to change the trajectory of society to avoid suffering and to realize the greater good, then the most effective way to achieve that goal must be to evolve the *story* that animates society.

To evolve the story is to evolve the source code that works through all three layers. Therefore, we have focused our work on the evolution of superstructure necessary to generate a new cultural “enlightenment”—specifically based on a new, emergent order of shared value. This is necessary to effectively respond to contemporary forms of catastrophic and existential risk.

### **3. Our Species Faces Two Forms of Existential Risk: The Death of Humanity and the Death of Our Humanity**

We address two distinct forms of existential risk in the writings on CosmoErotic Humanism: the death of humanity and the death of *our* humanity. The first form of existential risk is how the term is usually understood: existential risk as the death of the human species. An extinction or near-extinction event. Catastrophic risk refers to events that will cause the death or extreme suffering of large segments of humanity.

The second form of existential risk is equally threatening, but more insidious. The death of our humanity might be caused, for example, by a pervasive, digitally mediated environment, based on the lowest common denominator of the human experience, which effectively generates degraded humans without any genuine free will, personhood, or dignity. Protecting and preserving the value of personhood, therefore, must animate efforts to avert the death of our humanity.

The articulation of a new shared story of value, rooted in First Principles and First Values, is not a totalizing or homogenizing project. It is rather the valorization of richly diverse and unique personhood. We understand that evolving the answers to the great philosophical and spiritual questions—Who Am I? Who Are We?—is pivotal for changing the vector of the present and creating a new future, the basis of a new cultural enlightenment necessary for cohering an open and vital society. The alternative is the rise and dominance of closed societies—or the collapse of the future itself.

Thus, the articulation of a shared grammar of value, from which new kinds of identities and communities may arise, is essential in responding to existential risk, essential for preventing the death of (our) humanity. A grammar is shared by everyone who speaks a language, and its parameters allow for each person's unique expression. A grammar



of value is likewise universal for everyone, while allowing for unique individual expressions, manifestations, and evolutions. Articulating such a grammar of value is the essential superstructural basis for any coherent course of action at planetary scale that could preserve the species. As such, its creation/discovery is self-evidently one of the overriding moral imperatives of our time.

#### **4. The Meta-Crisis Has Both an Exterior and an Interior Dimension**

The exterior dimension of the meta-crisis is catastrophic and existential risk, the full or partial death of humanity and all future generations. This is what we referred to above as the first form of existential risk, the extinction of humanity as we know it.

This exterior dimension can be seen and touched, so it is an obvious place to focus on. There are major problems with human economic systems, supply chains, electrical grids, weapons with catastrophic potential, and other aspects of the built environment. These interface with the biological world in ways that result in polluted oceans, extinct species, climatological disruptions, and humanitarian catastrophes. Planetary computational megastructures encircle the Earth. While they have their clear benefits, the sheer size, volume, and scope of these exterior systems can elicit an overwhelming, sublime terror that calls forth everything we have in response.

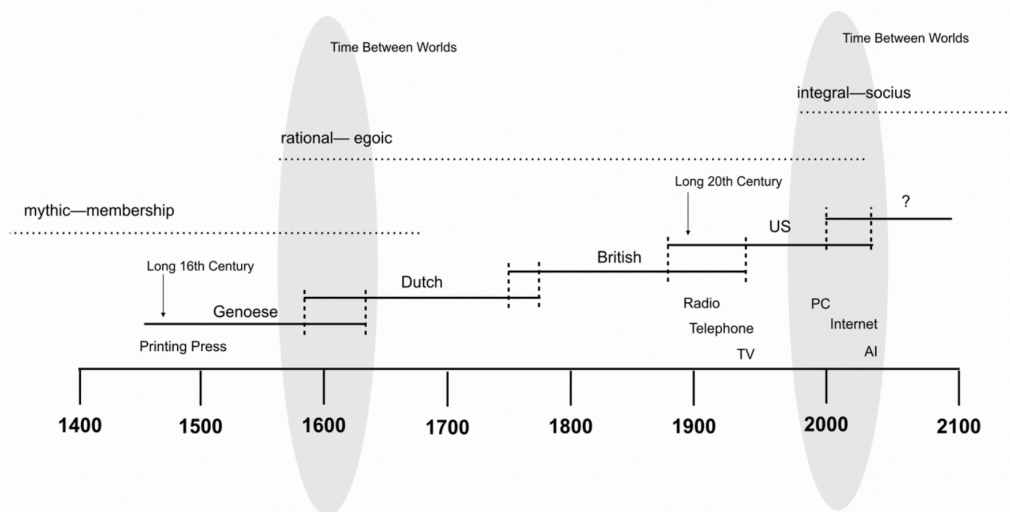
However, this spectacle must not distract us from the interior dimension of the meta-crisis, where the death of our humanity quietly and invisibly occurs. Through the countless thoughts and feelings of the billions whose lives and futures are being foreclosed, the interior dimensions of the meta-crisis unfold. In the fragmentation of cultures ripped apart by novel technologies, there in the immeasurable interiors of human consciousness the meta-crisis pushes the limits of what can be endured by human nature.

It is possible that we will cease to be human in all the ways we have traditionally and currently recognized and honored the human experience. This is what we referred to above as the second form of existential risk, the death of our humanity as we know it.

#### **5. We Live in a Time Between Worlds, a Time Between Stories**

We are poised between utopia and dystopia. When looking at the world situation, our first reaction is to ask about what, who, and how. What has happened? Who has gotten our civilization into this? How can it be helped or changed for the better? These questions are essential, and we encourage everyone to continue asking them. However, there is a more important question that is less often asked: when is it? Which is to say: when are we? Or more basically: what time is it?

Clearly, it is a time for change. We live in a time between worlds, a time of almost unbearable intensity, potential, and transformation.



**Figure 1:** Timeline displaying secular cycles of world hegemonic organization during seven centuries of the capitalist world system (based on Arrighi; Wallerstein), as nested within dynamics of media and cultural evolution (based on McLuhan; Gebser). Two epochs represent a convergence of metahistorical trends marking major transformations and can thus be characterized as “time between worlds.”

The ancient Greeks had a word (an archetype, really) for this kind of time: *kairos*, meaning “a chance, penetrable opening” in the flow of time, which allows for something truly new to emerge. It is a potent time of meaning-making and transformation. This is contrasted with *chronos*, which is linear time, duration, and clock time. Understanding that we have stepped outside of “normal time” is important because the meaning of what is possible can be re-evaluated. On the inside of normal time, *chronos*, are the events of our lives, the rhythms of civilization, the seasons, the normal course of things. On the “inside” of *kairos* are the portals to new worlds—the non-linear influxes of creativity, disruption, and opportunity. *Kairos* tells us that within the vast linear fabric of *chronos* there are “penetrable openings” at certain points, chinks in the regimented armor of time from which the truly new can emerge. *Kairos* refers to the *time within time*, the special times, pregnant times, times when the unimaginable is imagined, when the impossible becomes realized. One hour in this time is not worth the same as any other.

The figure above places insights from the field of cultural evolution alongside a certain telling of economic history in the West. The point here is not the exact dates, nor the exact language, but rather the broad trends, and more importantly, the convergences between trends. During this incredibly eventful stretch of history there are two places where metahistorical currents in cultural evolution coincide with economic cycles: the years surrounding the turning of the seventeenth century and today at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In these epochs we can witness the new beginnings of economic hegemony, transformative new technologies, and sweeping changes in the nature of culture and consciousness. During each of these transformational times, there is an inordinate amount of thinking and innovation in the realms of basic institutional

design, culture, patterns of life, sense-making, and meaning. In particular, conceptions of education, religion, and government are all in the process of being rethought.

We are presenting CosmoErotic Humanism not as a mere theory but as a transformative intellectual movement foregrounding new First Principles and Values. It is to be understood as part of a broader trajectory of intellectual currents that are emerging and flourishing during the current historical juncture. Di Vinci and his cohorts in Venice during the Renaissance stood on the brink of a time between worlds, and their synoptic and innovative humanism would be shepherded through a period of tremendous turmoil and transformation throughout Europe, until the modern revolutions began in earnest during the seventeenth century. The movement included those oriented to changing the dominant mood and metaphors underlying culture itself in particular directions—specifically towards a new story of the self, the community, and the universe that includes the best accounts of what was known about nature, the psyche, and power. So it is that again today we clearly stand in a time between worlds, seeking an unprecedented way forward. However, the stakes are now much higher, the picture bigger—and the way through to a new world even more promising.

## **6. The Gap Between Interiors and Exteriors Now Involves Exponential Technology, Resulting in Global Civilization Failure and Existential Risk**

From the beginning of recorded history, and arguably before that, humanity has evolved both interior (subjective) and exterior (objective) aspects. But at some point, through the emergence of modern science leading to the industrial and information revolutions, a gap developed—an ever-widening chasm between interior (cognition, awareness, emotion, value) and exterior (technological) capacities. The longstanding co-evolution of interiors and exteriors has dramatically broken down, and we no longer have a story of value equal to our power. This gap between the wisdom of a civilization and its power has greatly contributed to the existential challenges threatening the future of our social systems.

The challenges that resulted in the failure of classical civilization are now compounded through exponential technologies, which created a vital global civilization as well as existential risk. As scholars have pointed out, all civilizations generally fail due to the same set of causes, most of them rooted in some version of rivalrous win/lose dynamics and unsustainable resource extraction. We have not yet solved for any of those causes.

But if our civilization unravels it will be a failure of an entirely different order, a global failure. And because of weaponizable exponential technologies across multiple platforms, the failure of our global civilization may very well be an extinction event. This is what are referring to as the “second shock of existence”: the horrific awareness of possible self-induced species extinction.

Below we distinguish between the first and second shocks of existence. Briefly, the first shock of existence is the fear of death that lives in the individual human being. The

second shock of existence is a fear of the self-induced extinction of all human beings, a fear that now lives in every reflective human being, and in humanity at large.

## **7. The First Shock of Existence Is About the Death of the Human Being**

The human being's initial awareness of their own death is what we refer to as the "first shock of existence," the moment when the fear of death is born into reality. Collectively, this shock occurred deep in historical time when humans first emerged as distinctly *sapient*. The shock also occurs during every individual life, when in adolescence (usually but not always) an awareness of finitude and mortality begins to dawn.

Historically speaking, the first shock likely happened during what is called the prehistoric period. According to some historians, David Graeber and David Wengrow for example, by the time of early tribes, the religious mediation of the existential fear of death and related advanced processes of culture were already present. We can see this, for example, in early archeological evidence of ornate and clearly ritualized burial practices. There has long been enormous effort put into an engagement with the Denial of Death, as Ernest Becker reminds us.

One of the effects of the coronavirus crisis, which began in the early spring of 2020, was that the fear of death we usually displace either towards the end of our lives or onto others (often to the poor, the vulnerable, and the sick), began to rear its menacing head in the lives of everyone. The skull grinned in at the banquet. Suddenly, the fear of death was writ large on the global and personal scroll of life.

We generally displace this fear, even though death is happening all the time around the globe—and currently, millions of people are dying unnecessarily. But we displace this fear, assuming we've got another ten, twenty, thirty, maybe forty years left. Enter a widespread biological crisis like Covid, and instantly the fear of death, this first shock of existence, has forcefully entered into all of our homes, demanding a response. This is neither good nor bad. It is simply the psychological truth of what happened.

## **8. The First Shock of Existence Activates Inner Gnosis**

The original first shock of existence activated an inner gnosis, pressing the human being into a profound search, and into the disclosure of meaning. The result was the great traditions of spirit. The result was great art. The result was great music. The result was the great systems of law and other cornerstones of civilization. It is of course true that many of these great revelations and developments were mediated through distorting ethnocentric prisms, resulting in horrific pain inflicted by virtually all the great religious and cultural traditions.

But it is also clear that the fear of death, the encounter with mortality, generated a depth of vision and understanding of human nature, which invited us into a larger story and, at least potentially, participation in the field of consciousness—as well as a

palpable sense of immortality. In other words, the fear of death focused our attention inside. And when we accessed our own interiors, the deepest wellsprings of the interior face of Cosmos, this produced some of the most beautiful movements of ethics and spirit and religion—which originally meant *religare*: to reconnect, to realign, with the nature of reality. The fear of death entering reality generated this explosion of Spirit, these vital new forms of spirituality.

Many of us today—children of modern and post-modern culture—find that while the intuition of immortality is invaluable, the price demanded by religion is still too high. Every historical religion has claimed, in one form or another, that eternity and immortality were available only to its adherents, and only in exchange for various forms of rigid obedience and submission, ranging from the doctrinal, psychological, and theological, to the political and economic.

In the West we are the children of Voltaire, who led the liberation from religion’s many shadows of corruption with the battle cry “remember the cruelties.” Those cruelties were often the result of ethnocentric the prisms through which the pre-modern religions mediated between human beings and the Infinite. In modernity, however, we threw the baby out with the bathwater. While we wisely rejected forms of religious obedience and submission, the essential primary intuitions—the realization of the first shock of existence, and the vital response to it—remain powerfully resonant and true.

To transcend the fear of death we need to make our life a triumph. It is only the well-lived life that does not fear death. And to make our life a triumph we need a new narrative of value that is committed to making all lives—and indeed life itself—flourish.

The old triumphalist narratives in which a dominator in-group survives and succeeds while the out-groups wither and die is no longer viable. In our globally intermeshed and therefore fragile world space, we must all cooperate together, or we will all perish together. We must not stand against each other as in-groups against out-groups. Rather, we must all stand strong as actors in the same story of value, the same field of value, rooted in First Principles, on the side of love against fear and isolation.

While post-modernity has its many virtues and dignities, it has also savagely and mercilessly deconstructed all previous narratives of the well-lived life, inhibiting the emergence of a new story of value rooted in First Principles and First Values. Indeed, post-modernity claims that the very idea of a well-lived life of intrinsic value is itself a mere social construction of reality, completely unsupported by the universe.

## **9. The Second Shock of Existence Is About the Self-Induced Extinction of Our Species**

Much of our core infrastructure has become inherently fragile, and it’s seemingly only a matter of time before one or several catastrophic risk scenarios are realized. This started to become visible, to a limited extent, in the financial meltdown of 2008, as well as a dozen or so other less noticed but equally important recent events. Lately, it has become unmistakable, with the widespread eruption of climate catastrophes such as

wildfires and superstorms—and, of course, the first of the long-predicted planetary pandemics.

Some risks are catastrophic, wherein large populations perish; other risks are “existential,” meaning that nothing human survives. The realization of this possibility is precisely what we have called “the second shock of existence,” which has also been recognized by dozens of thinkers who track global trends. Existential risk, or the second shock of existence, means not the death of the individual human being, but awareness of the potential death of humanity.

Catastrophic events such as the Covid pandemic actually raise the specter of a looming existential risk, quite possibly in the next decade, and include: climate change, ecosystem destabilization, rogue weapons, exponentialized destructive technologies, runaway machine learning and AI, methane gas released from the arctic, peak oil and peak phosphorus, resource depletion based on unsustainable extraction models, exponential growth curves based on fractional-reserve banking, the end of Bretton Woods economic structures, and the creation of fragile, complicated essential systems at global scale that are radically vulnerable to myriad forms of attack.

This, of course, is but one list of possible forms of existential risk, or self-induced species extinction events. They are real, potential scenarios, and yet humanity must largely split them off from awareness until some way can be found to adapt culture to the second shock.

## **10. The Second Shock of Existence Activates Our Inner Gnosis**

The self-awareness of death in the individual human resulted in a new level of value and a new level of meaning in the world, because it pressed us into our own interior realization. Just like the first shock of existence created the first wave of proto-universal visions of value, the second shock of existence now needs to create another wave of genuine universal gnosis and value—this time mediated through a world-centric moral prism.

What is the deeper sense-making that seeks to emerge from the second shock of existence? We must allow this moment to spur us, to again press us into our interiors, and to invite awareness of the meta-crisis not in a way that paralyzes us, but in a way that inspires new levels of insight and realization necessary to prevent the death of humanity in both senses.

It is worth noting at the outset—as part our meta-context—that the idea of existential risk, the second shock of existence, is a direct expression of the great traditions who contrasted Armageddon and apocalypse with Metatron and Messianism. These are the utopian visions of a new human and a new humanity, the great flourishing of life in all its dimensions and expressions that virtually all the great traditions, each in their own language, intuited and articulated in their texts of realization and revelation. The “end of days,” Apocalypse, and Armageddon—these dystopian visions—are similarly core to the intuitions of virtually all the great traditions, recorded in their texts of realization

and revelation. The great traditions, however, hijacked both the intuitions of utopia and dystopia by weaving them into their own ethnocentric myths.

In modernity, existential risk is disclosed as a scientific reality, a world-centric challenge—not a prophetic intuition but a genuine potential playing out in the immediacy of the present. But the second shock of existence can result in the fulfillment of a dystopian vision, or it can provoke the emergence of a new human and the new humanity—which we discuss below as the evolution of *Homo sapiens* into *Homo amor*. We are in a new moment in history because, as discerning eyes can see, plausible paths to dystopia—the genuine death of civilization—are very much real. However, the path to a planetary civilization that can exist in perpetuity within planetary boundaries can also be seen, although walking that path is considerably more difficult.

Many bear the great privilege and the great responsibility of having the capacity to see what is unfolding, to take a seat at the table of history, and to act for the sake of every individual human and for humanity at large. This obligation is hard to capture in words. All past generations count on us to complete their unfinished work. The beings currently populating earth turn to us to transform the present to assure their survival. All the countless unborn, possibly trillions, in all possible future generations have only us, right now, to ensure their existence and their well-being.

There is a covenant between generations in which those alive today must work to avert dystopia and extinction on behalf of those yet to come. This is an inescapable and instructively asymmetrical obligation. Today's work goes on to benefit tomorrow's people, who cannot benefit us in the present. We today must remember what it means to give of ourselves to tomorrow. It is, actually and finally, the only way there will be a tomorrow.

## **11. Humans Must Learn to Move From a Pre-Tragic to a Post-Tragic Relationship to Existential Risk**

We speak with some depth in CosmoErotic Humanism about the distinction between three stations of consciousness, which we identify as the pre-tragic, tragic, and post-tragic. These three stations apply to both the personal and the collective. Briefly, in the pre-tragic station we have either not experienced tragedy or have managed to deny it. In the tragic station, we acknowledge and face the tragedy of suffering but often cannot find our way beyond it, so it destroys our capacity to respond, to innovate, or to creatively engage reality. In the post-tragic we have fully faced the tragic and live within it, but are able to transcend and transform it.

The move from pre-tragic to tragic is simply the movement in which we—to borrow Robert Jay Lifton's phrase—"face the apocalypse." We step out of the potentially fatal illusion that things will just continue on as they are, or that we will soon "return back to normal." We must face the genuine possibilities of catastrophic and existential risk.

Tragic awareness often results in a "doomer" stance of hopelessness or resignation. But there is a way through: a post-tragic view can emerge. We begin by understanding that crisis is and always has been an evolutionary driver, and that our current meta-crisis is

a birth. In the post-tragic, we allow the second shock of existence to awaken us to new possibility.

From the pre-tragic view, awareness of the meta-crisis and the possibility of self-induced species extinction does not occur, or is ignored. The obvious beauty and self-sufficiency of nature, as well as the simple givenness of the world, appear to override any possible bad news about the end of all things. The pre-tragic view of life is a specific and necessary phase to pass through, ideally during early childhood and adolescence, when the young human is brought into the fold of life.

But tragedies occur. And so, the pre-tragic view either gives way or becomes a defense. The emotional immaturity of a defensive pre-tragic view is often what becomes associated with the worst of new-age culture, where reality is “all good” and “all love.” The tragic view of life will have nothing of the idea that it is “all good.” In fact, the tragic view holds that there is perhaps almost nothing truly good in this world. It sees through the pre-tragic justifications of social, economic, and military atrocities, looking at human nature as red in tooth and claw. Of course, the worst thing for humanity to do would be to end all life for humans. And so the awareness of existential and catastrophic risks appears to be the final nail in the coffin of the pre-tragic view—from the tragic perspective, there can be no redemption at all for humanity or the world.

The tragic view eventually gives way, as tragedies open up from within and gradually yield to their unresolvability. Crises call forth transformation into new identities. Tragedies are not solved, but lived through. Burning in the pain of tragedy long enough, one becomes increasingly self-aware, able to endure despite defeat. Recognizing the incessant push of life—of Eros—enables the recognition that even within the depths of the tragic, in the darkness and terror, there is the possibility of redemption. Here is the return of laughter and stillness, the return of love and hope. The post-tragic also entails the clarification and complexification of the pre-tragic view of a good and loving Cosmos, or God.

There is no future for human culture if it remains struck in the pre-tragic or tragic view of the meta-crisis. The second shock of existence must be metabolized by human culture, and especially by those in the wisdom lineages of religious and philosophical thought. The meta-crisis is a demand for a mature and wise world philosophy that can help shift human culture into a post-tragic view on essential existential questions.

In the clarity of post-tragic awareness, it often becomes clear how the tragedy arose. Careful analysis suggests that most tragedies can be cut off at their root, before they blossom into suffering.

## **12. The Generator Functions for Existential and Catastrophic Risk Have an Underlying Root Cause: A Global Intimacy Disorder**

There is a set of core generator functions for both catastrophic and existential risk. Our collaborators at the Center, Barbara Marx Hubbard and Daniel Schmachtenberger,



have both spoken at length about these. Two of these functions deserve particular attention here.

The first is the success story that dominates global culture in both open and closed societies, albeit in different forms: **rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics**. This story of human identity and worth generates an extraction-based economic model where the planet itself is commodified, and all of reality is “used up” through the dynamics of economic competition. As a result, in roughly a century humanity has nearly exhausted the resources that took hundreds of billions of years to develop on Earth. We are now governed by unlimited growth curves that cannot be maintained, which leads to conflict, polarization, fundamentalist/globalist perspectives, widespread alienation, multipolar traps, tragedies of the commons, arms races that exponentially produce ever more dangerous weaponized technology, gain-of-function research, and so much more.

All of these factors together, spread across the global fields of commerce, economics and government, amount to vast, interdigitated, and highly “complicated” systems. This is the second basic generator function we highlight here. **Complicated systems are fragile systems, whereas complex systems are anti-fragile**. There is a fundamental disassociation among the parts of the highly entangled hyper-object we call global civilization, a disassociation that makes the overall system complicated but not complex, fragile rather than robust. To describe it as complicated is to say that the many parts do not relate to each other, they cannot *feel* each other, they cannot *heal* or self-assemble. In the language of CosmoErotic Humanism, we would say there is no **allurement** between the parts, no intrinsic relationality, no basis for embodied or organic shared value. This disassociation in turn generates cascading fragilities throughout the system, with devastating consequences. In essence, global civilization is not a complex system where the parts feel each other and therefore inherently self-organize, self-repair, and adapt for the sake of the whole.

Further reflection reveals that there is a deeper root cause which underlies both generator functions, what we call the **Global Intimacy Disorder**. This disorder can naturally only be healed by the emergence of new configurations and structures of intimacy. This potentially means restoring old patterns of intimacy and/or, more likely, generating and evolving new qualities, patterns, structures, and depths of intimacy, which are to some degree based on older forms.

Intimacy is broken when we lose access to a shared story of value. This is true whether we are talking about intimacy in a couple, organization, community, tribe, nation, religion—or even intimacy with oneself. We will return to this crucial theme below when we discuss the failure to articulate a shared global story, as one of thirteen expressions of the global intimacy disorder. We will also elaborate the crucial idea that intimacy is a First Principle and First Value of Cosmos itself.

Two strands of alienation have resulted in the disorder: alienation from a shared story and alienation from value itself. We can refer to these together as **alienation from a shared story of value**, combining the key interlocking features of the global intimacy disorder. Therefore, it cannot be addressed merely by restoring a shared story; rather, we must articulate a new shared story of value—and specifically, *intrinsic* value. Said

slightly differently: the global intimacy disorder is only healed by articulating a **universal grammar of value**.

But we are ahead of ourselves. We have identified thirteen distinct expressions of the global intimacy disorder at the heart of culture. This list below is in no sense exhaustive but rather points towards the kind of phenomena that typify this disorder.

### **13. Thirteen Expressions of the Global Intimacy Disorder Can Be Understood as Thirteen Forms of Alienation**

All thirteen expressions of the global intimacy disorder are paradoxically intimate with each other. Each one helps create the context for the next, and together they create a web of exponential, existential alienation.

We realize that the image of society presented here is critical and negative. The goal is to diagnose a disorder and characterize a pathology, and so in this sense we are focusing here on what is wrong. Later we explore the First Principles and First Values of Cosmos, which form the core of a vision for what is right. Were it not for the always already present dynamics of these living values and evolving truths, the pathologies presented below would have brought humanity to its end long ago. So the claim here is not that society is characterized by nothing but an intimacy disorder. The claim is rather that a society must strengthen its foundations in intimacy (and other First Values and First Principles); it cannot last long serving as host to the following pathologies.

#### **1. Win/Lose Metrics**

We are constantly exchanging favors and goods hoping to somehow stand out, to win, to gain. But this implicit framework means that for me to win someone else must lose. We want to be successful and to triumph, but our success story is structured by the dynamic of rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics. Win/lose metrics means that every time it seems like I see you, I don't *really* see you. I see you instrumentally, as an "it." Society is currently governed by I-It, win/lose relationships. So at some core level we are invisible to each other. I don't recognize you. I don't feel you. And therefore, I cannot generate shared purpose with you. In rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics there is no shared identity between the parties. Neither is there mutuality of pathos, mutuality of recognition, or mutuality of purpose. Governed by this dynamic, you become an instrument for my advance—and vice-versa—no matter how many pretty costumes of civility we don to mask that ugly truth.

Let's note that rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics should not be confused with healthy competition in the larger context of I-Thou relationship. Extreme forms of win/lose competition make up virtually all relationships in our society, with the narrow exception of a very small circle of people—family members and maybe one or two friends whom we may profess to love, or some kind of tribe we profess to love. But sadly, even within these contexts, rivalrous dynamics governed by win/lose metrics are more often than not still strongly at play.

## 2. Complicated Systems Dominate Complex Ones

Complex systems, like the human body or a rainforest, are composed of parts that organically self-organize and are thus capable of self-repair, exhibiting a state known as “anti-fragility.” Complicated systems, like airplanes or financial instruments, have no such capacities. There is no resonance between the parts and thus no intimate, self-regulating coherence between part and whole. In CosmoErotic Humanism we point out that in complex systems there is always allurements between the parts; in complicated systems, there is only alienation and disconnection. Authentic resonance leading to coherence is a property of intimacy. In a complicated system, the parts do not truly recognize each other or feel each other, so shared value and purpose are just not possible.

Whether on the micro or macro level, a society without shared value and shared purpose is a complicated and fragile system. Each of the parts follows its autonomous vector of unfolding alienated from the larger field of communion; there is inherent fragility. Virtually the entire global system is a vast hyper-object with myriad moving parts spread across the world—parts that on the one hand all impact each other directly or indirectly, and on the other hand are barely aware of each other, experiencing no intimacy at all. The financial meltdown of 2008, for example, was directly caused by this dynamic. Fragile financial instruments were created, motivated by the first expression of the intimacy disorder: success stories built around rivalrous conflict driven by win/lose metrics. Unintelligible to most actors impacted by them, these financial instruments—derivatives created by subprime residential mortgages—created havoc, their effects rippling across reality, collapsing economies. Neither the creators of the financial instruments nor the instruments themselves had any mutuality of recognition, pathos, or purpose (and certainly no sense of shared identity), as people’s lives were devastated by the crisis. The absence of intimacy in complicated systems is a key partial cause for virtually all other forms of suffering and breakdown in the world.

## 3. Alienation Between Different Ways of Knowing

A third expression of the global intimacy disorder is the alienation between the humanities and the STEM professions (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). A STEM field like physics, for example, must of course operate according to its own principles and seek validation through its own methods. And the same is true for the humanities, which deploy their own methods and validation tests to explore the truthfulness of their assertions. Strangely, however, the STEM fields are commonly understood as being value-free and thus supportive of a reductionist materialist Cosmos. For their part, the humanities—at least when they move beyond logical positivism and existentialism—generally threaten both the idea of value neutrality and reductionism. The current cultural hegemony of STEM is one reason there is a strong impulse to deconstruct any notion of intrinsic value offered by the humanities. For it to be successful according to its own metric, STEM doesn’t need there to be any value in the universe.

So when a discipline in the humanities argues for an ontology of value—i.e., asserting the existence of intrinsic value—it is immediately declared irrelevant to the operations of the STEM fields, deemed “unscientific” or simply not real. This disqualification of large swaths of reality—both any form of interior knowledge, as well as value itself—causes a breakdown of intimacy with entire dimensions of reality. This disqualification of reality is not rooted in epistemology, but rather in the politics of the real. The further result is the collapse of intimacy between our primary disciplines of human knowledge. Our various forms of epistemology therefore do not erotically inform or relate to each other, leaving each of them impoverished; without any coherence, they are all but irrelevant regarding the most important human inquiries. As evolutionary theorist Abraham Kook writes, “One of the great afflictions of the world is that every discipline of knowledge or of emotion, blocks [the] view from every other discipline, and because of this most people [and reality itself] are left incomplete [with] deficiencies ever multiplying.” The breakdown of intimacy is when there is no longer “knowing between forms of knowing,” which catastrophically undermines our capacity to discern the intimate contours of reality and to engage with it accordingly. This common and seemingly innocuous systemic violation of epistemological integrity is cause for collapse along myriad vectors.

#### 4. Alienation from Time—Past, Present and Future

As many writers and cultural critics have pointed out, we rarely enter the depths of the present moment. Neither are we intimate with the present, nor with our own *presence* in the present. And we are equally alienated from a genuine intimacy with the past, unless we are part of a religious tradition. But in that case, we are generally intimate only with the past of our community, and usually only with an idealized retelling of that past. However, most crucially perhaps, we are not intimate with the future. Although we are filled with surface desires for immediate- and medium-term future outcomes, we scarcely feel the future as part of the now. Thus, the overwhelming majority of *Homo sapiens* are alienated from the memory of the past, non-intimate with the memory of the future, and disassociated from the depths of the present.

Paradoxically, true depth in the present contains within it both past and future, which in turn evokes memories of both the past and future, and thus generating a deep commitment to the past and future. This failure of intimacy with time itself is why we are perfectly comfortable in our daily lives participating in an destructive extraction model, which takes from the earth essential resources that took billions of years to generate and are crucially needed for generations to come. This connects with the second expression of the global intimacy disorder: We are alienated from the impact of our actions on the future because it is lost in the vast swamp of opaquely interconnected complicated systems. However, this intimacy disorder is not limited to our blindness to future impacts of the present extraction model. The failure of intimacy with the future is precisely what makes us deaf to the cries of the unborn trillions in future generations silently pleading with us to identify, engage with, and transform—*now*—the root causes of catastrophic and existential risk.

## 5. Alienation from Sense-Making: The Broken Information Ecology

There has been a collapse of intimacy with information itself. We don't know how to make sense of the world together, unable to locate our personal and political worlds in the larger contexts of either culture or Cosmos. We are fundamentally dislocated from information streams, interior or exterior, that bring us into intimacy with reality. We do not trust our sources, nor understand how various streams of information relate to each other. Without a shared culture of high-quality information and sense-making, we are alienated from our core sources of gnosis. Sense-making is *sensual*. In a precise way, it is sense-making that fundamentally enables our intimacy with reality. Our alienation from access to valid information has caused a breakdown of trust that is collapsing intimacy across all spheres of reality.

## 6. Alienation from Ourselves, Alienation from Our Depths

Alienation from our own selves expresses in multiple ways. At a basic level, human beings internalize win/lose metrics as part of their fundamental identity. Failure to achieve what is defined as success results in devastating self-recrimination, shame, and mental breakdown expressed across a wide spectrum of symptoms. Virtually all human beings are alienated and split off from core parts of themselves. We are not truly intimate with our shadow expressions, instead projecting them onto others, which in turn feeds the downward spiral of intimacy breakdown and alienation. We are split off from our own greatness, from our own depths, from our larger selves, and from the wider fields of consciousness and value in which we participate. Even when we profess otherwise, we experience ourselves as limited, separate selves, living in the confined dimension of this lifetime, and determined by the lowest common denominator of what Daniel Kahneman calls “fast thinking,” as we desperately seek status and attention. Furthermore, we are split off from our bodies, and particularly from a sense of embodied aliveness itself. We are non-intimate and often deeply shamed by our bodies, our needs, our desires, our powerlessness—and finally, our finitude.

## 7. Alienation from a Shared Story

When there is no shared story, intimacy breaks down—whether in a couple, an organization, a tribe, religion, nation, or within oneself. A shared story generates the possibility of intimate coherence. The collapse of shared story generates myriad forms of fragmentation and dissolution, within the self, between selves, or between groups of selves. For an ego self to function effectively, and with a sense of ease and joy in the world, it needs a coherent and shared story between all the different voices and subpersonalities. The failure to articulate such a shared story is a direct cause of mental breakdown of varying degrees of intensity. The same is true for different parts and sectors of a local community, society, or global civilization. Only a shared story between all the parts generates intimate communion, which in turn generates coherence and capacities of co-ordination, which in turn generate ever greater, deeper, and wider intimacies.

## 8. Polarization: Alienation Between Diverse Political and Social Positions

There is hyper-polarization at every level of society. In the third expression of the global intimacy disorder, we have already pointed towards a polarization between disciplines—between forms of knowing—which in effect means between methodologies for gathering information and discerning something of the nature of reality. But here we are referring specifically to social and political polarization, where those who take a different position are regarded as demonized Others worthy of being reviled, degraded, and/or cancelled. To overcome the intimacy disorder, the shared story cannot only be a shared story of fate, but must also be a shared story of value. To be clear: intimacy is a natural byproduct of a shared story of value, which allows for the transcending of polarization. This does not imply homogeneity on any level. Rather, our shared story of value establishes the context for our diversity to be expressed and celebrated.

## 9. Alienation Between Values

Social polarization is rooted in alienation between values themselves. Instead of there being a cluster of values that operate in dialectical tension and harmony with each other, we are witnessing extreme polarization in the realm of value. While this has innumerable expressions, it can be illustrated simply using one example: the great debate that has ensued for many decades around a woman's right to have an abortion. Those who favor that right, protecting the autonomy and integrity of the woman, are called pro-choice. Those who limit that right, protecting the life of the fetus as they understand it, are called pro-life. There is intense extremism on both sides of this debate. What is striking is that each side identifies itself with a value, but makes it absolute, without requiring their value to remain in dialectical tension with the competing value.

For the pro-choice community in the abortion wars, the value of choice is consistently triumphant over the value of life. For the pro-life community, the value of life must consistently triumph over the value of choice. A true understanding of any value, however, only emerges through intimate, dialectical synergy with opposing values. The idea here would be that life and choice are in a perpetual unresolvable tension, which can only be navigated by engaging forms of judgment and discourse that can truly hold multi-valued complexity. Over time, this dialectical integration yields new wholes, new higher-order coordinating values greater than any individual value. When values disassociate from each other, in a sense when they lose their intimacy, the result is always some form of extremism that inevitable generates more suffering and pain. In effect, values themselves are in rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics in which each value struggles to be successful at the expense of its rival.

## 10. Alienation from the Field of Value

Perhaps the most significant expression of the global intimacy disorder, that which undergirds all other forms, is the alienation from value itself. There is a core sense, put forth in various forms by modernity, but accentuated and widely promoted by post-modern culture, that all value itself is a “social construction of reality,” “fiction,” or “a figment of our imagination.” In this vision, there is no sense of the human being at home in the universe. Einstein got many things wrong when he stepped out of the

realm of science. But he got it very right when he responded to a reporter who asked him what his most important question was; he said he most wanted to know whether or not the Universe was friendly. We ask the question somewhat differently in the writings of CosmoErotic Humanism, but the intention is similar:

*Are we welcome in the universe?*

The philosophical core of existentialism, the great proto-postmodern movement, is the sense that we are not welcome in the universe. This assumption is the source of the current mood of non-intimacy that pervades culture, the great alienation that defines existentialism and its daughter, post-modernism. The human being is a total stranger in the universe, according to these viewpoints. Yet, that cannot possibly be true. There is, in fact, a welcome sign hanging on the Universe. We just need to decipher it.

Alienation from the field of value is related to the eighth and ninth expressions of the global intimacy disorder: social polarization and the polarization between values themselves. This is a subtle but crucial point. If two people or two groups within a larger society take issue on questions of value—for example, choice versus life—but they both experience themselves as being within the wider field of value, the conflict can generate creative synergy instead of polarization. The reason is that both parties share an undeniable experiential knowledge of the field of value. They do not take issue with value itself—quite the opposite in fact: they are both in the field of value *together*. They contest with each other only regarding the relationship between two unique instantiations of a shared field of value. Instead of desperately standing for a particular value in a context where value itself is questioned, we can meet and respect each other in the field of value itself—mutually recognizing the values we share and the values we disagree on, leading to productive synergies and the creation of new wholes.

## 11. Externalities

There is a general inability to see clearly and connect the dots in society—myopic, localized forms of tunnel vision prevail. For most people most of the time, most of reality is an externality, outside their circle of love, attention, and awareness. Where does your trash go? Where did all the many parts of your complicated iPhone come from? Companies create externalities as part of business as usual; individuals do so simply by living their lives. In general, we lack a sense of our true impact on the world around us, and thus lack a sense of our true situation. We have no willingness to attempt a view of the whole. And it is only from a sense of the whole, in all its intimate interrelationships, that we can genuinely locate ourselves in value, in the wonder of reality. The Buddhist master Dogen was not wrong when he said, “Enlightenment means intimacy with all things.” And in our CosmoErotic Humanist reformulation, we might say that “Enlightenment means there are no externalities.” To be intimate with all things is to refuse to turn away or split off any part of reality. It is to turn towards reality face-to-face. We do not split off groups of people, or any part of the globe, or any aspect of reality—animals, for example, or the biosphere—from our consideration. In other words, this deep intimacy, this disavowal of externalities, means that we are omniconsiderate for the sake of the whole.

## 12. TechnoFeudalism and the Digital Nervous System of the Planet

A worldwide digital skin has become the de facto nervous system of the planet. This could potentially create a new form of intimacy, what we have called elsewhere, “digital intimacy.” Instead, while the digital embrace has created a great deal of connectivity, it has also generated massive alienation in multiple forms that contribute profoundly to the global intimacy disorder. Indeed, the differences and affinities between connectivity and intimacy are themselves a source of much confusion. This feature of the global intimacy disorder will be a major theme of a later thread in our conversation, when we turn our attention to the nexus of politics and high technology—what we have called “TechnoFeudalism.” Digital technologies are connecting the world, but this is being done primarily in order to generate predictive analysis via machine intelligence, which allows for the control of thought and behavior by misaligned, non-intimate third parties. Both the TechnoFeudalists and these misaligned third parties to whom predictive analysis is marketed are driven by narrow forms of self-interest: typically profit maximization or forms of domination. In this sense, they are self-evidently alienated—that is, they do not share mutuality of recognition, pathos, or purpose with the ostensible end-users of these digital technologies. Rather, they are treated as an “it” from whom data are to be extracted and then commodified. Moreover, the mind-numbing and attention-hijacking modalities of the TechnoFeudalists are by their very design targeted to the lowest-common-denominator aspects of our humanity. They are alienating us from our own uniqueness, and in a negative feedback loop further alienating us from our own bodies and minds—and thus from each other.

## 13. The Gap Between the Elite and the “Masses”

There is in contemporary global society an evident and ever-widening gap between the haves and have-nots—a gap that has historically been a core feature of civilization. It only finally began to close after the Renaissance, a trend that continued through the industrial revolution and throughout much of the twentieth century. As many have pointed out, this increasing parity has stopped and the pendulum is now swinging wholly in the other direction. Moreover, at this point, the trend is such that it will soon become far more than a gap in wealth and opportunity. We are moving rapidly towards a new global caste system in which a tiny elite is technologically augmented, in terms of cognition, aesthetics, physical capacity and even longevity. If this persists, the gap will eventually become an essential split between two forms of human. This division between the powerful and the powerless is a primary underminer of shared identity, and of intimacy, making impossible any true mutuality of recognition, pathos, value, or purpose. This gap is spiraling out of control and will very quickly turn the planet into a caste system that will surpass all older forms of inequality.



## **14. Pre-modern, Modern, and Post-modern Understandings of Value Must be Integrated into a New Story of Value that Responds to the Meta-crisis**

The traditional, pre-modern world was rife with brutality and alienation. Rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics raged between religions and between nations. But there was an underlying sense that the human being was welcome in a world that was ultimately ordered and meaningful, lined with grace, an expression of the Tao, located in a field of ultimate value. However, this welcome home sign was invariably limited only to members of one's own community and religion. This meant that one's local values, expressed by one's local religion, were taken to be superior to all others, and therefore deserving of absolute loyalty.

In the modern world, as we will note below in more depth, there was a split between the theoretical deconstructors of intrinsic value, such as David Hume, and those who affirmed intrinsic value, such as John Amos Comenius and the Cambridge Platonists. In practice, for both camps, there was a shared sense of "common-sense sacred axioms" of value. These governed, motivated, and animated the everyday life of virtually all "modern" human beings—irrespective of their theoretical views on value. Humans within both pre-modern and modern epochs lived within stories of value, albeit in different ways. The pre-modern world was explicit about the reality of value, expressed in ethnocentric belief/social systems. In modernity the issue of intrinsic value was often assumed to be a given—inarticulate common-sense axioms prevailed—even as the theoretical worldviews of some philosophers began to express value skepticism.

Post-modernity exposed and intensified this contradiction in modernity, ultimately deconstructing and defacing all claims of intrinsic value. Reductive scientific explanations of human behavior joined up with literary and philosophical criticism to form a dominant cultural trope that value, truth, and beauty are but "social constructions."

The story line of modernity was woven in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment era. It's depth and goodness birthed the great dignities of modernity: the scientific method, democracy, women's suffrage, and universal human rights. The flaws in the plotlines, the failure of depth and value, the disqualification of the universe, the exile of the subjective and the immeasurable, the thin narratives of identity, and more, resulted in the disasters of modernity, ultimately leading to what we described above as the contemporary second shock of existence. After the post-modern savaging of the worldviews and plotlines of modernity and pre-modernity, we find ourselves, as mentioned above, in a time between worlds and a time between stories.

In some sense this moment parallels the time of the Renaissance. Da Vinci and his cohort lived in the wake of the Black Death that had decimated much of Europe and Asia. They understood that they could not find their way to every village to offer help. The value axioms of the old worldview were dissolving all around them. Da Vinci and his cohort understood that they were in a time between worlds and a time between stories. They understood that the most powerful moral act they could perform was to

tell a new story. A new story of value, a story of the new human and the new humanity, a new universe story, a new narrative of identity, a new story of the divine, a new story of power, a new story of desire, a new story of Eros.

## 15. God is Stories: Narrative as First Principle and Value

Story is a core structure of Cosmos itself, a First Principle and Value. As many wisdom traditions have maintain, God lives as stories. This is expressed in the Hebrew mystical lineage as the Ten *Sefirot*. The singular *sefirah* means lamination or light, but it also derives from the Hebrew word *sippur*, meaning “story.” In other words, ten *sefirot* is code for the realization of the interior sciences that there are ten major plotlines in the Cosmic story that play themselves out again and again and again, at every level of reality. And crucially, this does not refer to an eternal, cyclical story of Being but rather an ever-evolving narrative of dynamic emergence and Becoming.

Story at the scale of Cosmos can be understood as involving the intrinsic movements of meaning, consciousness, and information. The Cosmic Story itself has five core elements. First, a story always has plotlines; a story always has a *telos*. Second, these plotlines play out primordial desires, or what Whitehead refers to as the appetites of Cosmos. Third, these desires are reaching towards intrinsic values of Cosmos; intrinsic desires are animated by intrinsic values. Fourth, story implies agency—reality is not at all materialistic and entirely determined, but rather there is an evolving dimension of will, choice, and freedom in Cosmos. Finally, story entails crisis and resolution. There are always crises in the plotline of Cosmos—and crisis is always a crisis of value, which is resolved in the emergence of a new structure of value.

Similar notions of Cosmic story are being introduced in various branches of science, especially with the rise of complexity theory and evolutionary biology. Our presentation of the four big bangs in the next proposition is an expression of the scientific impulse towards recognizing that reality is animated by inherent *telos*—direction—clearly indicating that reality has plotlines of value. Reality is not merely a fact. Reality is a story. Running through all four big bangs is a set of consistent plotlines disclosed by what reality does, the self-evident movement of reality itself. The four big bangs together set the stage for the plotlines of reality, which begin to disclose the parameters of a new story of value to which we will frequently return.

## 16. There Have Been Four Big Bangs

What is sometimes called “Big History” is the deep-time story of the reality of Cosmos. Contemporary science presents an image of cosmological evolution that can be read according to several deep-time epochs, each marked by an abrupt discontinuity in the structure of reality itself. We refer to these as the four “Big Bangs,” although there are many other ways to frame this.

The first big bang initiated cosmological evolution. This is the “big bang” spoken about by physicists, the momentous leap from the unmanifest to the manifest. The First Big Bang is the explosion of the original singularity into matter, and the emergence of the laws of the Cosmos, including all of mathematics and physics. This is the birth of the *physiosphere*.

After evolving through many stages, matter then triumphs as life. This is the Second Big Bang, initiating biological evolution—the momentous leap from matter to life and origin of all the laws of classical biology and microbiology. This is the birth of the *biosphere*.

Life now moves through many critical stages of evolutionary development, ultimately triumphing in the emergence of the self-reflective human mind. This is the Third Big Bang, the birth of the *noosphere*—from the Greek word *nous*, or mind—indicating the interior self-reflective mind.

We do not mean to imply here that there was no interiority prior to the Third Big Bang. There obviously was. Indeed, at the core of CosmoErotic Humanism is what we call “pan-interiority,” the realization that reality is composed of both interiors *and* exteriors, all the way down and all the way up the evolutionary chain. Life and mind co-evolve. One has only to turn to the advances in micro-biology from the last fifty years—from Barbara Mclintock’s *transposition* (jumping genes), to Lynn Margulis’s *symbiogenesis*, to James Shapiro’s *natural genetic engineering*, and Dennis Noble’s *systems biology*—to realize that there is a virtually unimaginable quality of intelligence, mind, or even consciousness at the cellular level. The extraordinary capacity of cells to edit and literally rewrite their own DNA, generating novel cellular emergents, is something that neo-Darwinism never imagined. Transposition, horizontal gene transfer, symbiogenesis, and natural genetic engineering have all demonstrated beyond scientific doubt that the processes of evolution are not accountable only to the sorting mechanism of natural selection and variation, but are instead animated by genuine depth intelligence, consciousness, and *telos*. This is part of what we try to capture with the term “pan-interiority.”

Having said that, at the level of the Third Big Bang, when the depth of the self-reflective human mind emerges, yet another momentous leap occurs: the emergence and evolution of cumulative human culture, growing eventually to planetary scale.

After the Third Big Bang, the human mind—both personally and culturally—goes through many stages of evolutionary development. Human personality and culture will also complexify into a unique emergence, singularity, and eventually triumph. This is what we have called the Fourth Big Bang, the fulfillment of *Homo sapiens* in what we might call *Homo amor*, the birth of the new planetary human and the new world-centric humanity. The birth of *Homo amor*, the new human and new humanity—including the necessary catalysts for its emergence, as well as its demarcating characteristics—is the major topic of CosmoErotic Humanism.

## 17. There are Identifiable Plotlines in the Universe Story

Across the four Big Bangs, the universe story of evolution has a set of core trajectories or plotlines. Taken together, they comprise the central drama of the Cosmos—and of our individual lives. Later these will be formalized in a set of First Principles and First Values. In other words, as we have already alluded to, the First Principles and First Values are themselves the core *plotlines* of the evolutionary story.

The first trajectory is the movement of existence to higher and higher forms of complexity. The evolutionary flow moves from atom to amoeba (single-celled organisms) to plants to early animals to mammals to early humans walking upright to awake and enlightened human beings. But this is only a limited, exterior description of evolution.

What is the interior experience of evolution during this same time sequence? The interior of evolution is a yearning of some kind. If you could feel the inside of evolution throughout history, you would feel forms of yearning going all the way back. These questions and ideas seem absurd to a certain kind of scientific mindset. But they were obvious questions to most of our human ancestors, whom scientists have largely dismissed as “primitive.” Our ancestors believed that nature and the Cosmos were self-evidently purposeful in some way, here for some reason—that the Universe was clearly a value-driven process.

What does evolution yearn for? Well, just look at the exterior trajectory of evolution and you will know. Atoms to amoebas to plants to animals to mammals to early humans to self-aware planetary humans. What is the trajectory of evolution that we see in this snapshot of the evolutionary chain? We see first that evolution moves from simplicity to **complexity**. On the inside, it stands to reason that evolution has an appetite—in some way it wants to evolve from simplicity to complexity.

Subatomic particles do not become atoms merely mechanically, or in some obvious way. Not at all. There is what can only be described as an intense **allurement**, a force, an attraction, a longing that brings subatomic particles together to form the new configuration of intimacy called an atom. To see what evolution yearns for we need only to see the trajectories of evolution, the plotlines that give it meaning.

One of these trajectories is the movement to more and more **consciousness**. This is easy to see in our snapshot of the evolutionary chain. The more complex a lifeform is, the more conscious it is. For example, an amoeba is more conscious than an atom, a plant more conscious than an amoeba, a squirrel more conscious than a plant, and a human more conscious than a squirrel. Finally, a self-aware planetary human is more conscious than an ordinary human, who goes about life asleep to her true nature and true situation. Felt from the inside, we might say that evolution yearns for more and more consciousness.

Another trajectory of evolution is the movement to more and more **creativity**. A dog is more creative than an amoeba, and a human being is more creative than a dog. Felt from the inside, we might say that evolution yearns for more and more creativity.

Yet another trajectory is the movement toward more and more **uniqueness**. Reality begins with unique pressure waves and then evolves to atoms. An atom is unique—no two are precisely the same. Atoms are then allured together to form molecules, which are allured together to form macromolecules. At each subsequent level uniqueness deepens and evolves. The intimacy intensifies within macromolecules, and in the momentous leap to life early cells emerge. An amoeba is more differentiated and unique than even a complex macromolecule. Cells add another level of differentiation and uniqueness to atoms, molecules, and macromolecules. A plant is more complex and more uniquely differentiated than an atom or an amoeba. A human being is more complex and uniquely differentiated than a squirrel. A spiritually awake human being, living consciously and focused on sharing his unique gifts, is more complex and differentiated than a person who is unconscious and spiritually asleep. Felt from the inside, we might say that evolution yearns for more and more uniqueness.

Another trajectory is that toward deeper and higher levels of **Eros, or love**. By love we mean not merely ordinary love, but Evolutionary Love, Outrageous Love, the Eros pulling the Cosmos itself forward. The uniqueness and complexity in the movement from molecules to macromolecules to cells implies that cells also have new emergent properties. These new capacities are a manifestation of Eros, enabling greater intimacy, creativity, contact, and aliveness. In the cell there is an intensification of aliveness, a coming online of life, an awakening into deeper consciousness, and what leading-edge research from Mclintock, Margulis, Kaufman, and Schapiro would call *will* or *choice*.

Cells are more capacitated in Eros and intimacy, more alive, more whole. The relationships between the parts of cells expresses an intensification of intimacy and will, far beyond that which exists in molecules and macromolecules. Cells are intelligent in some sense, which is both self-evidently discontinuous from and continuous with what we call human intelligence. Cells, according to Stuart Kaufman, contain genuine dimensions of consciousness and creativity which suggest deeper capacities for will, choice, and ultimately Eros, or what we call Evolutionary Love.

Ordinary love is often a human strategy to obtain more security and comfort. Evolutionary Love, or Outrageous Love, is the movement of all of reality—including human beings—to more and more contact, more and more care, more and more union, and more and more mutuality. Human Eros participates in the Cosmic field of Eros. The Intimate Universe. The CosmoErotic Universe.

Another way to talk about yearning is to call it *telos*. This Greek word means that something has direction, a yearning to go somewhere, to get closer, to be more, to go deeper, and to feel more. All of these directions are part of the *telos* of reality. Yearning then expresses both the Eros and *telos* of reality. If you put the words Eros and *telos* together, you get what our beloved colleague Barbara Marx Hubbard calls “telerotic.” We live not only in an erotic universe but in a Telerotic Universe. Eros in its true nature is always teleological.

All these elements—Allurement, Consciousness, Complexity, Intimacy, Uniqueness, Creativity, Eros, and others—are part of a larger constellation of First Principles and First Values of reality, woven together to form a story of value involving plotlines across the four Big Bangs, and beyond.

## **18. The Plotlines of the Cosmos Become Self-Aware in the Human, Creating the Conditions for Conscious Evolution**

Let's again return to the notion of conscious evolution that we began to point towards above. We speak of the realization that reality has a narrative arc, that reality is a story in which there is a progressive deepening of intimacies. The universe is a love story, and its plotlines are lived, consciously and reflectively, by human beings. This reframing of conscious evolution is key to the larger context of CosmoErotic Humanism.

Conscious evolution requires human beings to awaken to a set of related realizations. First, as we noted, is the realization that evolution is itself a story. This realization derives from the capacity to trace the narrative arc of evolution through the four Big Bangs as we have described them above. We realize that the story itself is not an eternal/cyclical story of Being, but an evolving story of Becoming.

Next, we realize that the Cosmic Story is driven by several primary inter-animated plotlines, particularly Eros, intimacy, and desire—all of which point to the nature of reality's narrative arc, revealing it to be a story of value rooted in First Principles and First Values.

Then there is the realization that the human being is the storyteller of reality, the only being we know capable of grasping the whole and articulating a narrative about the All. Of course, not only are we the storytellers of the universe, we are also actors in the story. Our personal stories are themselves chapter and verse part of the Universe Story. The plotlines of Cosmic evolution become self-aware in humanity. Now the actors in the story become aware of the drama of the love story they are enacting.

Moreover, the story is unfinished. We understand that we of the Anthropocene epoch will write humanity's next (or final) chapter. Our capacity to awaken as conscious evolution, to write the next and not the final story in human history, depends primarily on the quality and accuracy of the story that we currently choose to tell about reality. For it is only the telling of a new story of value, the enactment of a new superstructure, which has the capacity to effectively respond to looming existential and catastrophic risk.

## **19. There Has Been a Collapse of Intrinsic Value at the Center of Culture**

Value itself has been subject to withering critique in modernity and post-modernity. That critique wisely undermined and deconstructed old and outdated notions of value. But because this critique went a bit too far, the vast majority of people who participate in civilization today, East and West, do not understand themselves as participating in a universal field of value. A subtle, inarticulate, and pernicious nihilism is pervasive,

wherein values are seen, at best, only as social constructions—or worse, as subtle ploys for power.

There has been no widely received reconstructive project that substantively addresses these critiques of value. We are engaged in what we understand to be the great post-post-modern project, the reconstruction of value itself, honoring both those legitimate aspects of the critiques while also carefully and forcefully responding to the other, mistaken aspects. In doing so, we seek to restore the value that was always there—but not to its pre-modern condition. Rather, the goal is to evolve a universal grammar of value, codified as a set of First Values and First Principles embedded in a story of value. We discuss the new theory of value in terms of an “evolving perennialism” and justify it in terms of what we call the “anthro-ontological method.” But that’s getting ahead of the story.

Before we turn to a new theory of value, we need to understand more deeply how we got here, how value collapsed. Let’s once again begin with the pre-modern period, which for our purposes here refers to the epoch from the Axial Age in which the great religions emerged up to (but not including) the Renaissance.

In pre-modernity, the ontological existence of value was a given, a story well recapitulated by C.S. Lewis in *The Discarded Image*. Pre-modernity was also defined by the success story of rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics, but the core arena of conflict was not the state of war between every individual, as described by Hobbes (eventually to become a core feature of modernity). Rather, in the pre-modern context, the core rivalrous conflict was between religions themselves, and between political entities such as clans, tribes, and kingdoms. The general ethnocentric presupposition of every religion was that it alone had the clearest, most direct access to the source of all value.

Generally, this created a two-tiered set of ethics. One set of ethical principles indicated a higher order of goodness applicable only to those in one’s religion, tribe, or kingdom. A second set of ethical principles, generally of a lower order, applied to all those not in one’s tribe or kingdom. Everyone agreed that you could not randomly murder people for the sake of power and profit. But most of pre-modern humanity limited the term “person”—at least in this regard—only to those in their tribe or religion.

That said, side by side with its ethnocentricity, pre-modernity also formulated universal principles. These expressed themselves strongly in the many strains of medieval philosophy, which were deeply formed by Platonic and Aristotelian principles, both in terms of formal natural philosophy (what would later become science) and in terms of metaphysics. These universal systems lived inside of the ethnocentric systems—and all of them assumed ontological value as an intrinsic feature of Cosmos. Naturally, there was tension between this universal impulse and the ethnocentricity inherent in all the great traditions.

In many of these traditions there were formulations of what might be called “natural law,” even if that specific term was not deployed. Natural law expresses a series of universal axiomatic moral principles said to be embedded in the intrinsic structure of Cosmos, governing both nature and humanity. Modernity’s critique of pre-modernity

overturned the authority of the great traditions, as well as the metaphysics on which they were based, undermining the very possibility of natural law.

When certain claims about the nature of the world backed by religious authority were debunked by the new modern sciences, it became clear that the traditions had overreached. Moreover, multiple religions claimed mutually exclusive truths, which in the clear light of modernity, self-evidently indicated that they were rooted in culture and not objective divine truth, as claimed. The texts of the religions were shown to have developed historically and not solely through divine revelation. Greater numbers gained access to education and social mobility, facilitating their rejection of the ostensibly divinely mandated religious doctrines that supported their oppression. Human creativity and the inherent sense of an evolving Cosmos quickly displaced the creations myths. Prayer proved less effective at healing the sick than penicillin, as sanitation and germ theory were more effective against plagues.

These and other related shifts are well discussed in scholarship on intellectual history, and do not require further elaboration. So let's turn to a question critical for our purposes here: How did modernity approach value?

## **20. Modernity Can Be Characterized by Two Divergent Views on Value**

In the broadest possible terms, we can speak of two approaches to value in modernity. This is important because the present moment is not simply determined or predestined. Intellectual history shows that the past within the present is manifold, with futures also potentiated in various directions. These two strains of modernity still inform the intellectual intuitions and assumptions of many in the West, and throughout the world, wherever the triumphant cannon of the Enlightenment took hold.

One strain can be sourced in passages that appear in seminal modern theorists like David Hume, and then traced up through the dualists and materialists to the early analytical and positivist schools. This reductive, scientific, and skeptical position dissociates fact and value, and then dismisses value as non-scientific, i.e., unreal. Retrospectively, this can be seen a kind of proto post-modernism. Indeed, Habermas points out that post-modernity is really nothing but the disclosure of the core structure of modernity's unbalanced logic, fully revealed and amplified. The deconstruction of intrinsic value essential to post-modernity was already well rehearsed during the first acts of the modern age.

The roots of the vision of a Cosmos animated only by physical laws and devoid of value emerges in clear form with modernity. Indeed, as the seventeenth-century proceeds, dualists such as Descartes convincingly claimed that Spirit, or mind, was distinct from matter. David Hume then stepped in to clarify the true implications of this view, which continued to develop in Darwin, followed by various strains of neo-Darwinism. Out of this nineteenth-century matrix emerged a very strong intellectual center of gravity around materialism, which promoted the impossibility of intrinsic value. Indeed,



nineteenth-century materialism was simply seventeenth-century dualism without the spiritual dimension. This materialist vector animates movements like logical positivism, subjectivism, and then existentialism, all of which appear well before the formal emergence of post-modernity. The Cosmos was gradually being denuded of all value.

Of course, paradoxically, for early modern thinkers, God language remained at the center of culture even as it was moving towards materialism. Eventually the divine natural law from theologians like Aquinas was subject to significant critique, and then dismissed entirely. And rightly so. For example, based on natural law Aquinas claims that all forms of contraception are forbidden. This, of course, does not follow from any objective reading of natural law. The Catholic prohibition on contraception does not and should not become adopted as a universal norm based on the idea it is “natural law.”

In its public expressions, the major movement of modern culture proudly viewed itself as radically discontinuous with pre-modernity. The transition from pre-modern to modern was understood as a sharp rupture—a movement from a world that revolved around God to a world in which man was the center, and God was either dethroned entirely (materialism) or effectively sidelined (deism).

As mentioned above, however, there was a second movement in modern culture that lived side by side with the first. The earliest seminal representative of this oppositional strain in modernity is John Amos Comenius, but the broader moment is found in Leibnitz and the Cambridge Platonists, and can be traced up through Peirce, Whitehead, C.S. Lewis, and other heterodox preservers of realism and value.

This second movement emphasizes a greater continuity between pre-modernity and modernity. This is particularly true regarding some of the key universal structures of pre-modernity such as natural law or the commonality of the great traditions articulated by the perennial philosophy. The notion of the perennial philosophy itself emerges from this strain of modernity, from the pen of Leibnitz, who was himself inspired by Comenius’s vision.

In this second strain, God (however that term is understood) is said to have invested reality with a certain natural law, both in terms of exteriors, as expressed in mathematics and sciences, and in terms of interiors, expressed in values and their ethical derivatives. Both the equations of mathematics and a field of value are thought to be intrinsic to nature. This natural law eventually becomes a universal grammar of value in the context of a worldview transposed by science. The core intuition of natural law is that there are innate and self-evident structures of ethics that are part of the Cosmos. Natural law language and theory is extensively deployed by early modernity’s jurists and continues as a significant if increasingly marginalized intellectual orientation throughout the modern period.

A second expression of this second strain in modernity is the so-called perennial philosophy. The perennialists are quintessentially modern in that they attempt to extrapolate universal principles of metaphysics and ethics from the nature of the Cosmos as disclosed through intense spiritual exercise. As Aldous Huxley points out in his classic book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, individuals can be transfigured in such a way

that they have direct access to metaphysical and ethical truths. Perennialists also represent an aspect of the modern impulse in seeking to discover underlying universals from local religious systems, as a transition from an ethnocentric view to a world-centric view.

The deists, for example, who were highly influential among the American founding fathers, spoke about God as the watchmaker who had designed and wound the watch of the universe and then stepped out of the action, leaving some version of natural law to organize, animate, and guide reality. The deists can thus be understood either as perennialists or as proto-materialists, as proto-atheists or men of God in the more classical sense. They seem to be some confused or sophisticated merger of both, and continue to be read in this way.

Various schools of thought arose during the birth of modernity, the distinctions between which were often not clearly expressed in culture. Yet, all essentially subscribed to the “self-evident universal truths” espoused by the new democracies. This fundamental coherence around the new politics and the new sciences tended to obfuscate their very different metaphysical understandings. “Self-evident universal truths” could be understood as rooted in intrinsic universal value structures—ultimately sourced in the realm of spirit. Or they could be understood as entirely materialistic, which is how, for example, much of modernity is portrayed by contemporary cultural historians like Steven Pinker, Jared Diamond, and Yuval Noah Harari. In their readings of the major strains in modernity, value by definition is not and cannot be intrinsic.

The deconstruction of value in early modernity is far from obvious in public culture, and this is so for multiple reasons, several of which are highly relevant to our conversation. Side by side with the modern disqualification of value are equally powerful ideas that affirm value as intrinsic to Cosmos, part of its very nature. There was a host of thinkers who affirmed the Tao—the intrinsic field of value—across the landscapes of modernity. Comenius, whom we invoked above, is one of them, and his school had great influence. Adam Smith, whose notion of the invisible hand of the market is rooted in Islamic mysticism, as historian David Graeber reminds us, is another.

It is often not simple for the general or even the scholarly public to discern whether a particular thinker falls into the first or the second intellectual strain of modernity. This would be true, for example, for Adam Smith, as well as a figure as central to modernity as Immanuel Kant. Indeed, almost all early modern thinkers deploy various forms of spirit and God language, to some degree. But as political philosopher Leo Strauss and others have pointed out, the deployment of a particular religious language has many purposes—many of which are often strategically political and social.

So, there were some who used the language of self-evident truths as a cover for their deism, which often bordered on atheism. But there were as many others who took it as a premise that these self-evident truths were God-given, spiritually animated expressions of natural law.

It is also true that the confusion persisted in modernity because, as noted above, it existed in the hearts of the thinkers themselves. As the scientific method and its strategy

of measurement ascended, the vast physical Cosmos began to be explained by inherently consistent “natural laws” of reality. These laws, both scientific and ethical, differ sharply from pre-modern views of nature that posited far more immediate divine involvement in human affairs.

Modernity initially saw these two ways of thinking about reality as a contradictory. The laws of science painted a very different picture of the universe than belief structures based on strict adherence to a King-like God. Penicillin, it seemed, would displace prayer. Germ theory seemed to displace devotion. And it would take several centuries before total integration between the two.

From the beginning of modernity, at the leading edges of religion and science, coded distinctions began to be made between what we referred to above as the surface structure and depth structure of the great traditions. The deeper esoteric truths of the religions were positively distinguished from the cultural narrative and supernaturalistic elements. At the same time, science itself was gradually starting to be seen as a new text of revelation. Despite intellectual attempts to make everything profane and secular, to completely remove value from its place in the universe, the modern world was in fact shaped by a deep sense of shared value, which drove everything from the early democratic revolutions to the anti-slavery and civil rights movements.

It should be noted that the heretics and atheists of the first strain of modernity, who seeded the deconstruction of value that exploded into popular post-modern culture, were in many ways profoundly religious, representing a “heresy which is faith.” In other words, they refused to allow their comprehension of reality to be dwarfed by contradictory, distorted, and degraded visions of value or the divine. Their rejection of these caricatures of reality was a holy heresy that served to clearly identify the dross of degraded religion and its increasing cultural domination, opening the gates for the authentic evolution of consciousness that birthed the great dignities of modernity.

It is also worth noting that these thinkers took the void seriously. The void figures prominently in much of the sophisticated interior sciences of the time, for example in the esoteric writings of the great interior scientist Nachman of Breslov. The void is the place where one cannot experience Spirit. It is the place that births both holy heresy and holy atheism. These movements, which fiercely rejected the superficial and degraded forms of the great traditions, are themselves vital faces of the evolutionary impulse and the movement of reality towards ever great intimacy and value.

## **21. There are a Set of Common-Sense Sacred Axioms that Undergird Modernity**

The meta-crisis, with its various existential and catastrophic possibilities, has clear roots in the underlying crisis of value. The absence of value at the heart of culture is a new phenomenon; there has never before been a civilization that held, at the center of its superstructure and dominant worldview, a basic skepticism towards value. Modernity, as we have shown, had an inchoate, almost unspoken conception of the reality of value,

expressed in what we call the “common-sense sacred axioms.” The exhaustion and fragmentation of these as the background assumption of social life is the story of post-modernity, to which we return again below.

These common-sense sacred axioms were a given in modern culture up until the late industrial age, available to everyone. By common sense we mean the sense-making common to human beings in societies during and after so-called “modernization,” upon which they based the significant decisions of their everyday lives. This is what Habermas calls the “background assumptions of the lifeworld.” Common-sense sacred axioms are modernity’s implicit articulation of a universal grammar of value—not a metaphysical grammar but a practical grammar that established the shared space of value thought to characterize and constrain all human beings. The common-sense sacred axioms are distinct from any earlier forms, even as they emerge from multiple dimensions of pre-modern tradition. To understand the ways in which they are distinct, it is necessary first to understand how they were informed by their precursors.

First, they were undoubtedly fashioned by the spiritual capital of the pre-modern religions, borrowed by modernity to form the social, spiritual, and moral contours of the new age. There was an innate assumption—an axiom, if you will—that value itself was intrinsic, even if the details of its divine source and exactly what that meant were not as clear as they were thought to have been in pre-modernity.

Second, they were influenced by the general impulse of modernity to extrapolate shared universals from particulars, and to articulate a set of universal laws for all humans. In the exterior sciences, there was a long-standing drive to discard magical and religious thinking, including dismissing the intentions of gods local to one tribe or religion. Instead, modern science sought universal principles that could be measured and shown to apply across space and time, throughout history, anywhere on the planet.

Similarly, the modern impulse was to ignore the local and mutually exclusive truth claims of the various religions, and focus instead on the underlying universals that united them. As we noted above, this modern impulse to seek underlying universals of value and spirit—usually sought in the esoteric cores of the great traditions—was similar to that of the perennial philosophers, who sought the underlying universals, or depth structures, that lay beneath the apparent local surface structures of religious traditions.

Modernity’s universalizing impulse was also the core movement, as we alluded to above, of natural law in so many of its modern juridical, philosophical, and spiritual expressions. Perennial philosophy tended to focus more on metaphysics—not dogmatic metaphysics, but principles about the true nature of the human being and the universe that could be realized through direct practice and experimentation. By contrast, natural law, concerned as it was with law rather than theory, tended to focus on practical expressions. If perennial philosophers centered around *ontological* values and principles, natural law focused on *normative* and *ethical* values and principles.

In Aldous Huxley’s summation of the perennial philosophy, fundamental premises like “Spirit is Real” are central. And they are all validated by direct experience yielding direct gnosis. Huxley presents what he calls the minimal working hypothesis, which includes six major dimensions:

That Spirit is Real. That there is a Godhead, Ground, Brahman, Clear Light, or Void, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation.

That the Ground is at once transcendent [beyond the world] and immanent [of the world]

That it is possible for human beings to love, to know, and to become actually identical with the divine ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge of the Godhead is the final end and purpose of human existence.

That there is a law or Dharma which must be obeyed—a Tao, a way that must be followed—if men are to achieve their final end.

That the more there is of self [contracted egoic identity] the less there is of the Godhead. The Tao is therefore a way of humility and love, the Dharma a living Law of self-transcending awareness.

It is noteworthy that four out of the six are about ontological principles and only the last two touch more directly on normative value, ethos, and practical behavior. There is, however, no true split between the first four and the last two of Huxley's tenets, the latter tenets of action flowing directly from the former tenets of reality. Huxley published *The Perennial Philosophy* in 1944, a year after C.S. Lewis's *Abolition of Man*, which he undoubtedly read, for he and Huxley moved in overlapping cultural, social, and intellectual circles. Both refer to the Tao and to Dharma. By those terms, which they are using in somewhat similar manner, they are referring precisely to the notion of reality as grounded in a larger field of intrinsic value.

While it is true that natural law, as we noted above, focuses more on normative value and less on the ontological principles of Cosmos, normative value is nonetheless understood as ultimately rooted in those principles. This observation is easily validated by referring to the appendix of *Abolition of Man*, where Lewis makes a list of loosely collected universal principles of natural law, rooted in the Tao, that show up pretty much universally across space and time. This list is almost exclusively concerned with normative value, but the normative is clearly assumed to be rooted in Cosmic principles:

The Law of General Beneficence in Negative Form [Do No Harm] and Positive Form [Do Good].

The Law of Special Beneficence [Unique Obligation to Family and Clan]

Duties to Parents, Elders, and Ancestors

Duties to Children and Posterity

The Law of Justice: Sexual Justice, Honesty in the sense of action

Justice in Court

The Law of Good Faith and Veracity in the sense of speech and character

The Law of Mercy [or what we might call compassion]

The Law of Magnanimity: To strain every nerve to live according to that best part of us [from Aristotle]

Lewis identifies the Tao with natural law. And he identified natural law with a set of normative statements of value intended to apply across space and time, as expressions of reality, not as social constructions. Versions of the perennial philosophy and natural law appear as expressions of the second strain throughout the modern period, climaxing in these late-modern formulations by Aldous Huxley and C.S. Lewis.

Common-sense sacred axioms are similar to but also different from these explicit universal systems of late modernity. The axioms are assumed and lived, not usually talked about, operating exclusively at the level of social practice. They do not refer to any source for their authority, although they are clearly taken in some sense to be natural. At this point it is helpful to offer a provisional, incomplete list of common-sense sacred axioms. Notice as you read them their minimalist nature, so they may be held by both schools of modernity: the school that views value as intrinsic, and the school that obfuscates the issue and tends towards the de-ontologizing of value.

## 22. It Is Reasonable to Propose at Least Eight Common-Sense Sacred Axioms

There is no formal philosophy or theology behind any of the common-sense sacred axioms. They are intentionally not formulated as metaphysical positions. Instead, as their name implies, they are the background assumptions upon which we predicate all our communications, decisions, and interactions within the lifeworld. It is unnecessary to list all the common-sense sacred axioms, but this list of eight should offer a good sense of them.

**1: CHOICE MATTERS** A first axiom might be free will and its implicit corollary that our choices matter. Every human being has the experience, at some level, that their choices matter. No matter what position we might take on the esoteric debates around free will vs. determinism, we all have some innate sense that our choices are not irrelevant. It matters if I choose to help the old lady across the street or—like Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*—murder her. This sense that our choices are significant is a core basis for how we live our lives and how we structure society. The idea that choices matter is in some profound sense a truth that forms the very fabric of our lives.

**2: THERE ARE BETTER AND WORSE CHOICES** This axiom points towards what is often called the good. The better choice is the choice that orients toward the good. The other alternative is sometimes labeled bad, or even evil, but minimally it is worse than the better choice. This axiom goes under many disguises, ranging from claims as to the nature of good and evil derived from revelation, to those formulated by reason, and those stemming from pragmatism. We intuitively feel that some choices are aligned with what is good, and others are not. This is true even when, as is often the case, we are not sure how to articulate the standard or principle or life current with which our choices need to align. Regardless of how the story of better or worse is told, it is told in every culture and time. There is an implicit moral sense, a given fabric of ethos, which animates our lives and drives virtually all of our choices.

**3: MY LIFE MATTERS AND IS MEANINGFUL** These first two axioms are naturally rooted in a third sacred truth of common sense—that life matters. One obvious expression of this is the universal, inherent drive to life, which innately assumes and indicates that our individual lives matter. Evolutionary science texts often implicitly or explicitly refer to this innate dynamic of reality, in reductionist materialist terms, as “the drive to survive.” But this drive to survive is clearly a drive for life. A closer look at the survival drive indicates that it is an exterior expression of an interior value: there is an inherent knowing that life, particularly *my* life, matters and is meaningful. And more, it is *infinitely* valuable. And it is worth doing virtually anything to maintain it.

Our choices matter because life matters, because life is meaningful.

We intuit that there is only one fundamental decision we ever have to make: Either everything is meaningful, or nothing is meaningful. In the end we find the possibility of nothing being meaningful untenable. It violates something essential in our interior. If one thing is clearly meaningful—our life—then everything is meaningful, and our decisions matter in more than a merely pragmatic sense.

Part of the experience of this axiom is the sense of being personally addressed by reality. Even after the revelation of the unimaginable vastness of the universe, our intimate sense of reality being right and good and true, and our intimate sense that one is plainly at home in Cosmos, appropriately remain. The sense of being personally addressed was hyper-accentuated in pre-modernity, in the extraordinary revelatory experiences of mystics, prophets, or kings. But in the common-sense sacred axioms of modernity, personal address appears as part of the common experience of every human being. The experience that my life matters, that there is meaning in my life, implies the personal address of reality, in whatever form and on whatever level that might hold true. The vast majority of human beings live their lives according to the axiomatic truth that life, at least in some fashion, is meaningful in some ultimate sense. This is true even when their life philosophy or religion (or lack thereof) militantly rejects this truth. We live the truth that my life matters—with its myriad, interconnected implications—every day.

**4: IT IS GOOD TO LOVE** This brings us to our fourth sacred axiom, the value and goodness of loving and being loved. In every society the experience of loving is considered noble. In some societies it is love of God, in others it is romantic love; in some it might be love of wisdom, while in others it might be parental love or love of country. Often, these are combined. But the experience of love which fills one with

depth and joy, which gives life self-evident meaning, which invites and even demands the bracketing or abnegation of self while also fulfilling and honoring the self—this experience is viewed as a central good of a life well lived.

Many have correctly pointed out that for most of history there has always been an in-group and an out-group. The in-group were in some profound sense enjoined to love each other, while the out-group were not part of the circle of love and often treated as enemies, with horrific consequences. But that does not undermine the sacred axiom that it is good to love. Quite the opposite. For within every circle of intimacy, within every community of shared identity, there is some deep and simple gnosis that it is good to love. The evolutionary challenge, the developmental challenge, is thus to evolve and expand the boundaries of inclusivity for this love. For example, at this moment in human history, the sense that it is good to love, for most people, does not genuinely apply to animals—excluding our pets, whom we turn into little people. Animals are largely objects to be ignored or manipulated or used. That is why people eat meat, which comes from animals—cows, lambs, chickens—raised under conditions of unbearable cruelty. For most people, animals are outside the circle of those beings we feel called to love.

This is, of course, directly related to the reality of the evolution of love we discussed above. For many people in the world, those outside of their sociocentric circle are out of the circle of love. Indeed, CosmoErotic Humanism suggests that the evolution of love is the evolution of *intimacy*, which means that we begin to recognize ever wider and ever deeper levels of shared identity, with ever widening circles of humanity and circles of life itself. To participate in the evolution of love is to experience ever evolving mutuality of recognition, pathos, value, and purpose—that is, ever widening circles of intimacy. This is the evolutionary movement: from egocentric intimacy to ethnocentric intimacy to world-centric intimacy to cosmo-centric intimacy.

**5: SACRIFICE IS VIRTUOUS, SELFISHNESS IS NOT** Heroes are good. Those who perform noble actions for the sake of specific others, or for the sake of the larger field of life, are greatly honored and worthy of emulation. This implies the fifth sacred axiom: My life is valuable only within a larger context of value. In virtually every society, there is some notion of the one who gives up their life for the sake of another. The other might be the nation, for example: the soldier dies defending the homeland. The other might be a group of children trapped in a building on fire. The implicit axiom, however, in both cases is that my life lives in a larger constellation of value.

Based on the evolution of our level of consciousness, we naturally begin to realize that there are sacred values worth dying for and corrupt values that do not deserve our sacrifice. And of course, there have been many instances in history where this sacred axiom was mediated through prisms that were less than good, true, or beautiful. French and German soldiers firing at each other across the Maginot Line in World War One, killing each other by the millions in just four short years, is but one potent example. The historical record is simply riddled with such unnecessary pain. As we have already affirmed, each axiom must be mediated through ever evolving structures of consciousness—for example, the movement from ethnocentric sacrifice to world-centric and cosmo-centric sacrifice.



Dying to make profit for a drug cartel is not a noble value. Dying to protect democracy against Nazism is a noble value. Of course, not everyone is willing to make every form of noble sacrifice. But most people are willing to make very significant levels of sacrifice for what they recognize as valuable. Moreover, virtually everyone recognizes as noble those who do make such sacrifices. They become the heroes of our culture.

Sacrifice, however, is not only a value in its public, heroic context. Heroism can also be powerful when invisible and private. Every day we are invited to sacrifice—to transcend selfishness—and overcome the narrow, petty concerns of superficial status and aggrandizement motivated by the narcissistic and wounded self. In every relationship, in every group or community, sacrifice is valued as noble and desirable. The word “noble” evokes in us images of honor, duty, right action, responsibility, and even obligation. While each of these terms has been hijacked and degraded in myriad ways, there is a universal sense of their fundamental truth. To live without them in the “selfish pursuit of narcissistic grandeur” is considered by common sense to be both superficial and delusional. The creation of value must be *for* the self and *transcend* the self at the same time. This is the demand: delight and devotion implicit in the heroic sacrifice, bracketing the narrow ego for the deeper and higher value.

**6. EFFORT IS REWARDED, AND LAZINESS IS NOT A VIRTUE BUT A VICE** That effort is rewarded means that transcending laziness through an exertion of discipline and will is ethically significant. Sometimes “effort is rewarded” means that effort produces results. But in other contexts this has little or nothing at all to do with the fruits of labor, but with the integrity of the effort itself. Laziness which is not a virtue does not refer to spacious relaxation or a delightful vacation. Laziness refers to the abandonment of will in favor of the indifferent waves of sloth and inertia that carry us out to sea, far from the destiny which is our home. To be lazy—whether in heart, deed, or mind—is the source of all degradation. To think clearly, to feel clearly, and to act clearly all require a transcending of natural laziness in favor of ostensibly unnatural effort. However, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the true revelation of effort is that it—and not laziness—is our deeper nature.

**7: FAIRNESS IS IMPORTANT** The sense of fairness is innate and universal, even if the details of what that means and how it plays out are not. There was a recent episode of a radio program, which told the true story of a teacher who had students call a phone—which was not actually recording any information—in order to share what bad social things happened to them in kindergarten that day. The idea was that instead of tattling to the teacher the kids would tattle to the phone. One intrepid reporter installed an actual phone to hear what the children were saying. It turned out that the common theme of the calls to the phone and their complaints was: “it’s not fair.” What this anecdote and many other studies have revealed is that humans possess an innate sense that things should be fair—and we are outraged when they are not. This innate ethical sense is not merely pragmatic. That the violation of fairness arouses our indignation and even fierce outrage indicates that fairness is of a more ultimate nature than mere habits of culture.

Related to this innate ethical sense is our feeling that unjust suffering is wrong. This is inter-included with our third common-sense sacred axiom—the universal affirmation of the self-sacrificial hero who saves individuals or larger groups from unjust suffering.

Moreover, any sense we have that good people should not suffer, any anger or even outrage we have when the innocent suffer, derives from this implicit premise that life should be fair.

**8: THERE ARE IMPORTANT FORMS OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION THAT ARE DESIRABLE AND GOOD** An eighth sacred axiom speaks to the dignity, goodness, and desirability of transformation. We universally ascribe some sense of more than merely pragmatic value to the fierce human commitment to acquiring skills and knowledge, applying them to growth and transformation. Whether or not we philosophically believe in fate or destiny, we admire self-improvement, in simple forms like learning a skill or a trade, or in more subtle terms like the refinement of character. In its depths, self-improvement gives way to self-transformation. Here we speak not of local improvement in a particular sector of our lives, but rather of a more complete and total transfiguration. This might be the transformation of identity, or even the transformation of consciousness. Whether we understand this human effort as animated by spirit or as a natural emergent of a purportedly materialist framework, we view it as virtuous and good. Indeed, the notion of virtue itself points to a larger vision of growth and transformation to which we all, on some level, subscribe—even when our notions of precisely what is virtuous do not align or even contradict each other. And we value growth and transformation as a virtue, even when we do not view their absence as a vice.

We also value transformation even above natural virtue. When we are asked who is more virtuous—the one who was born with virtue or the one who exerted effort to grow and transform vice into virtue—we almost always choose the latter. In every age, there is some form of transformation that seen as both possible and valuable. It goes under many names: Redemption, Liberation, Enlightenment, the Good Citizen, the Good Life, Surrender, Virtue, Evolutionary Adaption, Development and more. Sometimes the initiator of transformation is separate self, and at other times it is True Self, some kind of transpersonal process which somehow opens the gates of transformation. But self-transformation is always a central value in human existence.

## **23. The Common-Sense Sacred Axioms Have Not Survived the Post-modern Collapse of Value: A Reconstruction of Value is Necessary**

This shared set of common-sense sacred axioms cuts across modern culture, including both strains of modernity outlined above. In modernity there was a minimal shared universal grammar of value, the fumes left in the tank after the abundant cultural fuel left over by pre-modern religion had been burned off.

One of the most significant issues with these common-sense sacred axioms is that they were not rooted in a shared “story of value.” Issues like the nature of the universe are ignored in the axioms, which, as we have articulated them, present neither a narrative nor a philosophical system at all. Rather, they point to an inchoate, shared sense of lived reality, directly accessible through common sense as the matrix of value in which everyone lived. Late modern culture eventually developed an extreme, general critique

of simple metanarratives, including those that were distinctly modern such as natural law and perennial philosophy, both of which came under fire and were finally demolished by post-modernity.

Indeed, it can be argued that perennialism ignores the wisdom of embodiment, democracy, universal human rights, sexuality, the feminine in all its emergent forms, as well as the transformations available only through the path of psychology. Perennialism emphasizes a particular path to truth, that of meditative transfiguration through various forms of nondual union. It ignores many other paths to liberation, such as the path of prayer that leads to direct contact with what we might call the infinity of intimacy, or the personal face of the divine. Similarly, the notion of individuality, the irreducible uniqueness and therefore inherent value of the individual, and personal creativity—all cornerstones of the modern ethos—seem to have no place in perennial philosophy, at least in its classic formulations.

The naturalistic fallacy is commonly leveled at natural law theorists. There are multiple expressions of this fallacy, including: Why does the fact that something exists in nature make it good? Why should the “Is” of nature demand subservience to an “Ought” before which human beings must bow? Moreover, that which is claimed to be natural—for example, Aquinas’s assertion that natural law forbids sex without procreation or demands particular forms of marriage—is an obvious grafting onto the natural of a particular ideological interpretation and/or theological agenda. And finally, there is much seeming cruelty that happens in the natural law of the jungle that we would never allow in the world of humans. How then do we decide what is natural law and what is not?

But the two most devastating critiques of both natural law and perennial philosophy are of a more fundamental nature. These critiques are pervasive and powerful, and are what has dislodged both natural law and perennial philosophy from the crucial role we so desperately need them to play in contemporary culture, albeit in updated form. The first is the subjectivist critique, and the second is the evolutionary critique.

Take, for example, Howard Bloom, who focuses on the subjectivist critique in his excellent work, *The Lucifer Principle*. Bloom points out that different societies at different times in history have acted in the name of love. But they have all understood what love means in entirely different terms. Their actions from the perspective of ethics, as expressions of love, would seem to be in sharp variance with each other and with how we understand love in our contemporary western culture. And yet everyone is using the same word—*love*. The value of love does not therefore seem to have any intrinsic meaning. It is rather contextual and subjective, its meaning seeming to change entirely in different contexts. Therefore, love cannot possibly be an expression of some intrinsic Cosmic value, but simply a word to describe particular subjective, social, and political constructions of reality.

This is tightly correlated to the evolutionary critique. We know from the theory of evolution that reality is constantly changing. Evolution now serves as the basic frame for the sciences of cosmology (the evolution of matter), biology (the evolution of life), and culture (the evolution of consciousness). Evolution is the driving force of all of Cosmos, from quarks to collective culture.

Within this larger evolutionary framework, it seems clear that value also evolves. Evolution is not purely linear, rather emerging through something more like pulses or waves. But there is clearly a discernible evolutionary arc. Value in this view would seem to be created by evolving contexts in which both interior structures of consciousness and exterior structures develop. In this spirit, the notion that intrinsic value transcends the mutable historical context—which is how value was largely understood in pre-modernity—is fiercely critiqued and demolished, first by modernity and then, even more intensely and overtly, by post-modernity.

Each new evolutionary context is said to generate new value. The old sense of pre-ordained or eternal values is held to be hopelessly naïve at best, and more likely a tool of domination. For post-modernity, values are simply social constructions that serve a power narrative at a particular moment in time. Notions of free will, choice, autonomy, intrinsic goodness, truth, beauty, love, integrity—all of these are said to be absolutely bound to their subjective, ever-changing context.

## **24. Everyday Anecdotes Display the Deep Impact of Post-Modernity's Deconstruction of Value**

Three short education anecdotes amply illustrate the post-modern deconstruction of value. Two of them come from Exeter Academy, the same school that produced Mark Zuckerberg and many other future business and social leaders. The first anecdote: a teacher at Exeter shared the following with the authors: “When I came to Exeter, I knew that my job was to teach about the good, the true, and the beautiful. By the time I retired from Exeter, both the teachers and students assumed that there was no such thing. The good, the true, and the beautiful no longer referred to something that was real.”

The second anecdote: One of us was guest lecturing at Exeter to a large group of engaged students. There were perhaps 150 or so young men and women in the group. The following moral question was our topic: “You are on a deserted island with a person you detest and whom you feel is verbally abusive to you. She is driving you absolutely out of your mind. You know you will never be rescued. She injures herself and does not have the capacity to feed herself. You are a doctor with the capacity to heal her and you also have full capacity to feed her. Do you have an obligation to heal and feed her. No one in this world will ever know what happens because you will never be rescued.” The overwhelming majority of the students said emphatically that one could not formulate an Ought, any sort of cosmic obligation rooted in any sort of objective moral principle, which demanded that you feed the other person.

Anecdote Three: One of us is giving a guest lecture at the Bronx High School of Science in New York. We ask the students to declare that Hitler is bad and that Mother Teresa is good. The overwhelming majority balk, declaring that there is no intrinsic sense of good and bad. Everything is socially constructed and context-bound.

In light of these attacks, the common-sense sacred axioms are no longer sufficient to hold a common story of culture. The shared field of Eros that suffuses culture expresses itself in value. When value disappears, Eros evaporates and all that remains is polarization and rivalrous conflict, the success story of hyper-modernity, in all its distressing disguises.

## **25. The Culture Must Change from Implicit Common-Sense Sacred Axioms to Explicit First Principles and First Values**

The demarcation between common-sense sacred axioms and First Principles and First Values is not sharp or definitive. Common-sense sacred axioms remain crucial in our lives despite their being undermined by post-modernity. But they are insufficient to hold us and create a new shared global story by themselves.

At this historical moment, the pendulum of synthesis needs to swing back from the antithesis of value's necessary deconstruction to a reclamation of value at higher level of consciousness. The common-sense sacred axioms are the beginning of a shared human story of value, what we have also called a universal grammar of value. These are a set of universals that survived and thrived despite modernity's attempt, from David Hume and others, to undo value. While the articulation of the common-sense sacred axioms may differ greatly in many of their details and even their essentials, after all the distinctions, there remains a set of shared, unmistakable truths.

These shared truths, however, are not theoretical. They are rather the practical axioms on which most of humanity stakes its daily life. One cannot communicate or function in any way that we moderns commonly recognize as good without at least the majority of these common-sense sacred axioms. It is for these shared axioms of value that huge swaths of humanity have historically been willing to give up their lives. These axioms contain self-evident transcendent value structures, even when not named or articulated as such. They disclose value in the sense of goodness, truth, beauty, and purpose. Of course, our list of axioms, as we presented it above, is neither absolutely definitive or dogmatic.

A deeper story of First Principles and First Values, embedded in a story that places value back at the center stage of culture, did not take root in modernity. And as post-modernity continues to completely deconstruct our reliance on these common-sense sacred axioms, we need to reclaim value in a more precise and powerful fashion—as explicit First Principles and First Values embedded in a story of value.

The intuitive yet inchoate and inarticulate nature of the sacred axioms generated modern society, both in its dignity and its disaster. They were not explicit nor demanding enough to challenge the modern success story as the governing story of value. The axioms of value are both crucial and compelling because they disclose the implicit shared story of value at play in human hearts and minds since modernity's onset. We often forget that we have lived in a shared language of value, however imperfect, since the beginning of the western enlightenment. The common-sense sacred axioms of value already contain the glimmerings of a shared story that has lived among

us for centuries, but they have never been made entirely explicit. This itself is great source of inspiration and hope. And we can realize that the evolutionary movement of history toward a shared story of value is *itself* a core expression of the evolution of value.

The realization that we have been bound throughout all of modernity by the common-sense sacred axioms of value is a potent foreshadowing of our capacity to create a new, post-postmodern story of value rooted in evolving First Values and First Principles. In this context we can begin to understand that in the dialectical movement of evolutionary history, post-modernity's savaging of value was not for the sake of deconstruction in and of itself, but rather for the sake of *reconstruction*, for the sake of *evolution*, and for the sake of the *evolution of value* itself.

We can only access the new story of value by explicitly naming some First Principles and First Values. This new story goes much further than the implicit common-sense sacred axioms that guided us through modernity. It is not merely a restatement of the perennial philosophy. Nor is it a reworking of natural law. Both of these, while crucial and inspiring influences, were rightly critiqued and are memories of the past.

Rather, the new story of value is rooted in the explicit articulation of a universal set of First Values and First Principles, which live in reality all the way down and all the way up the evolutionary chain. They are eternal *and* they also transform. This is what we have called an **Evolving Perennialism**.

Evolving Perennialism is woven together as a new story of value.

This new story of value is not a memory of the past but a *memory of the future*.

## 26. Evolving First Principles and First Values are Embedded in an Evolving Story of Value

Value is eternal, but not in the sense of being preordained, everlasting, or unchanging. Rather, as Wittgenstein—as one of the greatest modern, positivist critics of superficial notions of eternal value—pointed out, eternity does not mean everlasting time but *that which is beneath time*.

There is no contradiction between value being both eternal and evolving. Or said somewhat differently: *The Eternal Tao is the Evolving Tao*. This is what we have named (somewhat paradoxically) Evolving Perennialism. And perhaps at this point is it worth reminding ourselves again, dear reader, that paradox, opposites being joined at the hip, is itself a First Principle and First Value of Cosmos.

The notion of evolving value effectively undoes the core critiques of intrinsic value that animated modernity and post-modernity. Once we realize that the notion of evolving value effectively and beautifully addresses these necessary, productive critiques, we can turn towards the reclaiming of value. As we emerge from the fog of post-modernity and

seek to transcend the historical anti-thesis of anti-value, we can enter into a greater synthesis.

Post-modernity deepened the schools of modernity that deconstructed the ontology of value, from David Hume’s “radical” empiricism through the nineteenth-century materialists and neo-Darwinists, to the logical positivists and existentialists. Myriad twentieth-century expressions of subjectivism and relativism then hyper-accentuated the rejection of any form of intrinsic value, and this was done in a way that sought to fundamentally recast the very heart and psyche of modern culture. The result: value was thoroughly deconstructed and exiled from the heart of culture. And we lost our bearings.

To regain our bearings, we must directly claim First Principles and First Values—but not in a pre-modern or even modern regressive fashion that ignores evolution and the evolution of value. Rather, we must reclaim evolving First Principles and First Values embedded in an evolving story of value, as a kind of evolving perennialism or evolving natural law.

So for the sake of shorthand, we refer to this new emergent as Evolving Perennialism, arising from the collapse of the common-sense sacred axioms of value of modernity. As a framework of evolving value, Evolving Perennialism elegantly resolves the valid and debilitating challenges to both natural law and perennial philosophy. It is possible to have a universal set of First Principles and First Values, understood as both always already existent, and ever evolving into greater, more complex and more beautiful forms. As a grammar of value, it speaks to the universal and eternal, and yet we intuitively know that value is only ever instantiated through unique and contextual evolutionary expressions.

## **27. It is Possible to Make a Partial List of First Principles and First Values of Cosmos**

We will now turn to the list of First Principles and First Values themselves. It is worth noting two points at the outset. First, this list is in progress. We are working on refining and clarifying the list. It is incomplete. It is evolving. We will publish a more complete list in forthcoming volumes dedicated to First Principles and First Values. Second, all the principles and values are inter-included, interdigitated; they mutually co-arise and cannot be easily distinguished in an ultimate sense.

A foundational world philosophy requires an architecture of basic elements, which range across epistemology, ontology, cosmology, and ethics (value theory). CosmoErotic Humanism is built around a (non-exhaustive and ever unfolding) set of First Principles and First Values, which capture the most fundamental dimensions of reality. Integrating pre-modern, modern, and post-modern forms of knowledge, these philosophical primitives can be integrated into a new story of value. This is a story of evolution on a cosmic scale, the emergence of humanity as an expression of cosmic value, and the future of humanity—the birth of a new human—as the continuation of the primordial process of value actualization that characterizes all reality.

The equations that accompany some of them are intended as formalizations of richly numinous semantic content. They can be used to aid explanations and understanding across multiple disciplines, timescales, and theoretical orientations—transdisciplinary shorthand not intended for use in any formal mathematical sense. Future writings will unpack each of these across the realms of matter, life, and mind. Here we are simply offering them for the first time as a set, with only a few caveats and explanations. The goal here is to provide a gestalt, the incipient architecture and blueprint for the larger project.

The First Principles and First Values of CosmoErotic Humanism	
<u>First Order</u>	Fundamental Characteristics of the Manifest Cosmos
Perspectives	1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person perspectives are primordial to Cosmos, constitutive of all further, more complex perspectives.
Temporality/Eternity	Past, present, and future are inextricable aspects of Cosmos, which supervene on an eternal dimension, that which is beneath and beyond time.
Hidden/Revealed	There is mystery and knowledge in all areas of Cosmos; unknowability is not epistemic failure but an ontological reality.
Whole/Parts	Reality is composed of “holons”: there is no part that is not itself a whole, and no whole that is not itself a part, and as such “holarchies” emerge.
Polarity and Paradox	Reality is composed of opposites joined at the hip—a situation of <i>coincidentia oppositorum</i> —in which paradox is constitutive of all knowledge.
Interior/Exterior	Consciousness and matter serve equiprimordially as aspects of Cosmos, always in different ratios, and are constitutive of time and space.
Value	Better and worse—i.e., normativity—is constitutive of Cosmos, manifesting as the ubiquity of appetite (desire and need).



<u>Second order</u>	Dynamic Equations
<b>Uniqueness</b>	Uniqueness = Emergent Distinction from the Field of [Universal] Reality x Radically New Value (Quality + Consciousness) x New Capacity (Attention + Eros + Function + Integration)
<b>Eros</b>	Eros = Radical Aliveness x Desiring (Growing + Seeking) x Deeper Contact x Greater Wholeness x Self Actualization/Self Transcendence (Creation/Destruction)
<b>Intimacy</b>	Intimacy = Shared Identity x [Relative] Otherness x Mutuality (Recognition + Feeling + Value + Purpose)
<b>Desire</b>	Desire = Presence/Call of Possible Future Value x Universal Field of Needs (Values) x Unique Identity (Level of Consciousness + Values)
<b>Relationship</b>	Relationship = Parts/Wholes x Allurement to Communion (Attraction + Creativity + Eros) x Assertion of Autonomy (Repulsion + Destruction + Eros)
<b>Evolution</b>	Evolution = Eternity x Temporality x Transformation (Eros + Creativity + Complexity + Destruction) x Story (Meaning + Information + Value [Need + Desire])
<b>Harmony</b>	Harmony (Fairness) = Whole/Parts x Value (Goodness + Truth + Beauty) x Eros
<b>Personhood</b>	Personhood = Irreducible Interiority x Value x Uniqueness x Perspective x Intimacy
<b>Freedom</b>	Freedom = Paradox (Causation/Telos + Design/Contingency + Choice/Choicelessness) x Eros (Transformation + Creation/Destruction) x Value x Uniqueness
<b>Story</b>	Story = Temporality x Evolution x Plotlines (Value + Eros + Telos + Crisis) x Information (Meaning)
<b>Integrity</b>	Integrity = Evolution (Eros + Story [Plotlines + Crisis]) x Non-rejection/Exclusion (Conservation [Energy + Value] + Reparation [Reconstruction + Wholeness]) x Harmony

## 28. The Constitutive Cosmic Order and The Dynamic Field of Cosmic Evolution: First-Order and Second-Order Values and Principles

The first-order First Principles and First Values are fundamental, primordial, and serve as the fabric and constitutive order, the warp and weft, of Cosmos itself. These can be thought of as the basic categories, the elements required to get anything like a universe such as ours going. These are, properly speaking, *metaphysical* categories, whereas the second-order set is *ontological*. If you will permit us, dear reader, some definitional remarks: metaphysics concerns the most basic given realities of subject and object, of being and non-being. Ontology is concerned with how Being becomes populated by pluralities of the real; after the one becomes many there is much else to say.

The First Big Bang is a metaphysical wonder. Whatever was hidden is revealed, and time begins—along with the basic structures of wholes and parts, interiors and exteriors, *telos*, and the tendency towards the intensification of polarities. The first-order First Principles and First Values identify the order of Cosmos that is quite obviously, always already everywhere. You can't get behind or prior to these, even as you can't get beyond them either.

Some of these basic principles of Cosmos can be found throughout intellectual history. Time and space, relations between whole and part, as well as the categories of the unknowable, hidden, mysterious, and paradoxical are perennial topics in most philosophical systems, religious or otherwise, East and West, North and South. Topics of intrinsic value and the perspectival nature of reality also recur throughout world philosophy.

In later works we will trace out a specific line from the Kabbalistically inspired metaphysics of John Amos Comenius and Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, through C.S. Peirce, William James, and W.N. Whitehead, to CosmoErotic Humanism, including all the various recent related projects of reconstructive post-postmodernism. There is something like an overlapping consensus here on what an adequate metaphysics looks like.

There is also the knowing of reality directly, through immediate experience and self-reflective inquiry. We discuss this below as the Anthro-Ontological Method, which is inspired by the perennially recurring insights and practices from the totality of world philosophies and wisdom traditions. The fundamental work of metaphysics is not reading other thinkers, but rather deepening into the experience of reality itself. The method requires individual and collective work to clarify our interiors and enable a direct knowing of reality—which *only then* can you test against the best of what others have found and reported.

Metaphysics is not a science. It is prior to science. Scientific practice itself depends on anthro-ontologically derived principles, such as *the value of truth itself* (which cannot be scientifically “proven”). A First Principle, a First Value. We discuss this further below,

but for now, the point is that the metaphysics proposed here in schematic form is not controversial, but a remembering of collective insights. These are the most basic building blocks for a new story of Cosmos—for understanding the place of value within it, as well as humanity’s role.

With the emergence of second-order principles and values, a dynamic ontology unfolds from within the set created by the first-order elements, a dynamic field of cosmic evolution. It is a field of value, unfolding into deeper expressions and intensifications. The equations formalize the dynamics being expressed at various levels of evolution. Despite changes in the material and biological substrate—the physiosphere and the biosphere—these principles and values continue to be expressed at higher and higher levels. Some of these are worth briefly unpacking here, while others must await full elaboration elsewhere. In forthcoming volumes we will unfold what we humbly and audaciously refer to as the Great Library of CosmoErotic Humanism, in response to the meta-crisis—an expression of the evolution of value which itself is fundamentally the evolution of love.

### *The First Value and First Principle of Uniqueness*

The First Value and First Principle of Uniqueness begins in the first moments of the First Big Bang with unique particles, and evolves through the worlds of matter, life, and the depths of the human self-reflective mind. Uniqueness continues its unceasing transformations, ultimately manifesting in the Fourth Big Bang as fully actualized human personhood, what we have called *Homo amor*.

Uniqueness is always in dialectical relationship to Sameness. In the worlds of matter, life, and self-reflective mind, reality is demarcated by the sameness that exists within and between all types and forms. In addition, the distinctions of uniqueness define the relationship between forms, and between all expressions of the same form.

The Uniqueness Equation:

*Uniqueness = Emergent Distinction from the Field of [Universal] Reality x Radically New Value (Quality + Consciousness) x New Capacity (Attention + Eros + Function + Integration)*

In the equation, several core structures of uniqueness become apparent. First, uniqueness is distinct but inseparable from separateness. Uniqueness expresses distinction embedded *within* a larger common field. So we say that uniqueness is the currency of connection, not the coin of alienation. Second, uniqueness generates new value and quality, which potentially capacitates ever deeper levels of consciousness, attention, and love.

Uniqueness itself implies obligation and responsibility, even as it enables the capacity for deeper forms of loving, as well as new potentials for being loved. Love is a unique self-perception of others, even as the capacity to love is mediated through one’s own unique field of being and becoming.

Thus arises the crucial question: Who Are You? You participate as a common member within all the larger fields of reality. This includes the field of structure and form, the field of concrete physicality and its laws, and the field of quality and consciousness, also referred to as the field of value, meaning, and normativity. Another way to phrase it, in the fledgling terminology of CosmoErotic Humanism: You are an irreducibly unique expression of the LoveIntelligence, LoveDesire, and LoveBeauty of all that is, was, and will be—which lives in you, as you, and through you.

This is not the place to fully unpack this equation, but hopefully its broad contours are clear enough. The equation outlines the theory and vision of self that is core to CosmoErotic Humanism, by addressing two great questions: Whom Am I? Who Are We? Separate Self, True Self, Unique Self and Evolutionary Unique Self progressively answers the first question in four successive steps. Unique Self Symphony addresses the second question. These core concepts are discussed at length in other writings.

We will not provide such elaborations for all the First Principles and First Values here. We will, however, unpack all the First Principles and First Values and their equations in future volumes of the Great Library.

The ideas offered here regarding uniqueness have already been formulated as Unique Self Theory, a cornerstone of CosmoErotic Humanism, and the core of a new narrative of identity based on First Principles and First Values. It states that each individual is an expression of the evolution of value— particularly the value of uniqueness—which advances both your personal development *and* the collective evolution of culture.

Unique Self is the personal realization of your fully interconnected uniqueness. Not only do you have an irreducibly unique molecular and cellular structure, and not only is your immune system undeniably and shockingly singular, but your entire biological matrix is unique. However, your unique aspects do not stop at biology.

To awaken to your Unique Self is to know that you occupy a particular place in the spacetime continuum. You are an irreducibly unique emergent value of the whole. You are an irreducibly unique incarnation of value. You don't exist without the atmosphere. Nor without the plants that produce it. Nor without the hydrological cycles that water the plants. Nor without the gravity driving the thermonuclear fusion of the star that fuels our planet—the gravity that also keeps planets and galaxies in motion. So you do not exist independently of anything or anyone. You are the same as everyone and everything in significant ways, even as you are a new and unprecedented and unique identity. You are a new unique, ontic value.

You are singularly unique and therefore irreplaceable and therefore irreducibly valuable. Your irreducibly unique expression and experience of consciousness and agency are emergent properties of all that is, uniquely configured in relationship as you. Although you are a novel property of Eros, intimacy, desire, and perspective, you are not reducible to your constituent parts, nor the laws that govern them at lower levels. You are an ontological emergent generating newness—including new value—completely irreducible to the history from which you emerge.

All of this simply means that you have an irreducibly unique perspective and irreducibly unique quality of intimacy. Your unique perspective and quality of intimacy foster your unique insight, which births your Unique Capacity, which in turn fosters your Unique Gift. Your Unique Gift allows you to address a unique need in your unique circle of intimacy and influence that can be addressed uniquely by you and you alone.

Once you realize that you are an irreducibly unique expression of the Cosmos, you realize that there is a corner of the world that lacks love and can only be transformed by you. Evolution took 13.7 billion years of synchronicity to produce this unique expression—you. You are the personal face of the evolutionary impulse. You are not irrelevant.

### *The First Principle and First Value of Eros*

The First Value and First Principle of Eros begins like all rest, in the first moments of the First Big Bang and evolves all through the multiple levels of matter, life, the human self-reflective mind, and beyond. Reality is Eros—and more than that: reality is the *evolution* of Eros, the evolution of love. These statements may seem trite, but they capture deep philosophical wisdom realized anthro-ontologically across all ages and places, from Plato to Peirce, from the Upanishads to Aurobindo.

The Eros Equation:

*Eros = Radical Aliveness x Desiring (Growing + Seeking) x Deeper Contact x Greater Wholeness x Self Actualization/Self Transcendence (Creation [Destruction])*

By love, we do not mean ordinary love (which is often a mere social construction or egoic strategy) but Evolutionary or Outrageous Love, the core value or quality of reality itself.

The human experience of obligation, which already appears in the First Principle and First Value of uniqueness, makes no sense, absent the existence of the wider set of First Principles and First Values. Obligation is not an externally imposed structure but an internal experience of connection between parts and beings, welling up from the fullness of Eros, naturally emergent from the field of value. Obligation derives from the realization of a prior wholeness that is *disclosed in love*. Obligation derives from the intuitive understanding (or gnosis) that different parts or beings are not ultimately separate. Rather, as Einstein remarked, such an experience of separateness is but an “optical delusion of consciousness.” All seemingly separate parts are included in a larger shared whole, the seamless coat of the universe, a shared identity caught up in a common fate. Hence, the experience of obligation emerges from a joyful, even ecstatic recognition of shared identity and wholeness.

In some cultures, this is reflected in language. For example, in Hebrew the word *chiba* (love) and *chobah* (obligation) can both be traced back to the two-letter root word, *chet beit*. Similarly, the English word obligation derives from the Latin *obligare*, which means

to bind or connect. Thus, obligation makes explicit the implicit connection and bond that is always present, often unseen, and disclosed through love.

The common superficial assumption—rooted in a confusion of terms—is that there is a core contradiction between the erotic and the ethical. There is a sense that one’s natural life force will overrun ethical boundaries. But this assumption refers to unclarified Eros, or pseudo-Eros and not to Eros itself. All failure of Ethos can be traced to a prior breakdown in Eros. When true Eros is not accessed then the overwhelming feeling of emptiness, ennui, and alienation moves one towards unethical acting out in myriad forms. This true both personally and collectively. That acting out is what we are calling pseudo-Eros.

Obligation wells up from the Eros of Cosmos that moves through one’s being. And from that Eros comes one’s unique nature and capacity to address unique needs and express the unique dimension of Cosmos, at a particular nexus in space and time, that can be uniquely expressed by each individual.

### *The First Value and First Principle of Intimacy*

The First Value and First Principle of Intimacy begins in the first moments of the First Big Bang, as the original quarks are allured together to form protons and neutrons. Intimacy then continues to deepen and widen through all the multiple evolving levels of matter, life, the human self-reflective mind—and beyond. We live in an Intimate Universe. The Intimate Universe lives in us. Reality is evolution—the evolution of intimacy. More specifically: reality is the progressive *deepening* of intimacies.

The Intimacy Equation:

*Intimacy = Shared Identity x [Relative] Otherness x Mutuality (Recognition + Feeling + Value + Purpose)*

Like Eros, intimacy has two distinct dimensions: Being and Becoming. Becoming is the dynamic quality of Eros. In a modern context, this quality has been identified as the “evolutionary impulse,” or the desire of reality to transform into ever wider and deeper wholeness. Intimacy thus implies shared identity with the evolutionary impulse itself.

Being is the quality of Eros that, like consciousness, underlies and suffuses all of reality. Intimacy is identity with the shared quality of being that inheres in all of reality, the seamless coat of the universe. Forgive us, dear reader, for not saying more about these first values and first principles, but we must move on.

### *The First Principle and First Value of Desire*

The First Value and First Principle of Desire begins in the first moments of the First Big Bang, with elementary particles desiring ever deeper contact and ever greater wholeness. Mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead referred to this

as the “appetition” of Cosmos. As with the other values, desire and need then continue to transform, ever deepening and widening, evolving through the multiple evolving levels of matter, life, the human self-reflective mind—and beyond.

The Desire Equation:

*Desire = Presence/Call of Possible Future Value x Universal Field of Needs (Values) x Unique Identity (Level of Consciousness + Values)*

This equation formulates desire throughout the trajectory of all three Big Bangs, from matter to life to the depth of human self-reflective mind. Reality is constituted by the evolution of desire and need, and our response to them, as they continuously deepen and transfigure in form and quality through all the levels of matter, life, and mind. On the human level, the clarification of desire and need takes place when we awaken as evolution in person—i.e., conscious evolution—with the unique capacity to clarify desire and need.

Reality equally affirms the dignity of the past tense, receiving all of the past into the present, and the dignity of the present tense, the place in which we reside in every moment, full of creative desire that generates the future; at the level of human self-reflective mind, the capacity exists to re-narrate and thus reconfigure the past. Past, present, and future—all core to the experience of reality—can themselves be considered First Principles and First Values of Cosmos.

### *The First Value and First Principle of Relationship*

The First Value and First Principle of Relationship begins in the first moments of the First Big Bang with elementary particles desiring and realizing stable relationships. Relationships continue to transform, ever-deepening and widening, evolving through the multiple evolving levels of matter, life, the human self-reflective mind—and beyond.

The Relationship Equation:

*Relationship = Parts/Wholes x Allurement to Communion (Attraction + Creativity + Eros) x Assertion of Autonomy (Repulsion + Destruction + Eros)*

Reality is constituted by the evolution of relationships. Evolution is a series of transformations toward ever-greater depth of relationship in all of its forms, within every level of consciousness and between every level of consciousness. Reality is the evolution of relationships toward ever-greater depth, at ever new levels of consciousness and complexity.

### *The First Value and First Principle of Evolution*

The First Principle and First Value of Evolution is disclosed in the first moments of the First Big Bang as cosmological evolution and transformations began to unfold, continuing to evolve throughout the multiple levels of matter, life, the human self-

reflective mind—and beyond. Reality is evolution. The trajectory of evolution is a series of transformations animated and motivated by Eros (Evolutionary Love).

The Evolution Equation:

$$\text{Evolution} = \text{Eternity} \times \text{Temporality} \times \text{Transformation} (\text{Eros} + \text{Creativity} + \text{Complexity} + \text{Destruction}) \times \text{Story} (\text{Meaning} + \text{Information} + \text{Value} [\text{Need} + \text{Desire}])$$

Reality involves growth—becoming bigger, fuller, more expansive. This might be simply the process of getting taller or stronger. Growth is inevitably followed by a process of decline, which does not necessarily reverse growth but ultimately ends life. Growth is a core exterior value.

A deeper form of growth is what we are calling transformation, which occurs when growth generates new emergent properties of depth. This might include the generation of new value in the form of new synergistic wholes, new insight, new goodness, truth, or beauty, new skills, or new qualities. Transformation always involves some new measure of interiority, and even technological transformation is based on deeper insights that allow for the emergence of newer technologies. The trajectory of evolution is a series of transformations animated and motivated by Eros, plotlines that drive all stages of reality: the narrative arc of the Cosmic Story consisting of the four Big Bangs, as well as every personal story at the human level.

All of these qualities are an expression of the core First Principle and First Value of Eros that animates and drives reality. Since evolution lives in the human being, the human being is evolution awakened to itself in human form. As such, all human transformation participates in the same Eros of transformation that animates, drives, and dances all of Cosmos.

This vector of evolutionary love, in the context of the manifest universe, is self-evidently not inevitable. As evolution emerges at the human level, and as human influence becomes ever more potent in the Anthropocene, both creatively and destructively—through weaponized exponential technologies that generate existential risk—human choice plays a potentially pivotal role in the vector of evolution. Human choice could cause evolution at the cultural level to devolve or even fail outright. This has always been the case in the story of an individual human life in which the human being can choose, either consciously or unconsciously, to self-terminate. This has now expanded, and the conscious or unconscious decision to self-terminate is now a genuine option in the collective life of humanity.

### *The First Principle and First Value of Harmony*

Reality desires, actively seeks, and manifests harmony and coherence. The First Principle and First Value of Harmony (and Coherence) begins in the first moments of the First Big Bang with the initial harmonic resonances, evolving all through the multiple evolving levels of matter, life, the human self-reflective mind—and beyond.



Reality is harmony, which like the other values, evolves through a series of transformations that move toward ever deeper coherence.

The Harmony (Coherence) Equation:

$$\text{Harmony (Coherence or Fairness)} = \text{Whole/Parts} \times \text{Value (Goodness + Truth + Beauty)} \times \text{Eros}$$

At the human level, there are multiple expressions of the First Principle and First Value of Harmony. One such manifestation of harmony and coherence appears as fairness or justice. A second manifestation of harmony and coherence is the great wisdom triad of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty.

### *The First Value and First Principle of Freedom*

The First Principle and First Value of Freedom begins in the first moments of the First Big Bang and evolves throughout the multiple evolving levels of matter, life, the human self-reflective mind—and beyond. All randomness takes place in the context of non-randomness. There is inherent design and symmetry in reality, from the first nanoseconds of the Big Bang, expressed in the complexity of mathematical and physical laws, as well as in the complex process of cellular life which exhibits a type of inherent (though not “intelligent”) design—what has been called “natural genetic engineering.”

It is important to note that randomness and freedom are not isomorphic. Randomness implies a freedom from design, while freedom implies an interiority that has the capacity to navigate freely. In other words, freedom implies both freedom *from* and freedom *for*. There is an inherent principle of freedom in Cosmos that generates new possibilities—combining contingency and emergence—and leading to the creative advance into novelty. Emergence is defined by the integration of all the design and all the freedom of the present. And crucially, emergence is not dictated solely by the demands of the past, but also by the freedom of the present, and the call of the future.

The Freedom (Design) Equation:

$$\text{Freedom} = \text{Paradox (Causation/Telos + Design/Contingency + Choice/Choicelessness)} \times \text{Eros (Transformation + Creation/Destruction)} \times \text{Value} \times \text{Uniqueness}$$

Emergence is the result of the inherent *telos* of all First Principles and First Values co-evolving, which overcomes the apparent contradiction of contingency and design. First Principles and First Values are iterated endlessly, generating greater and vaster expanses of complexity and consciousness, with all apparent inherent symmetry and ostensible design. At the same time, this emergent reality is radically contingent, and generates continuous emergence—*surprise*—as an expression of the radical freedom at the heart of reality.

Human-level freedom expresses itself as a capacity to increasingly interrupt the chain of antecedent causes and become an immanent first cause in reality—in other words, to be subject not merely object. Human choice is a core value of human life. Freedom implies the gravitas and dignity of choice which participates as a key component, with multiple

other factors, in setting the direction of a human life. From the perspective of interiors, the capacity for choice is primary in setting the interior direction of the overall trajectory of a particular life.

## 29. First Principles and First Values Go Beyond Categories of Natural and Supernatural

We are intentionally avoiding the issue of whether these First Principles and First Values are supernatural or natural. Both words are highly confusing, and the typical binary distinction between their superficial definitions is wildly insufficient to our task. First Principles and First Values are clearly not supernatural in the sense that they are imposed from without and do not participate in the inherent and intrinsic nature of Cosmos. But neither are First Principles and First Values natural, meaning they are not purely materialistic principles, mere expressions of randomness and chance with no intrinsic interior value. We need to move to a third that transcends the tired binary split between the natural and the supernatural. We will return to this notion of a “third” below.

As we noted, value is not eternal in the sense of everlasting, unchanging, or static. Value is rather eternal in the sense that it is sourced beneath and beyond space and time, following Wittgenstein’s notion of eternity. In this sense, value participates in being. But as the interior scientists of Kashmir Shaivism and the Hebrew wisdom lineage reminded us, as evolutionary science has documented, and as our predecessors such as Peirce and Whitehead clearly articulated: reality is not only being, reality is also becoming. Reality is that third beyond both being and becoming. Value therefore not only participates in being, but also in becoming. Value evolves. And this brings us back to the four Big Bangs that form the narrative arc of value’s evolution.

Each of these living First Principles and First Values evolves through successive levels of matter (cosmological evolution in the physiosphere), then through successive levels of life (biological evolution in the biosphere), and then through successive levels of human self-reflective mind (cultural evolution of consciousness in the noosphere). As noted above, we refer to these three great stages of evolution respectively as the three Big Bangs. Matter transforms into and triumphs as life, and life transforms into and triumphs as self-reflective mind. This is the narrative arc of evolution. Remember, dear reader, that both story and evolution are First Principles and Values of Cosmos.

Reality evolves from quarks to culture, from mud to Mozart. All the First Principles and First Values of Reality evolve through recognizable evolutionary stages—within matter, from matter to life, within life, from life to self-reflective mind, and within self-reflective mind. Alfred North Whitehead was not wrong when he understood evolution at its core as the *desire* of reality, what he called reality’s “appetite” for ever deeper and wider expressions of value. This is the narrative arc of the first three Big Bangs.

The First Big Bang generated matter, self-evidently suffused with all of the inherent Eros and *telos* of reality. This is what we refer to as the Telerotic Universe. Matter is not

static but inherently allured to form ever-deeper and wider evolving wholes, ever deeper and wider configurations of intimate coherence. The successive levels of matter led to the triumphant emergence of life, the Second Big Bang. And then the successive levels of life led to the triumphant emergence of unprecedented depth, intelligence, and function in the human self-reflective mind, the Third Big Bang.

But it does not end there. History clearly does not end with the emergence of self-reflective mind. As noted above, we are now in the midst of is what we call the Fourth Big Bang. The narrative arc of *Cosmos* seeks the emergence of the next triumph, the triumph of *Homo sapiens*, via the human self-reflective mind, into the next level of human possibility, *Homo amor*. In the Fourth Big Bang, all cosmic values become aware of themselves at the next level—in us, as us, and through us—as human beings awakening to Conscious Evolution. Love awakens to itself in us and as us. This is the moment, long envisioned in so many diverse wisdom traditions across time and space (pre-modern, modern, and post-modern), of the emergence of a New Human and New Humanity.

There are names for this triumph of self-reflective mind into a new level of existence, what we are calling the Fourth Big Bang, in every tradition. In the ancient world both the Fourth Big Bang and the lurking dystopia of existential risk were intuited and named. Existential Risk was called apocalypse or Armageddon. The Fourth Big Bang, the new human and the new humanity, was called Messiah, Messianism, or the messianic age.

Enlightenment, both personal and collective, is another cross-cultural expression used across space and time, for this new era of fulfilled humanity. The age of Metatron is the term used in the Hebrew wisdom tradition for a similar idea. The modern idea of progress is yet another. There are many other terms to express this notion of a new emergent in world history beyond the classic self-reflective ego-mind of *Homo sapiens*.

The proliferation of terms and concepts simply points to a cross-cultural intuition of the next stage of human history and evolution. This intuition in its earlier form of classical messianism or apocalypse was mediated through pre-modern ethnocentric prisms and values. The notion of a new human and new humanity in pre-modernity was hijacked by individual traditions to indicate the particular triumph of *their* God and *their* system. First there would be apocalypse in which the non-believers were shown the error of their ways, in a continuum of more-or-less hellish descriptions, followed by a bright new age for the chosen.

But when fully liberated from its ethnocentric context, we can recognize in the original messianic intuition of pre-modernity a reaching for the realization of the Fourth Big Bang, the emergence of the new human and the new humanity, the self-transformation of *Homo sapiens*. There has long been an intuitive knowing that *Homo sapiens* is not the end of the story. Just as matter is transcended and included, and triumphs in life, and just as life is transcended and included, and triumphs in the depth of the self-reflective human mind, so too is the self-reflective human mind transcended and included, and triumphs in the depth of the new human and the new humanity.

In calling this moment the Fourth Big Bang, we express as the transition from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo amor*, locating the emergence of the new human as an expression of what evolutionary mystic Abraham Kook calls the “ultimately optimistic” narrative arc of the evolving Cosmos. Humans become self-aware as unique configurations of Eros. We generate a pragmatic politics of love. We become the redeemers of the Cosmos, actualizing its plotlines through our actions and history.

### **30. Continuity and Discontinuity Characterizes First Principles and First Values at Every Level of Emergence, from Matter to Life to Mind and Beyond**

First Principles and First Values are self-evidently different in quality and nature from modernity’s common-sense sacred axioms. They are features of Cosmos itself which evolve as Cosmos evolves. They begin at the beginning, or very close to the beginning, of time itself. That said, there is no naïve assumption of isomorphic continuity from matter to life to mind, nor even within all the unfolding levels of matter, the unfolding levels of life, and the unfolding stages of human self-reflective mind.

Each First Principle and First Value expresses a core movement and quality of Cosmos that evolves through every stage of its development. Uniqueness, harmony, and all the other First Principles and First Values evolve. That means the same principle and value will show up differently and distinctly at every stage of its unfolding—all the way through matter, life, mind, and beyond. In other words, there is both continuity and discontinuity in the way that First Principles and First Values show up across their vectors of evolutionary development.

Continuity means that love shows up at every level of human consciousness—it has always been around. But love will show up uniquely, and distinctly, at every level of human consciousness—and discontinuities are so stark that it can at times seem like something totally new has come into being. Both views are correct. Love has always been around. And human love is truly something uniquely new, emerging late in the evolution of the Universe.

Love is experienced by humans as allurement, care, concern, empathy, and an activated disposition or willingness to give to one another. This sense of love, however, applies not only at all human levels of consciousness. It can be usefully applied to describe love at the animal and even plant level of consciousness. Animals within a troupe, or plants within a local ecosystem that share entangled roots, for example, have some sense of allurement, care, concern, a feeling of empathy and some level of enacted inclination or commitment to support each other. Moreover, this sense of love can be extended back even further to the world of matter, all the way back to subatomic particles. Indeed, subatomic particles feel each other and recognize each other. Subatomic particles can come together to share identity in the large whole of an atom and in doing so evince shared purpose and pathos. Subatomic particles coalesce into larger wholes, atoms, in particular constellations of attraction, clearly demonstrating their allurement for each other, their love for each other.

Now while we don't fully know the interior experience of atoms, it does seem safe to say that they are not writing each other love sonnets. Their quality of love differs from that of Shakespeare, for example. There is therefore an obvious discontinuity between atomic love and human love of the Shakespearean kind. But as we have just shown, there is also continuity. It is fair to call both love, as they both share certain core qualities of Eros. Thus, we can accurately say that love is a First Principle and First Value of Cosmos which shows continuity in matter, life, and mind, even as there is self-evident discontinuity in the way love shows up at each level. This is a clear example of what we mean by *evolving* First Principles and First Values.

### **31. The Problem of Evil and Pain Must be Faced, Ultimately Demonstrating the Reality of Value, Paradox, Polarity, and Mystery**

One cannot credibly write about the intrinsic value of the universe or the plotlines of Cosmos as the progressive deepening of intimacies without authentically engaging the larger issue of suffering and evil. Obviously, we cannot do full justice here to this age-old problem. But please, dear reader, take this as the very beginning of one of the central conversations within CosmoErotic Humanism. *The world is full of outrageous pain, and the only response is outrageous love.* The problem, simply stated, is how a good universe, a universe which desires value, whose *telos* is the progressive deepening of intimacies, whose “insides are lined with love,” can allow for such great evil and suffering.

One interior scientist in the Hebrew lineage, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, once said, “The spiritual person must explain suffering, while the materialist must explain everything else.” Where the so-called “problem of evil” must be faced by those who claim the universe is intrinsically valuable, the problem of intrinsic value must be addressed by those who would paint the universe as meaningless. Indeed, as we discuss below, the very idea of evil and suffering presuppose a field of value from which they are contrasted.

In any case, how to speak of intimacy and Eros, or God, in the context of evil and suffering? This question has tormented Gafni and Stein for years, as it has many thinkers before them. We all know that any attempt to claim certainty—to offer an answer to the great question of suffering—is obscene. To deploy theology or metaphysics in the presence of starving children is an abomination.

It is not that all the perspectives of classical theodicy are wrong. They have insights about how we can retain our sense of the goodness of the universe in the face of enormous, outrageous pain. But they are only partially true. None of them add up to a figure that can balance the equation of suffering.

Yes, it is true that human free will affects the equation. This is the free will theodicy, which suggests we are wholly accountable for suffering, not the Universe, which is so full of love that it allows for freedom.

Yes, it is true that the realization of the continuity of consciousness after death affects the equation. This is the life after death theodicy, which claims our suffering is redeemed in the afterlife, or subsequent lifetimes.

Yes, it is true that we are ignorant of the virtually infinite hidden karmic calculations from this life and previous realities that might impact the equation of suffering. This is the human ignorance theodicy, which claims that we simply do not and cannot know what is going on, or that what appears to us as evil may ultimately not be.

Yes, it is true that we are sometimes transformed and even ennobled by our suffering, which affects the equation. This is the soul-making theodicy, the claim that suffering ennobles our souls.

Even though each one of these holds an important truth, none of these classic approaches to suffering—nor taking them all together—even begins to balance the equation of suffering in this world.

There is no “answer” to the question of suffering, other than—paradoxically—the question itself. The question is the answer. If we did not live within a field of value, a Cosmos constituted by First Principles and Values, we would have no reason to expect anything other than what we now call evil and suffering. We just would not call it evil and suffering; there would be nothing to contrast it with. We would not even notice it as unusual. It would be normal for everyone all the time.

If the Universe were not a love story, we would have no reason whatsoever to be surprised or shocked by suffering, no reason to be outraged beyond imagination by suffering. Indeed, the terms *good and evil* lose all of their depth and resonance in a world considered to be a vast cosmic accident without intention, purpose, or intrinsic value. Our challenge to evil, our general internal belief that it is innately wrong, our commitment to healing suffering and transforming cruelty—all this only makes sense in the larger context of Cosmic Value.

Simply put, cruelty and suffering are a failure of Intimacy, a collapse of Eros. Evil is a failure of Eros, a failure of intimacy. If we did not live in an Intimate Universe, then the only thing wrong with mass murder would be that we did not like it. If the world were not a love story, then “un-love”—alienation, indifference, loneliness, meaninglessness, separation, fear—in all its horror would not be horrifying. Horror would be simply ordinary. One can only speak of outrageous pain in the context of Outrageous Beauty and Outrageous Love.

The world is full of outrageous pain, and the only response is Outrageous Love.

## 32. First Principles and First Values Are the Plotlines of Reality, Beyond Contingency and Design, Revealing a Conversational Cosmos

First Principles and First Values are the plotlines of Cosmos; they represent the inherent *telos* of reality. But in this sense, *telos* does not exclude a strong evolutionary dimension of contingency. We can engage the mystery of contingency within the context of the larger arc of inherent *telos*. This is the dialectical mystery of *telos* and freedom. Profound contingency coupled with elegant order and inherent design are the paradoxical, radical empirical truths of Cosmos. And along with William James, we must be radical empiricists, employing all our faculties of perception, imagination, embodiment, mind, and spirit, to access the inner depths of reality.

To be forced to choose between contingency and elegant order is to violate radical empiricism. We are talking not of contradiction but a larger paradox which can only be resolved with great depth of insight. And, of course, the most subtle of the old traditions intuited this paradox as well. In the transparent if enigmatic language of one third-century esoteric Hebrew wisdom text, “All is known, and Permission is Given.”

This gnosis of First Principles and First Values, however, is disclosed to us not through natural law, as it would then be subject to the naturalistic fallacy. Nor is it disclosed through what is classically termed the supernatural intervention of revelation. We do not turn first to nature. Nor do we turn to the authority of a local ethnocentric God, owned by one nation.

Rather, we turn inward.

And here we begin to explain the Anthro-Ontological Method, the core of which is the realization that not only do we live in reality, but reality lives in us. We not only live in an Intimate Universe, the entire Intimate Universe lives in us. The far-reaching implication is that our own clarified interiors—as humans (*anthropos*)—disclose a deeper truth (*ontology*) about the nature and structure of reality itself. That means that the Eros, or love, that throbs at the core of our being is not isolated or local. Rather, the qualities of clarified Eros that live inside us participate in the highest, most expansive quality of love in the Cosmos.

You can access this reality anthro-ontologically—that is, directly in your own experience. Consider a truly great conversation between close friends, which is almost a sacred event. The nature of such conversations is never pre-planned. There is no formal itinerary, no designated or designed program. Such events are filled with radical surprise and delight. They are defined by contingency. At the same time, they are not in any sense random or arbitrary. Indeed, they are filled with elegant order and inherent design. Memories, allusions, innuendoes, jokes, strands of conversation, mutual insights, and other themes weave together in a larger whole that would have taken months of painstaking planning had they been pre-ordained or written out as a script. And it is even doubtful that such pre-design could ever yield that level of elegance, nuance, and depth. Such conversations are ultimately meaningful and often disclose a

depth and originality that is always surprising and often shockingly beautiful. In Eros, the apparent contradiction between elegant design and contingent surprise completely disappears.

That is the nature of a genuine sacred conversation. Conversation itself could be said to be the depth structure of Cosmos. Indeed, such basic exchanges of inherent design, proto-interiority, and freedom define Cosmos from its inception. It is in this sense that we join Howard Bloom in referring to reality as “the conversational Cosmos.” Indeed, the Hebrew interior sciences have pointed out that very word *Messiah* quite literally means *conversation*. Human conversations participate in a conversational Cosmos, and there is potential within us for a form of humanity that radically evolves the content and quality of the cosmic conversation itself. This is *Homo amor*—when humanity fundamentally evolves the Cosmic conversation.

All the way down and all the way up the evolutionary chain, within the conversational Cosmos, randomness and contingency are paradoxically seamlessly interwoven with elegant order and *telos*. Your body and mind at all levels is in a constant exchange of information with the Cosmos—you are in constant conversation with reality. This is the basis of Anthro-Ontology.

In truly sacred conversations, which are free and open, we are filled with surprise, spontaneity, and freedom, and there is also inherent *telos* and direction. Such is the nature of the conversational Cosmos in general. It is guided by First Values and First Principles, not imposed by an external God alienated from reality, but emergent from within inherent plotlines of the living Cosmos, far beyond the stale naturalistic/supernaturalistic split.

In effect, First Values and First Principles are the animating Eros and *telos* of Cosmos. The plotlines of the Telerotic Cosmos include the movement toward ever wider and deeper creativity, transformation, intimacy, love, relationship, and uniqueness. Each one of these is part of the virtually self-evident *telos* of Cosmos, which has self-actualized from matter to life to self-reflecting mind (through all the distinct levels of each), continuing always to evolve.

It is only by continuing to evolve value in this way that, at this critical moment in history, we can prevent the dark shadows of exponential technologies and myriad other existential risks—themselves rooted in the collapse of value due to a failure of intimacy—from either destroying us or creating a new TechnoFeudal caste system far worse than anything we might have previously imagined.

### **33. First Principles and First Values are Based in Anthro-Ontology, Not the Universal Epistemologies of Natural Law**

First Principles and First Values categorically include what is irreducibly unique, individual, and creative—as opposed to natural law and perennial philosophy, which often largely ignore particulars in favor of the universal. Two of the core First Principles



and First Values—part of the very plotlines of Cosmos—are uniqueness and personhood.

First Principles and First Values are not—as natural law often seemed to mistakenly suggest—derived from nature directly through “the light of reason.” Basing normative claims on the contemplation of objective nature—as the critics of natural law correctly pointed out—makes these claims subject to the naturalistic fallacy, the confusion of what *is* the case with what *ought* to be the case. Rather, as we describe them, First Principles and First Values are derived anthro-ontologically. We do not enter the depth of nature as an objective reality outside of us. Rather we enter the depth of our inner nature. Meaning, First Principles and First Values are derived from the contemplation of our own clarified interiors. The mysteries are first and foremost located within us. First Values and First Principles live in interior space, cross-culturally and cross-temporally—across space and time.

First Principles and First Values thus do not appear as a frozen snapshot of eternity or an objectified image of nature, but participate fundamentally in both being and becoming, eternity and evolution. First Principles and Values are eternal in the sense that they are beneath time and space—a fragrance from the timeless time and the placeless place. And they also evolve within space and time. For the simplest example, let us return once again to the example of love: There is no society that does not express the value of love, compassion, and care. And love evolves.

Many societies in the past, and many even to this day, have placed some arbitrary boundary on love, insisting that it applies only to these people and not to those other people. The evolution of love, however, is validated by enormous amounts of now integrated cross-cultural research. There is a broad base of empirical research in developmental psychology that points out how love evolves—from what we might call egocentric to ethnocentric to world-centric to cosmo-centric love.

Many people still have a direct moral experience of, for example, ethnocentric racism, which claims that only Whites, or only Blacks, or only Muslims, or only Germans are worthy of love—limiting love to a particular race. Those with access to a world-centric consciousness have a direct moral experience that ethnocentric limitations on love are significantly less reflective of the First Principle and First Value of Love.

Moreover, as we noted above, love evolves not only into ever wider circles of inclusion, but into ever more profound qualities of passion, potency and purpose, ever deeper levels of openness, intensity, subtly and nuance. That is what we mean when we say that the value of love itself evolves to include ever wider and deeper expression.

According to our method, as we explain more below, once we have accessed the First Value and First Principle of Eros in our anthro-ontologically clarified interiors, we then turn to outwards to nature, to the biosphere and the physiosphere, to see where and how Eros appears. And it turns out that Eros—or love—is present everywhere. From the allurements that moves subatomic particles to bond as atoms, to the strings of amino acids held together through complex patterns of intimacy, to gravitational fields, to the Eros that suffuses the world of plants, insects and birds, to the mechanisms of sexual selection that Darwin properly understood as a form of love, all the way through the

animal world... this sentence could go on for many pages. Reality, both in the world of matter and life, is simply suffused with Eros. Recall those lines from Dylan Thomas: *The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, drives my green age.* The same erotic force that lives in intimate communion all the way down beneath the quarks, and all the way up the evolutionary chain, to the collective cultural, political, and economic creativity of humanity.

Of course, the formal method we have recounted here—first turning inside and then turning to the exterior world—is not neat and formulaic, nor is our actual experience or the nature of reality itself, as Jeffrey Kripal and others have pointed out in their discussions of the power of doubleness and poverty of binary splits. While scientifically necessary—we would not navigate reality well without Aristotle's law of the excluded middle—formal logic and non-fuzzy categories can never exhaustively depict reality. Interior and exterior are not absolutely split; they are far more mutually enacted than we might think.

We, however, express this notion not quite as doubleness but rather with a new term, TRIALECTICS. This is what Hegel was referring to when he talked about thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. This is the basis of C.S. Peirce's metaphysics of thirdness. There is a third that lives beyond the old binary pairs. Binary logic is well deployed and highly useful in science and cannot be effaced or overridden. At the same time, William James's radical empiricism shows us that binary pairings fail to adequately explain both the facts and the empirical experience of reality. For example, as we demonstrated above, a series of conversations over many years, animated by the implicit *telos* of First Values and First Principles, are not in any sense merely arbitrary and contingent—but neither are they formally planned and designed by an exterior agent. Rather, there is a reality structure that could be called “trialectical,” or we sometimes like to say, “Reality Comes in Threes.” There is a third that lives beyond the binary, not effaced but transcending and including the binary. Reality is trialectical.

In this formal sense, the split between inside and outside, between our own interiors and nature, is itself inaccurate. We already formulated one of the core principles of Anthro-Ontology with the sentence: “Not only do we live in an Intimate Universe; the Intimate Universe lives in us.” As we saw in our earlier discussion, this is quite literally true. The human experience of thought, for example, is in part constituted through the entire history of evolution, from quarks to subatomic particles to atoms to molecules to cells, to the complex organismic systems of nature that quite literally constitute us. Universal Cosmic dynamics live within, through, and as us. Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine points toward one dimension of this truth when he writes, “Nature is part of us as we are part of it. We can recognize ourselves in the description we give to it.” We look inside even as we, through our eyes, are also surveying the wider landscape of our ostensibly exterior worlds.

### **34. Anthro-Ontology and Evolving First Principles and First Values Takes Us Beyond the Naturalistic Fallacy**

This permeability between interiors and exteriors (and our roving eye that moves fluidly between inner and outer space) characterizes Anthro-Ontology. This is very different

than, for example, committing the naturalistic fallacy by drawing a conclusion about so-called natural human behavior from the behavior of other mammals. For instance, the doctrine of natural law might argue for the legitimacy of ethnocentric warfare, based on the fact that chimpanzees and wolves engage in intergroup killing, a well-documented natural fact of what is called “intergroup coalitionary killing.” This is in effect a form of war, conducted for the sake of power and domination, that takes place among certain species. However, the fact that it exists in nature—and that aggression is natural—does not make it either inevitable or good in the human world.

Recall that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the core levels of reality: matter, life, and mind. Love shows up differently at each level. The aggression that shows up in the animal world—in fact, a clear expression of self-protection, autonomy, and communion, core First Values and First Principles of Cosmos—does not, need not, and should not express in identical fashion in the human world. The evolution of First Values and First Principles highlights both the continuity and discontinuity of value throughout the great evolutionary story.

For example, we rightly notice the First Principles and First Values of Eros, love, and allurements animate reality from its inception, as quarks form protons and neutrons, all the way through the extensive examples cited by Darwin, later by Kropotkin in his work on Mutual Aid, and in the long lineage that followed them—a realization that has only recently penetrated the academy in the works of mainstream evolutionary theorists like David Sloan Wilson.

Of course, there are First Principles and First Values that live within us which we might first notice in nature and then only later locate in our own interiors—these are thereby not subject to the naturalistic fallacy. For example, the First Principle and First Value of evolution—specifically, the understanding of evolution as a series of transformations, and its application across all platforms of matter, life, and mind—is derived from a radical empiricism, a direct scientific contemplation of the natural world of the kind that Darwin so elegantly modeled.

As we notice the evolutionary impulse that throbs in reality, we increasingly realize the same impulse toward transformation throbs in us. We locate our own evolution—in broad terms—within the larger story of evolution. We begin to realize that we are personally implicated in evolution. We are chapter and verse in the narrative arc of the Evolutionary Love Story, animated by the impulse whose interior is Evolutionary Eros. This knowing lives anthro-ontologically inside of us, which is why we are able to perceive it, as so many modern thinkers already have.

## **35. The Anthro-Ontological Method Can Be Specified and Evolved**

Cosmo-Erotic Humanism includes advances in theories of knowledge and philosophical methodology, articulating a new way of knowing and justifying claims to truth, goodness, and beauty. But how do we come to know for ourselves these First Values and First Principles? Let’s look deeper into Anthro-Ontology.

The basic premise of this method can be found in certain modern philosophers and sociologists, such as Jurgen Habermas, as well as many of the great religious traditions. The premise is that human body, mind, and language are ultimately the only means by which truths can be known. All truth claims are redeemed—either proven or not—in linguistic exchanges between embodied humans. This is what the philosophy of science tells us: that scientific practices take place in communities of inquiry that depend on interpretation, trust, embodiment, perception, and guessing at the riddles of nature (sometimes called abduction or hypothesis generation). What this means is that scientists are making truth claims that are different in degree but not fundamentally different in kind from the claims made in ordinary speech and human interaction. The implication is that you do not need to be a professional scientist, nor an expert of any kind, to be able to say that all kinds of things are true. Science is one beautiful path to truth, but far from the only one.

Antho-Ontology transcends but includes the claims of science, returning each human to their rightful place as a knower of truth, beauty, and goodness. This is the opposite of common post-modern views suggesting that truth is merely relative, that we each have our “own” truths, or that there is no such thing as truth. What is proposed here is that there are ways to reliably know collective and convergent truths—knowable universal truths, but which are themselves always evolving. So it is that Cosmo-Erotic Humanism includes theories of Eros, Ethics, Self, Power, and Community, as well as key distinctions around politics, education, and religious/spiritual practices and rituals. The claims made account for the major scientific disciplines and the truths expressed in the great wisdom traditions—ultimately grounded in clarified individual direct knowing, or *gnosis*.

So again, reality lives inside of us even as we live inside of reality. This is true not only physically—all of evolution is recapitulated in our physical bodies, from atoms to cells and all the way up the evolutionary chain. All of the value of reality lives in us in some significant way. Part of the CosmoErotic Humanist understanding of the Intimate Universe is that the human being is intimate with the reality pattern of Cosmos, a core premise of the many classical interior mystical sciences—the intimate relationship between micro-cosmos and macro-cosmos expressed in the Hermetic principle, *as above so below*.

The entire enterprise of modern exterior science makes no sense without the implicit substrate of our two epigrammatic sentences: *We live in an Intimate Universe. The Intimate Universe lives in us*. Human scientists are able to deploy mathematical models in physics as a means to hold the whole of Cosmos in their mind’s eye. That only makes sense if we understand that the human mind intimately participates in, and evolves from, the very Cosmos being mapped. Something of the elegant order of Cosmos clearly resides within the elegant order of the human mind, body, heart.

In the interior sciences, this idea has traditionally been explicit. But it is also increasingly becoming implicit in mathematics and physics. The activity of mathematics, for example, is not akin to taking a photograph of the universe and then having it developed according to some preexisting instructions. Rather, we are able to access the mysteries of Cosmos because we participate intimately in those same

mysteries. Without that premise, it would simply be absurd to discuss how abstract mathematics has the capacity to reflect back to us intimately accurate models of primordial history from the first nanoseconds of the big bang. The history of matter is made available through mathematics. Mathematical formulations live in us as they live in the universe.

Einstein spoke to this mystery when he wrote: “The very fact that the totality of our sense experiences is such that by means of thinking [...] it can be put in order, this fact is one which leaves us in awe, but which we shall never understand. One may say ‘the eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility’.” He goes on to invoke a word which did not fall easily from his lips: “The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle.”

The key point for our purposes is that science itself is an expression of the intimate universe in which we live, and which lives in us. The scientist derives information (data)—a form of knowledge, or gnosis—directly based on that intimacy. There is a fundamental coherence between the human being and Cosmos, and science is only possible because human nature is coherent with cosmic nature. If the human scientist were not also a cosmic human, there would simply be no science.

We stake our life on our clarified values because we sense our true nature as cosmic humans whose interior participates in the value structures of Cosmos. That is the core of Anthro-Ontology. Infinite human subjectivity—the Cosmos in person, in human form—articulates mathematics, which generates the First Principles of science. This first principle grasps the whole of Cosmos because the whole of the cosmic is already resonant with, attuned towards, and in some sense actually interior to, the *person* of the scientist. That is also precisely the nature of value in interior science. In that sense both exterior and interior sciences rely on the fact (whether we know it or not) that we live in a coherent and intimate universe that also lives in us, and therefore in which we directly participate.

True interior science is not a collection of dogmatic declarations or socially constructed assertions. Instead, it is derived from two primary sources. First, the common-sense, innate knowing that lives universally in most humans across space and time. We already referred to modernity’s implicit version of these as common-sense sacred axioms. But of course, common sense can also be deployed explicitly to discern value. Second, they emerge from deep processes of experimentation and clarification, based on some form of spiritual practice that transfigures the human person. The human being accesses a clarity, liberated from petty contraction, that allows for the transparent apprehension of reality. These processes of experimentation involve contemplation, transfiguration, and clarification, through various methods of intense practice, have been repeated around the world and in all times.

We have called the interior clarification that is the core process of Anthro-Ontology, *berur*, borrowing a term from the sixteenth-century Lurianic interior sciences. It is the clarification of our deepest heart’s desire. This process of clarification, *berur*, takes place in three distinct ways, the three anthro-ontological methods.

The first method is common-sense awareness of what you know to be true. This is the first level of clarification. It requires pausing, focusing attention, even if for a moment,

going inside, and articulating to yourself and/or others the most basic things you know to be true and live by. We have called the result of such immediate reflection “common sense.”

The second method we referred to above as contemplation, something of an intermediary clarification process between methods one and three. In contemplation, we enter deeply into either a purely interior state of meditation and engage in the direct consideration of reality, or we contemplate the nature of self and cosmos through the study of sacred texts, or through any of the exterior sciences. Contemplative meditation is more reflective than transfigurative in nature.

The third method—which enacts the most profound level of clarification—is transfiguration. Transfiguration may include any intense interior psychoactive process—meditation, breathwork, ecstatic dance, making love, fasting, and the like. In this method, if done with care and wisdom, we can access a very deep level of clarified gnosis.

All three of these forms disclose information about the First Principles and First Values of Cosmos. Often the same information becomes available, at different levels of depth and clarity, via all three methods. For example, the realization of the first principle and value of uniqueness might be implicitly or explicitly recognized in a moment of common sense, incepted in a short pause of self-reflection around one’s own self-evidently unique nature and the unique nature every dimension of reality. Contemplation and study would deepen that realization considerably, as one reflected and studied the depth and quality of uniqueness. Transfiguration would involve a profound process of awakening—what is often called realization—in which the person realizes their Unique Self, their ultimate and singular identity with the field of consciousness and desire.

Seven steps can be roughly outlined. First, we turn inward, locating ourselves in interior space. This requires stopping and consciously turning our attention inside. Second, we then *clarify* our interiors, accessing our deeper desires and motives, rather than our surface desires and motives. Surface desire motives are what are commonly referred to as the ego’s needs—not in the healthy sense of psychological ego, but in the sense of human pettiness and contraction. Third, from this place of clarified interior space we identify what appears to be a First Principle and First Value.

Fourth, once we have identified what seems to be a First Value or First Principle, like uniqueness, we then check—usually through contemplative study—to see if this quality shows up as a value in the core structure of human consciousness. This means engaging with the great wisdom literatures and teachings. How deep has this been as an object of spiritual and religious reflection?

Fifth, we look to see that this First Principle and First Value appears across space, and across time. Does it appear in some form in the various stages of pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity. Is it only in your mind and your local cultural world, or does it appear across cultures around the world? If it shows up universally in every culture around the world—as reflected both in cross-cultural wisdom literatures and

popular cultural expressions—then we may well be dealing with a First Value and First Principle.

Sixth, only at that point do we turn to nature. Does this quality of value appear in the biological world of life? With a value like “uniqueness,” it quickly becomes clear that it appears all through the lifeworld. And then you investigate even more deeply to see, perhaps in a somewhat altered form, how that core value or principle may express in the world of matter. For example, let’s take the value of fairness. We pointed out earlier that fairness does not appear under that name in the world of matter. But the value of harmony does show up in the earliest expressions of existence. Upon contemplation, we realize that these two values participate in a common thread. Harmony expresses the appropriate balance and distribution of energy in which every part is in right relationship to every other part and has the necessary energy to function effectively. We then begin to realize that fairness in human life is an evolved expression of this more basic harmony.

Seventh, we then trace a big-picture overview of the evolution of this value, from its inception as harmony, gradually shifting to fairness as it appears in the human world, gradually evolving in breadth and depth through unfolding levels of human consciousness, ultimately crystalizing as fairness that includes every human being, every dimension of every human being, and all of life in its circle of embrace.

Anthro-Ontology is an expression of an older idea, sourced in many of the great wisdom traditions: the distinction between the three eyes: the Eye of the Senses, the Eye of the Mind, and the Eye of the Spirit. The Eye of the Senses discloses empirical reality in the worlds of matter and life, visible through our sensory apparatus and their amplifiers, such as the Hubble telescope. But the Hubble telescope also requires the Eye of the Mind, which encompasses the mathematical calculations needed to interpret the data it discloses. The third eye is not merely the Eye of Spirit, but might be more appropriately termed the Eye of Consciousness, and expresses itself in four distinct modes of perception: the Eye of the Heart, the Eye of Value, the Eye of Contemplation, and the Eye of the Spirit. These eyes, collectively and cumulatively—and in alignment with the Eye of the Mind and the Eye of the Senses—allows one to access the interiors of Cosmos, from the value of love to the values of goodness, truth, and beauty. Anthro-Ontology points the Eyes of Consciousness in the right direction; inwards. It is by placing attention on the inward space of human consciousness that meaning is made—not as a social construction of reality but as the disclosure of interior value which can be accessed only on the *inside of the inside*.

## **36. We Must Recover and Renew The Eye of Value**

We talked above about the interior sciences as being disclosed by experiments of the Eye of the Heart, but we could also name it the Eye of Value, an expression of the Anthro-Ontological Method. This is the deep sense that “the mysteries are within us,” a recurrent theme in the writings of the interior sciences. The Eye of Value is the faculty that perceives value, also referred to by Iain McGilchrist as “value-ception.” This is an essential aspect of human psychology, the evolved capability to know what value is.

When this is stunted or distorted, it can lead to personal and collective pathologies, such as the global intimacy disorder.

The anthro-ontological Eye of Value is the epistemic source of modernity's common-sense sacred axioms. Like the evolving First Principles and First Values embedded in a story of value on which they are based, these axioms are a form of anthro-ontological disclosure. As noted above, they animated and guided human life through the period of modernity and until very recently—before the onslaught of the post-modern critique—served as the shared axioms of value among the overwhelming majority of humanity. In other words, the sacred axioms are anthro-ontologically validated. We might call these self-evident reflective truths apprehended by the Eye of Value. They are known through the first method of anthro-ontology: common sense.

They do not require the radical intensification of experience through practice that accompany some forms of contemplation, the second method, and all forms of transfiguration, the third. But they do require an elemental clarification of desire and consciousness, a stepping out of the tyranny of survival and brutal competition, to access the deeper currents of truth that always already live within us. Simply by thinking and feeling a bit more deeply, these truths are readily available. Moreover, much of the time, most human beings chart their daily lives and decisions based on the integrity of these truths.

### **37. The Collapse of Value Leads Inexorably to Existential Risk**

Let us recapitulate some of what has been said as we draw to a close. When we speak of First Values and First Principles embedded in a story of value, we speak of an ought that commands us. The ought which commands us is accessible directly through human experience itself—and is recorded in myriad forms in the texts of human spirit. Humanity itself participates directly in what has been called by many names. The Chinese refer to it as the Tao, the unnamable reality beyond all realities and underneath all realities. It is Nature that lives in and through and as us.

Rather than being a form of natural law that lives “out there,” we recognize that the out there also lives inside us. The interior sciences show what is not self-evident in the exterior sciences, that our nature participates directly in the nature of Cosmos itself. The Tao is the field of value in which we live, and which lives in us. Or said differently, the Tao is the field of value in which we directly participate.

Again, in the language of CosmoErotic Humanism: *we live in an intimate universe and the intimate universe lives in us*. This was said by the medieval theologians, who defined virtue as *ordo amoris*, the right ordering of affections, the clarifying value of love or Eros, in which every subject and every object is accorded the kind and degree of love appropriate to it. Explicit and implicit versions of this conception appear cross-culturally throughout history in many forms—Platonic, Aristotelean, Stoic, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Hebrew, Deist, and some modern, ostensibly atheistic forms—and we refer to them as illuminating First Principles and First Values. These are not conclusions of philosophical argument subject to refutation, but rather metaphysical and ontological premises. They are the axioms that live across the great traditions of



human value, truths that are anthro-ontologically accessible to everyone, and fundamentally both eternal and evolving.

The common-sense sacred axioms were sufficient for modernity, but they are inadequate in this moment when post-modernism has penetrated the core of culture to execute a deconstruction of value itself. Therefore, only by fostering a new universal grammar of value as the context for our diversity can we sufficiently and effectively respond to catastrophic and existential risk—a universal grammar of value emergent from the matrix of First Principles and First Values embedded in a story of value. In this post-modern moment, without such an articulation that penetrates the heart of culture, all value fails. And without value, the entire system fails, leading to the death of our humanity and the death of humanity.

Let us now outline several important links between the collapse of value and catastrophic and existential risks to civilization. The diagnosis is clear: catastrophic and existential risks become more probable to the degree that there is a collapse of First Principles and First Values.

**There is No Global Coherence or Global Coordination without a Universal Grammar of Value.** Every single catastrophic and existential risk we face in the meta-crisis requires global coherence and coordination in response. Local responses to global issues will fail. All the local expressions of risk must be addressed at the global level to enact any form of potent response. Local solutions to global problems are not effective for planetary issues. Global coordination requires a genuine sense of global coherence at the level of superstructure, and only through such global coherence can we avert major suffering and transform our reality.

There is no global coherence without shared, universal First Principles and First Values embedded in a story of value. Coherence is rooted in a shared story of intrinsic value, a universal grammar of value, both as the context for our diversity and as a context for our larger shared identity. Coherence is sourced in prior intimacy, and the global intimacy disorder can only be adequately addressed through the emergence of a new shared story of value rooted in First Values and First Principles. Only a shared story of value generates the depths of intimacy required to heal the global intimacy disorder and activate the ground for global coherence necessary to effectively deploy global solutions.

Nearly all the catastrophic and existential risks we face are global challenges. From climate change to AI, to pandemics, to systems collapse, to arms races with exponential weaponized technologies. Nearly all these factors are driven by tragedies of the commons, multipolar traps, and races to the bottom—all of which are expressions of the rivalrous conflict meta-architecture which generates fragile systems subject to multiple forms of collapse, gradual or sudden. Every global challenge self-evidently requires a global solution. Global solutions can only be implemented with global co-ordination. Global co-ordination is impossible without global coherence. Global coherence is only possible if there is resonance between the parts—Global Resonance. Global Resonance is only possible if we have global intimacy. Global intimacy—just like intimacy in a couple—is only possible when there is a shared story, not just a shared history. A shared story generative of intimacy must be a shared story of value. There is

no intimacy without a shared field of the real, a shared field of value, shared First Values and First Principles.

It is only a shared story at planetary scale that generates a new emergent quality of intimacy—Global Intimacy. Intimacy requires a shared grammar of values as the generative matrix for a shared story of value. Without a shared grammar of value there is no global intimacy, and therefore no global coherence, and no global coordination in response to catastrophic and existential risk, the latter of which means—put simply—there will quite literally be no future.

**There is No Shared Sense-Making Without Minimal Agreement on First Principles and First Values.** The need for shared sense-making cannot be met without the good faith communication enabled by the mutual recognition of shared principles. There can be no response to catastrophic or existential risk without the capacity for shared sense-making. Without shared sense-making we become hopelessly mired in global action paralysis, or an even more dangerous scenario, what we have called “global action confusion.” Shared sense-making is impossible without shared evaluations and norms of communication, which are rooted in a shared story of value rooted in First Values and First Principles

**Open Societies Collapse Without Value at the Center of Public Culture.** At this moment in world history, only a shared story of value rooted in First Values and First Principles can sustain open societies. A universal grammar of value can generate a context for the diversity that defines open societies. Closed societies triumph in the absence of First Principles and First Values. The emergent order of a new story of shared value—global superstructural coherence—generates a new cultural enlightenment across open societies. This in turn generates the necessary global and local institutions—the social structure and infrastructure—to effectively respond to existential and catastrophic risk. Without an emergent order of a new shared story of value—a new cultural enlightenment—open societies will weaken, fragment, and fail, suffering progressive stages of increasing impotence, chaos, and collapse.

**Polarization Increases Uncontrollably When There Is no Shared Story of Value.** Polarization can only be overcome when we all live in shared field of intrinsic value. Without members of society consciously participating in the shared field of value as the context for all diversity, the chaos of the open society degrades to polarization. Polarization in all its manifestations undermines the shared sense-making process necessary to inhibit catastrophic and existential risk. It is only through a shared story of intrinsic value, in the field of the Innate, constituted by a set of First Principles and First Values that are recognized to be ontologically true, good, and beautiful, that the process of politics can move from poisonous polarization to potent new synergies.

Any ostensibly opposing values participate in the deeper underlying Eros of the universal field of value. This realization of an ever-present shared ground of value underlying any particular value championed by one side in an ostensible conflict of value, is the ground for synergy. When we experience ourselves as having stepped outside the field of value, then the Eros of synergy collapses. And in the collapse of Eros, pseudo-Eros always appears to fill the void. Our personal value becomes an expression of pseudo-Eros, not Eros. Whenever a value is decontextualized from the

larger field of value, it stands alone as a form of pseudo-Eros, and it inevitably polarizes and seeks to destroy other values in a zero-sum competition. Often the decontextualized pseudo-Eros value manifests in extreme form, even becoming a source of evil, because it is not dialectically balanced by an opposing value.

**Rivalrous Conflict Governed by Zero-Sum Win/Lose Metrics Cannot be Constrained Without Superordinate First Principles and Values.** The pseudo-Eros success story—rivalrous conflict governed by win/lose metrics—is a core generator function of existential risk. This story is caused directly by the failure of modernity to generate wisdom and value of a depth commensurate with the increasing complexity of exterior technologies. Unfortunately, the mainstream of the post-modern intelligentsia around the world has instead unconsciously perpetrated a progressive deconstruction of value that climaxes in the declaration that all value is “a figment of our imagination,” a “social construction of reality.” The pseudo-Eros success story results from a failure of Eros, which is a also failure to articulate First Principles and First Values embedded in a story of value.

Rivalrous conflict takes places between alienated and disassociated separate selves. Authentic distinction collapses into antagonistic separation. Genuinely distinct selves, who actually participate in the same larger field of value, end up contracting and coiling back into separate selves. Here is found the pervasive emptiness covered over by rampant consumption and forms of numbness and avoidance, expressed as indifference to the larger whole.

In a disqualified universe, the only principle that survived the wholesale deconstruction of value was winning at the game of rivalrous competition. This is a main cause for the unregulated growth of exponential technologies, including artificial intelligence. These new technologies are currently driven by a scientific creativity that has been hijacked by win/lose metrics and channeled into systems that only generate profit without any consideration of their overall value in society.

**Complicated Systems Dominate the World in the Absence of a Shared Story.** Every innovator and tech company is focused only on their work and its financial success, without consideration of its relationship to and impact on the larger social system. The result is a broken network of disconnected parts that make up various fragile technological systems vulnerable to failure under stress. Covid is but an extremely mild example of this. Such complicated systems are an expression of the global intimacy disorder. They are fundamentally non-intimate, devoid of Eros, defined by the radical disassociation between the parts that are either unaware of or indifferent to each other. Creating a coherent and complex self-organizing global civilization requires that cooperation and coordination take place at global scale. This means that the competitive, win/lose dynamics driving technology and infrastructure development would need to be bound by First Principles and First Values. Absent this approach, our most important systems will remain radically vulnerable and fragile, having been built in the context of alienation and competition, rather than for the sake of all humanity.

**The Requisite Political Will to Address Global Challenges Cannot be Found Without a Universal Grammar of Value.** A commitment to preserving the future is premised on an implicit *ought*: The future ought to be preserved. Without such a

commitment, such a noble demand on human action, we will never muster the will needed to take our seat at the table of history and stand for the future. It is only in the clear light of First Principles and First Values that we can find the evolutionary and eternal ground of a covenant between the generations, honoring not only the past and present but also the reality yet to come. The fundamental need to respond to existential risk hinges on the fact that the vast majority of humanity is now alienated from any sort of responsibility for the future. Where can be found the radical obligation that result in passionate moral commitments? It seems clear that there can be no response to the meta-crisis without a fundamental change in the ethical mood of the culture, based on what we already know to be true.

### 38. An Evolving Perennialism Allows for the Naming of Subversive Categories of Value

The core of our response, CosmoErotic Humanism, is clarifying a universal grammar of value, and proposing a robust system of philosophy adequate to the task of superstructural reformation to address and mitigate the effects of the meta-crisis. As such, we articulate not merely an eternal perennialism but an evolving perennialism, not a pre-ordained natural law but an evolving natural law, an evolving vision of eternal value.

The simple way to say it is: the new evolutionary perennialism is rooted in a vision of **evolving value**. The most common mistake in conversations surround value is the assumption that value must *only* be eternal and preordained.

A good example of this kind of thinking is a recent, intelligent political book, *The Global Revolt*, written by a secular Israeli reporter, Nadav Eyal. A major motif of the book, albeit disguised and understated in relation to its more obvious socio-political themes, is the search for a universal grammar of value grounded in ontology, the Tao, a larger field of value. Eyal, however, like so many other thinkers in our culture—Harari, Zuboff, Carr, Lanier, et al.—is an expression of the naive (and largely unconscious) absorption of post-modernity’s rejection of value. He transmits this widespread cultural assumption in a few passing sentences, as a declarative axiom—*of course, we all know that there are no preordained and eternal values*. His formulation is instructive, declaring a new kind of common sense.

Throughout his book, Eyal is particularly describing and promoting classical modernist liberal values, what he also refers to as “Globalist” values, as opposed to contemporary expressions for returning to pre-modern value—particularly fundamentalist versions of national or religious loyalties.

Eyal’s influential book is very much in line with the work of popular historian Yuval Harari, technology scholar Shoshana Zuboff, cultural critic Nicholas Carr, and high-tech insider Jaron Lanier, all of whom we describe as “uncontaminated” sources. What we mean by this term, borrowed from medievalist scholar Hayim Soloveitchik, is that when these writers take stands about key issues beyond the parameters of their genuine expertise in their disciplines—for example, when technologists philosophically expound

on the nature of value—they naturally, naively, and unconsciously reflect the Zeitgeist. They transparently reflect the core of post-modernity’s dismissal of intrinsic value and exemplify the naive experience of stepping out of the Tao, which have dominated culture and politics for the last three or four decades.

### **39. The Hidden Alignment Between Surveillance Capitalism and Its Critics Serves as an Example of the Collapse of Value and Its Implications**

A core feature of the degradation of value and the related global intimacy disorder is how it manifests in the political and economic realm as a pervasive technological management system. To explore this further, let’s look briefly at another contemporary source, a subtle but crucial example of the implications of a failed vision for a theory of value: Shoshanna Zuboff’s *Surveillance Capitalism*, which we have previously addressed as part our work on TechnoFeudalism.

First, let’s just say that we think Zuboff’s work is excellent and vitally needed at the moment. She fiercely critiques what we have called TechnoFeudalism, which she names as Surveillance Capitalism. We understand TechnoFeudalism, a civilizational form characterized by the large-scale use of behavioral modification technologies, to be a key expression of the second form of potential existential risk, the death of our humanity. On this we are fully aligned with Zuboff, who clearly shares similar concerns, articulating them with great passion, precision, and power. However, her critical project is largely rendered futile because of her inability to name the intrinsic values that TechnoFeudalists are violating. As we shall see, this is not a personal failing of Zuboff’s, but a broader cultural incapacity that she unwittingly adopts, similar to Eyal, Harari, and others mentioned above.

Her goal, as she writes in multiple passages, is to “arouse astonishment and outrage,” which will in turn generate the political “will” necessary to take significant action. A key thread in her work is eight distinct, emotionally and intellectually charged passages, which speak to the moral imperative of “naming.” She waxes eloquent in the best sense when she talks of the power of naming without which no change can ever be accomplished. She accuses the leading digital technology companies of hiding behind euphemism in their refusal to name the nature of their business. She herself takes on the task, not only naming Surveillance Capitalism itself, but effectively developing an entire vocabulary regarding the specific methods and strategies deployed by surveillance capitalists.

Just to get a direct sense of this, here is her eighth and final passage on these topics:

There is a fork in the road. In one direction lies the possibility of a synthetic declaration for a third modernity based on the strengthening of democratic institutions and the creative construction of a double movement for our time. On this road we harness the digital to forms of information capitalism that reunite supply and demand in ways that are both genuinely productive of effective life and compatible with a flourishing democratic social order. The first step down this road begins with naming, establishing our bearings, reawakening our astonishment, and sharing a sense of righteous indignity (p.397).

But here is the problem—a serious Achilles heel in Zuboff’s analysis. Time and again, she refuses to name any First Principle and First Value whatsoever. Instead, she largely *assumes* value, only occasionally referring to a certain principle as “foundational” or in the construction of Western culture. Indeed, she explicitly traces the values of personhood and choice back to three different sources, all of them subjective and historical, none of them intrinsic in any ontological sense.

She avoids any fragrance of First Values and First Principles embedded in a story of value, whose violation—as we are attempting to show—is much more than the violation of a social convention or contract, as she refers to it, but rather a violation of intrinsic value itself. The difference, of course, is everything.

Zuboff’s repeatedly invoked goal is to “arouse astonishment and outrage” in order to effect change. But “astonishment and outrage” is aroused only in response to a violation of *real* value, not in response to the mere violation of what Zuboff describes as social contracts rooted in the historical moment of the liberal West. Indeed, Zuboff is a classical expression of modernity’s obfuscation of value, which relies only on common-sense sacred axioms of value. But as we noted above, post-modernity has increasingly undermined these axioms, which allowed modernity to avoid paying back the loan of social and spiritual capital it had borrowed from pre-modernity. The loan has now come due.

Zuboff theorizes value as a given in the sense of modern common-sense sacred axioms. Yet this a position she knows full well has been thoroughly deconstructed in the post-modern context in which she writes. Indeed, in other passages she is explicit in her embrace of stances that deconstruct value, often exhibiting the classic post-modern performative contradiction, by declaring there are values worth fighting for, some reason for astonishment and outrage. But on what ontological ground?

Zuboff, of course, does invoke value to critique the current nexus of digital technology, capitalism, and political power. But she is very careful in her invocation. For example, when she discusses what we are referring to as the First Value and First Principle of human personhood, she is careful not to ascribe to it the status of intrinsic value, but instead grounding it in Sartre’s notion of the value of “first-person voice.”

Sartre, however, as Zuboff is certainly aware, is the apostle of cosmic meaninglessness, who more clearly than any other modern thinker locates himself outside the Tao, asserting that no such field of intrinsic value could possibly exist. This is the way Sartre is commonly read in the cultural world in which Zuboff lives, breathes, and writes, and key to her post-modern strategy of grounding value in Sartre’s “groundlessness.” In fact, she declares this strategy as intentional, a smoke screen that allows her to avoid naming First Principle and First Values: “I want to deliberately sidestep a more detailed discussion of what is ‘personality,’ or ‘emotion,’ or ‘conscious’ or ‘unconscious,’ in favor of what I hope is a less factitious truth, thrown into relief by the latest stage of the incursion (p.290). Naming a value like “personality,” personhood, or self is a fractious truth for Zuboff because the academic culture of post-modernity in which she writes—a culture that now animates much of society, and even directly inspires the TechnoFeudalists themselves—has no conception of intrinsic value.

Therefore, as Zuboff points out, the TechnoFeudalists only feel constrained by the letter of the law; when value disappears only law and power are left behind. However, TechnoFeudalism, or Surveillance Capitalism, through multiple strategies identified by Zuboff, has *legally* rendered much of the law impotent in its ability to regulate. By the phrase, “latest phase of the incursion,” Zuboff is referring to contemporary Surveillance capitalism. And her strategy is: I will show you the violation, you will be “astonished and outraged,” and you will make the value judgment without me needing to name it as intrinsic value, and thus I can avoid challenging post-modernity’s dogmatic deconstruction of value.

Would-be TechnoFeudalists understand Zuboff as either a modernist still claiming common-sense sacred axioms of value that post-modernity has long rejected, or they sense with relief that she is in fact aligned with them. They intuit that underneath all the posturing she is just a post-modernist righteously claiming the high ground of value, after having just deconstructed that very ground. They then perceive her, like themselves, as purely political, trafficking only in power—not knowledge or value. However, as we noted above, it is only the violation of intrinsic value, cosmic value, real value, that can arouse either moral, social, or political will.

Post-modernity has fiercely made modernity’s implied rejection of value explicit and definitive, a kind of hyper-deconstruction, such that intrinsic value for many is scarcely an inchoate intuition. This is the great contemporary collapse of value. This is what blocks any articulation of First Values and First Principles embedded in a story of value.

We desperately need a new story of value. We cannot challenge the current alignment of high technology, capitalism, and political power without explicitly naming First Values. We simply cannot continue, as Zuboff does in almost a dozen passages, to demand that we get “our bearings,” when she refuses to ground value in anything that is intrinsic or ontological. How can we stand for value when it is not actually Real? And why would we? As mentioned, Zuboff cannot be held accountable for this, as the Zeitgeist in which she moves and operates has no credible vision of value.

So we need a new vision of value that takes seriously beautiful critiques like Zuboff’s, offering a way forward that takes value seriously and catalyzes a global cultural enlightenment—a new superstructural value stack for reality. This can only be accomplished via humanity’s direct experience of a re-entry into the Tao, the field of value. This can only take place through a new vision of value that takes seriously the old critiques, and does not resort to fundamentalist apologetics or calls to pre-modern regression.

## **40. Needed are Subversive, Empowering Vocabularies of Value**

In response, what we have named Evolving Perennialism is a new, subversive, and empowering vocabulary for reclaiming and advancing inherent value. It seeks to help us articulate a universal grammar within a new story of value, ultimately rooted in intrinsic First Principles and First Values of Cosmos. Let us, dear reader, recapitulate

and deepen our discussion of Zuboff, as her work is instructive of the failures and difficulties in addressing the existential risks that face us—in this case, the death of our humanity, as the species is subject to profoundly manipulative technologies, built as part of a social world unmoored from First Principles and First Values.

What is offered by CosmoErotic Humanism is yet unavailable to Zuboff and other contemporary cultural critics. Thus, her strategy is to simply show the violation of values, while avoiding naming or committing to any of them. Zuboff likely knows better. As we have noted, she is a great proponent of the importance of naming. Naming is everything. Indeed, she accuses companies like Google of engaging in euphemism to avoid naming their great violations of value. But she herself will not name value as real, and deliberately avoids it. Perhaps this because she has absorbed the modern and postmodern critiques of value and in that sense has essentially bought into value's collapse.

Zuboff avoids fulfilling her self-declared, overriding moral imperative of naming because she, and the broader culture with her, simply does not have a conception of intrinsic value on which to base a critique. Zuboff and the culture she writes into simply does not know how to name First Principles and First Values, which have long been rejected by the modern and post-modern academy.

So Zuboff uses Sartre as the source for her ambiguous articulation of the values being violated by TechnoFeudalism. She introduces Sartre with her own formulation of values: "Experience is not what is given to me, but what I make of it. The same experience that I deride may invite your enthusiasm. The self is the inward space of lived experience from which such meanings are created." Zuboff is both careful and clear. Experience is the primary category. But she immediately wants to make it clear that there are no objective universals of value in experience. This is of course true in terms of the surface structure of experience. But Zuboff does not realize—or at least refuses to acknowledge, because it would be "fractious"—that there are in fact shared depth structures of value characteristic of all experience.

## **41. TechnoFeudalism is Our Default Future**

TechnoFeudalism is the (often unarticulated) philosophy driving the leading edge of emerging, geopolitically significant technological innovation. The power centers of technology today are comprehensively pursuing the possibility that politics can be overcome by digital network structures of self-organization and data-driven behavioral monitoring and control. Creating and stewarding remarkably powerful technologies, their public desire is to usher in an era of unprecedented human flourishing.

But it is not hard to see the possibility of a totalizing environment of social control enabled by digital technologies, in which all human behavior is tracked and algorithmically analyzed—and then in some way "nudged" or "guided" down specific paths. This is not far from the new techno-social forms China is developing today, which we would call a form of TechnoAutocracy. In the West, the new digital social world will be shaped not by a centralized government initiative but by a network of



competing private actors and companies, each with a different agenda, but all implicitly consenting to the new world emerging—a world run by TechnoFeudalists. Each is bent on optimizing digital control structures, some for the sake of power and profit, but the largest and most important players will be building these technologies in an attempt to save humanity from itself. The goal is persuasive technologies powerful enough to ensure that the vast majority of humans basically have no choice but to do “the right thing,” having been subtly and not so subtly surveilled and “nudged” throughout their entire lives. The justification—following a line of thinking that can be traced back to B.F. Skinner—is that there is no other way to avoid the self-induced extinction of humanity.

To the extent that these plans come to fruition—i.e., if truly powerful digital control structures are built and implemented (even supposedly for our own good!)—it will drastically undermine modern legal codes holding that individuals are accountable for their beliefs and the actions that follow from them. It will also undermine the idea of democratic governance that assumes people vote based on their own freely determined beliefs. Instead, we will have a society that is knowingly run according to different fundamental assumptions about the nature of the human being, choice, and political life. Therefore, we speak of TechnoFeudalism as a fundamentally new political possibility, emerging at the interface of new technologies and currently dominant ideologies and worldviews.

The vision here is not just of engineering for material abundance, but engineering for large-scale human behavioral coordination. Those thinking seriously about high-tech utopian futures are engaged in schemes to “re-engineer humanity” to bring about these futures. As we show here, the technical means to modulate human behavior appear be ready at hand, something that Skinner had predicted as an eventuality.

It’s not a question of whether or not humanity will be fundamentally changed by the digital age, but a question of in what ways and to what degree. And perhaps more pointedly: *Who will be responsible for the transformation of our humanity? Who will make the difference in shaping the future of the digital age? What are their First Principles and First Values? What is their worldview and philosophy?*

## **42. CosmoErotic Humanism Is a Response to The Possible Death of Our Humanity**

The future will not be determined only by technological innovation. It will hinge on the worldviews and philosophies of the groups and individuals that make technical innovation happen. Prior to all the engineering conversations about what can be done is a more basic conversation about what *ought* to be done. This is not a technical or scientific conversation; it is a philosophical and (dare we say) religious one.

We write from the belief that innovation in the domain of religious and philosophical thought is essential to avoiding catastrophic futures, including existential threats to our species and the biosphere itself. Basic questions are arising that will require our best efforts of heart and mind to address. How can we know which directions are preferable for human society? From what First Principles are our ethical precepts derived? What

is truly valuable in the universe and in human life? How does humanity engage with the broader universal fields of reality, evolution, and life itself? What is a worldview that could integrate the inevitabilities and risks of high technology with the greatest sources of wisdom in human history?

CosmoErotic Humanism is an attempt to begin addressing these questions. Specifically, the project offers arguments, methods, and evidence, from pre-modern, modern, and post-modern sources, which clearly demonstrate that intrinsic value is a constitutive and indispensable aspect of the Cosmos. We are overturning the speculative and ungrounded scientific dismissals of value, which view it as an epiphenomenon of a purely materialist universe, thus degrading the sacred to a mere social construction, and making value a fiction of the human mind. The basic claim is strong, but reasonable, and with a great deal of support: value and consciousness are to be placed alongside matter, space, time, and energy as basic elements of the universe, or reality itself.

Demonstrating that value is intrinsic to Cosmos opens the possibility for a new kind of story about the universe, a story of value that integrates universal First Principles and First Values of cosmic evolution with a vision of humanity and human potential. Such a story provides a new context for integrating wisdom traditions with modern thought. This is what we call an evolving perennialism of First Principles and Values, where a story of cosmic evolution is told that positions humanity in the context of *an ever-evolving field of eternal values*.

At its core, Cosmo-Erotic Humanism seeks to convene a higher-order conversation about what adequate future traditions of world philosophy and religion could be. As the twenty-first century unfolds, the demand for wisdom capable of addressing planetary-scale problems is only going to increase. Our work is to prepare for a steep uptick in the demand for meaning-making and insights adequate to the profundity of this historical moment. Neither science nor religion as they have been known can serve this role of providing an action-oriented world philosophy—religion because it traditionally neglects to engage with techno-scientific power, and science because it traditionally does not deal with issues of value, meaning, or purpose. Simply stated, the future quite literally depends on the wise integration of cosmic power with cosmic purpose.

To get a sense of why all this matters, consider the following pressing inquiries:

*What is the value of personhood, choice, and uniqueness as aspects of our humanity?*

*Should we protect against technologies that degrade personhood, coerce or distort choice, and homogenize uniqueness?*

Most people will intuitively say, “Yes, we should protect these essential aspects of what it means to be human! The great ethical and religious traditions tell us this, as does our common sense.” However, others may respond in a counter-intuitive way, saying, “No, personhood, choice, and uniqueness need not be protected, because they are dangerous illusions that science has started to deconstruct. Technologies can enhance human survival and happiness precisely by overriding these delusional aspects of how humans have long regarded themselves.”

The first view claims intuitive insight into something worth protecting that is essential to our humanity. The second view claims a certain kind of scientific justification for ignoring those same intuitions about what it means to be human. Where the first view is often clearly held and stated, it sometimes appears as reactionary against technology. The second view is often obscure and unstated, more apparent in the plans and designs of certain technologists rather than in their press releases. This is not a theoretical debate. As we demonstrate below, the way we answer these kinds of questions today will have profound implications for which forms of technological innovation structure future human social systems. Cosmo-Erotic Humanism argues for personhood, choice, and uniqueness as First Principles and Values of Cosmos, knowing that this stands in opposition to a significant, even dominant, intellectual current in public culture.

Mainstream rationalists and materialists—be they pessimists or optimists about near-term technological progress—maintain that our given human sense of meaningful choice is refuted by contemporary neuroscience and physics. Of course, many neuroscientists and physicists would disagree with this, but the point here is that one of the major narratives in the culture claims to have settled the age-old question of value, purpose, choice, and all that hinges on truly unique personhood.

The TechnoFeudalists have settled on the side of various forms of determinism and reductive materialism, which claim that scientific evidence overrides common sense about what human life is worth. Their positions are not new. Indeed, some version of these views has existed since antiquity, while present-day scientific materialism has been around for centuries. But never have these views been so close to the heart of power and so wedded to the design of emerging technologies. Never has a technologically intensive world been built around the dominance of views that question human personhood, choice, and uniqueness.

TechnoFeudalism is predicated on the idea that the world is too dangerous and complex to allow humans to continue to their unscientific, erroneous, and inefficient modes of personal choice. Celebrating advances in neuroscience and data science that appear to undermine traditional notions of personhood, choice, and individual value, ambitious social engineers (like B.F. Skinner) have always intended to free humanity from their delusions. The claim is that to avert catastrophe and stop needless suffering it is the responsibility of scientists and technologists to create a world where human behavior is techno-scientifically optimized, which means getting “beyond freedom and dignity.” We must formulate a strong response to this apparent victory of ideologies promoting the sciences of control over the philosophies of human freedom.

How can these basic problems of value and principle be resolved under current cultural conditions? CosmoErotic Humanism suggests that we must honor both our clarified intuitions *and* the best interpretations of our ever-changing scientific theories. Personhood, choice, and uniqueness are examples of what we call First Principles and Values of Cosmos. Simply put, this means that they are basic, intrinsic features of reality itself and therefore valuable for their own sake—and obviously expressed at every level of cosmic evolution.

