THREE CHALLENGES FOR GLOBAL RELIGION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: PEER TO PEER, INTEGRALISM, TRANSHUMANISM*

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I want to address three themes, powerful combination of ideas and social practices that will challenge both traditional and new religions as they struggle to maintain or establish themselves in the new century.

The first topic is the emergence of the peer to peer phenomenon and its deepening influence on many different fields of human endeavour, including religion and spirituality. In short, peer to peer is not only the emerging and fundamental form of the technological and productive infrastructure of our networked age, but also a new mode of production, a new form of social and political organisation, and finally, a new form of subjective experiencing of the world, a psychological and cultural phenomenon. Peer to peer is concerned with seeing and organising the world not in a strict hierarchical or centralised system, but as a 'network of networks' of equal participants, i.e. a reformulation and old aspiration of humankind, but not less real for that, as we hope to demonstrate. We will content that peer to peer is emerging as a new competitive civilisational format, on a par with the current domination of commodity-based capitalism, and its underlying philosophy of the war of each against all. We will specifically discuss the emergence of peer to peer as a spiritual phenomenon as well.

The second topic we want to address is integralism, a form of philosophical understanding that aims to integrate the findings of all religions and philosophies in an integrative viewpoint excluding none.

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What integralism does in essence, is to place the development of religion and spirituality in an evolutionary context, and to draw a common structural core to be found amongst the various spiritual worldviews.

And finally, we want to address the challenge of technological transhumanism, a very powerful alternative to transcendentally oriented religions, that acts as the subconscious context of the speeding of the technological quest and its eventual final realisation as a "God Project" on this planet, currently expressed in the fields of biotechnology, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence.

Ken Wilber, an author which we will discuss in the second chapter has developed a useful heuristic tool which he calls "All quadrants, all levels" (AQAL). It basically says that any phenomena can be described in the context of two polarities: one polarity is between agency and communion, i.e. its individual existence and its always being part of a system, and the other polarity is the interior-exterior polarity. In other words, every phenomenon has always a body in time and space, but always also an interior life, i.e. aspirations, motivations, desires, and instincts, which cannot be measured in space-time, but are nevertheless real.

This gives us a system of four quadrants: 1) the interior-individual quadrant, the realm of the subjective life and individual feelings 2) the exterior-individual quadrant, the field of the single object and its behaviour in time and space; 3) the interior-collective, the inter-subjective field which covers collective worldviews, including general culture, philosophy and religious worldviews; and 4) the exterior-collective, the interobjective field, which covers systems: systems of objects, such as the political, social, economic, and other systems.

In each quadrant one can then uncover an evolutionary line of development, which envelops systems of evermore encompassing complexity, and of course, interestingly, we can correlate the findings across the quadrants. (Lest we would fall in a trap of an ideology of progress, these lines should of course be based on a scientific consensus concerning the data of the past, not as a way to predict any future developments.). Let me be nevertheless clear that evolution does not necessarily mean progress, but a kind of process towards more complexity of organization and integration.

This is the interpretative scheme we will use to explain the

emergence of peer to peer, but we personally always amend the Wilberian scheme by putting technology in the individual-exterior quadrant, for the reason that technology can be very usefully seen as an externalisation of the human body, with different levels of technological development representing different externalisations. You do not necessarily need to remember this scheme, but it is the heuristic method I have been using for tracking spiritual phenomena and is thus 'active' as an epistemological background.

I. CHALLENGE ONE: PEER TO PEER

I.1. PEER TO PEER AS THE NEWLY EMERGING CIVILISATIONAL FORMAT

Our contention is that "Peer to peer" is first of all the primary form of the technological and productive infrastructure of the current phase of cognitive capitalism, but at the same time there are grave doubts that the current system can actually use P2P to its full potential, hence, it may also be a pointer to a new phase of our civilisation with adapted formats of collective organisation, cultural worldviews, and subjective realities. That at least is our contention. We use to notion of cognitive capitalism to distinguish it from the earlier phases of merchant capitalism, based on the use of slave labour and serfdom in a still feudal context, and the phase of industrial capitalism, based on the use of free forms of mass labour, a form that is, at least in the West, declining, and making place for a new logic based on immaterial labour and 'immaterial production'.

Indeed, in the current phase of our political economy, where the production of material goods is increasingly automated and dependent on immaterial factors, and where immaterial production is itself becoming a dominant factor (in its two expression of symbolic production by knowledge workers and service provision by 'affective' workers), peer to peer is already the primary format of our infrastructure. First of all there is of course the well-known internet, which is no longer organised as a centralised or pyramidal network as earlier computer infrastructures were (as were the mainframe and client-server configurations), but as an ever-changing configuration of a network of networks. This is not only

true for the network as a whole, but also for the format of technological organisation within the enterprise, where the client-server format is being abandoned in favor of a webification of the infrastructure. Very near on the horizon is the large-scale implementation of the concept of grid computing, which is an even more radical implementation of the peer to peer concept, where every computer of the network can be used for any application according to availibility. And within enterprises, while the process of webification continues apace despite the dotcom technology bubble, the next stage appears to be the implementation of Hypernets, which differ from the classic internet in that not only core applications are webified, but also the peripheral applications with workers on the field, who now have increasingly have access to networked devices that are no longer personal computers but a wide array of all kinds of 'peripheral devices'. In the telecom industry, which was the author's former area of expertise, centralised models of telephone distribution are increasingly being replaced by networked models, and of course there is the well-known explosion of P2P-based wireless transmission mode (Wi-Fi), very popular with civic movements for the independence it affords from private telecom infrastructure. Let me remind readers that in Western countries only about a quarter of the population is estimated to be involved in material production, and that this percentage is diminishing by about half a percent every year. And that the primary working and communication tool of the knowledge workers are networked computers based on peer to peer based models.

(As a reminder, P2P as technology means that all participating computers and networks are considered interchangeable parts of the overall network, which no longer has an identifiable center or hierarchic structure, though there are variations amongst network depending on the radicality of the P2 peer implementation; it also means that 'intelligence is located everywhere in the periphery and available to all participants of the network, without any 'bottlenecks of control')

Very important in terms of public consciousness is of course that peer to peer has become the dominant form of music distribution (i.e. more music downloaded than actually bought via CD's), and that this distribution uses peer to peer models of cooperatively united personal computers, connected worldwide into a single system of exchange. And

also very important is the increasing speed of implementation of 'open source' Linux system, which brings us to our second manifestation of peer to peer, not just as a format of technological infrastructure, but as a true mode of production.

Indeed, today thousands of programmers are cooperatively working on establishing computer systems, mostly software but now also 'open hardware', that are in many cases becoming more productive than commercially produced counterparts, as was recently confirmed in a cover story of Business Week. Free software, developed originally by Richard Stallman, says that all source code is common property and cannot be used for private gain (this is insured by the legal innovation that is the General Public License). Thus programmers worldwide are cooperating building on the common knowledge base produced by all their predecessors. Open Source, originally proposed and developed by Eric Raymond, is a more liberal version of free software, which does not prohibit commercial use, but insures that the source code remains open to collective inspection. Obviously, the latter is more open to involvement by the business world. One of the most successful applications of open source collaboration is the Linux operating system, which is making fast headway not only in governments worldwide, because of its marginal pricing as compared to software licences from private vendors, but is now very quickly making inroads in the business roads as well, while consumer applications such as StarOffice and OpenOffice insure that it will also be increasingly used as the interface for individual users. The majority of experts and users agree that most open source applications are more productive and bugfree than its commercial counterparts. Though the progress has been slow, it has been inexorable so far, and is speeding up to a significant degree, with for example Michael Dell, chairman of the largest computer firm, declaring that in two or three years, he expects one third of the computers that he sells, to be operating on Linux rather than Microsoft.

However, what is important here is to understand that free software is not just a form of technology, but a true 'third mode of production', i.e. a way of producing things, right now mostly software, but with a huge potential for generalised industrial applications. Indeed today, even in industrial production, the marketing and production phases

are dependent on the crucial design phase, which is wholly taking place using networked computers, and where the peer to peer method could be introduced without major problems. In the car industry for example, production is almost wholly outsourced using standardized parts, with the so-called car companies in fact essentially design and branding/marketing companies. This extension of P2P production modalities is actually being advocated by the German-based Oekonux group, which advocates a GPL society, based on extending the General Public Licence to other sectors of social life and production, and which counts several industrial engineers amongst its sympathizers and supporters.

Until now, the industrial world has known two modes of production, the free enterprise system on the one hand, and the centralised and authoritarian planning mode proposed by the now failed Eastern Bloc states. But here we have a cooperative mode, that is neither authoritarian, nor based on the motivation of gain, and that is a hugely significant development. A quick glance to history would be sufficient to show that specific technological modes of production and their associated 'political economies' are long-term but nevertheless transitory ways of organising the world and its production, as the succession of the system of Antiquity with the feudal and then the capitalist mode of production show. Nevertheless, the capitalist mode is sometimes presented as eternal by market fundamentalists with the good reason that the collectivist approach did not succeed as a viable alternative, and that it is human nature to be only motivated by greed. However, this argument is significantly weakened by the existence of an alternative which functions differently based on the non-hierarchical cooperation of thousands of peers worldwide, who are producing better quality material.

It is significant to see how the present system is reacting to that challenge: essentially by criminalising the new ways of software and music distribution. Thus the reaction is quite similar to the reactions of the feudal guilds when faced with the emerging capitalist mode, which was to try to outlaw it. However, when a system starts thwarting innovation and more productive applications than its own, it is a definite sign of a loss of legitimacy.

But let us continue our description of the peer to peer phenomenon: it is obvious that the success of such a new mode of

production is based on new cultural practices, new ways of working with each other. This is best described in the book 'The Hacker Ethic' by Pekka **Himmanen,** an update and dialogue with an earlier classic by Max Weber. As you will remember Weber, in his The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' had explained how the new mentalities expressed by the Protestant Reformation, and especially Calvinism, were instrumental in creating better conditions for the development of industrial capitalism. In the current phase of cognitive capitalism, these practices, which the author calls the Friday-isation of Sunday', are actually being exarcebated, and in fact, the ethics of organization and productivity (called the sphere of efficiency in a similar book by Jeremy Rifkin, entitled the Age of Access) are now not only being carried out to their extremes in the business world, but even being translated to the private world (called the sphere of intimacy by Rifkin). Exploitation of the body and the natural world, is being complemented by the exploitation of the human psyche and mind, in a similar unsustainable fashion. But the interesting second part of Himmanen's book outlines an emerging counter-movement, that was first seen in the communities of passionate programmers (the original definition of hackers, before the term got distorted in common parlance to mean authors of computer mischief). He notes that in the way they organize their workday, their ways of working and learning, are completely different from Weber's model, in fact many times opposed to them. The new model is a form of 'passionate play', interspersed with large periods of non-productive life, based on egalitarian cooperation. This point is very important because what we see here is that the objective phenomena of technological infrastructure and modes of production, are being translated into subjective experiencing and intersubjective modes of cooperation. Peer to peer is therefore also an emerging cultural format.

Equally significant are the new methods of political experiencing and organizing. The only growing and innovative worldwide political movement is the alterglobalisation movement, organized as a network of networks on a global scale, intensively using networked forms of organization and technology, and capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands of activists and sympathizers on a moment's notice. Many of its spokespersons insist that their movement no longer fits in a model of representation, but that everybody represents themselves and their ever-

changing configuration of political interests and engagement. This is echoed in new radical political theories, such as those of Toni Negri in Empire, Miguel Benasayag in *Les Contre-Pouvoirs*, and John Holloway in *Revolution without Power*. There is a lot more to say about this, and I have, in another essay, developed three transition scenarios to a more fully P2P organized and inspired world. One, defended by Richard Barbrook, says that peer to peer and capitalism will co-exist peacefully, just as feudalism tolerated the communist forms of the Catholic Church and its monasteries, and that producers will go back and forth between the two spheres. The second scenario is more negative, and is developed as a warning by Jeremy Rifkin: the new forms of cognitive capitalism are eating away in the cultural and intimate spheres, turning not only everything that we hold dear into commodities, but dispossessing people of any ownership of immaterial production, basing everything on forms of leasing and licensing which could be called informational feudalism1. Faced with this, defensive strategies are on order, such as the French 'exception culturelle' (just recently enshrined in the draft of the new European constitution!). And then there is a more optimistic scenario, best defended by the new French review called Multitudes. The argument is here that cognitive capitalism is hugely dependent on such cooperative intellectual work (called the General Intellect) but at the same time cannot by itself create the conditions to nurture it. Thus at one point it will be forced to accept the Universal Social Wage, which will create the conditions not only to make cognitive capitalism stable and growing and end the current era of continued systemic crisis, but at the same time creates a cooperative sphere that goes beyond it, letting that sphere grow as well, until such utopian times as the latter will dominate the former. This is not the proper venue to go into details of political economy, and these ideas are further developed in another essay that is solely devoted to the peer to peer phenomenon.

Before discussing the impact of peer to peer on spirituality proper, I hope to have convinced the reader that P2P is not just a transient technological phenomenon, but a kind of key format which can increasingly be found in diverse areas of human cultural life, in the objective organizational forms, and in individual and collective cultural expressions. Just as we can see in the past that past civilizations have

been based on a dominant form of human relationships (authoritarian in the pre-capitalist forms, commodity fetishism and utilitarianism in capitalism), just so we can envisage I belief a form of civilization for which it is the peer to peer format that is its central and most basic form of human relating and producing. That these various aspects of P2P appear concurrently in the four quadrants described in the beginning has been instrumental in strengthening my primary intuition that P2P was a fundamental civilizational process.

I.2. SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS AND EXPRESSIONS OF P2P

Religion can be seen in two different ways. At the core of the religious traditions are the numinous experiences or revelations of its founders, which can be said to be encounters with an Absolute beyond time and space, thus outside history, outside the objective world of social and cultural forms, outside the subjective experience of the Ego, and eternally equal to itself. (in fact, this very contention will be criticized in the next section on integralism, but it is a useful distinction in this context). Nevertheless, when these experiences have to be related, the inescapable fact is that it has to be translated in the cultural medium of language, which is the other basic aspect of religion, its concrete embodiment in concrete time and place. Indeed, when a religion is institutionalized in a organizational form and becomes part of the societal structure, it will take on all the garments of the time and space in which it has been born, and of course slowly adapt itself to changing cultural and societal conditions. Hence religion in the objective world is not a static affair, but subjects to the same type of evolution as the others realms of human affairs.

Taken this context into account, it can be said that most traditional religions that we know were forged in eras dominated by some form of what we generally called feudalism (or broadly similar social forms of the premodern era). And even though these world religions have gone through several hundred years of capitalism, there still have major characteristics of that era. The 'us vs. them' theologies that are a form of tribalism, not universalism; the relationships of authority and obedience, instead of democratic participation; the patriarchal attitudes towards

women and their place in the religious structures, instead of gender equality. We could go on with such a listing of characteristics showing that most traditional religions are still premodern in many of their aspects.

Obviously this creates a tension both with the modern 'democratic-capitalist' valuesystem, and with the post-modern 'networked-informational-nonrepresentational' value systems. It is to be expected that more recently created religions, such as for example the Protestant Reformation, or the new religious movements of the contemporary era, are much more influenced by the more recent social-cultural formats, analogous of the conception of Max Weber discussed above. Who can deny that a very large part of the New Age-based spiritual movements and experiencers, basically operate in a market-mode, where spiritual experiences are 'bought' in a marketplace, and where spiritual teachers make a living using market(ing)-based techniques? Most of the times we will be able to see the different social and civilisational formats as different sedimental layers. See for example Thai Buddhism, which I recently encountered after staying in the Chiang Mai area it has very strong elements of animism and spirit worship; as far as I understand it has a feudal authority structure, the system of merit functions as a spiritual credit card with huge financial streams involved, the financial accounting of this is opaque, and most often, a few monks control huge income, while others have no means of even taking care of their basic health problems, etc.. Pre-feudal, feudal, capitalist and postmodern forms coexist. Sometimes this co-existence is well integrated and forms a positive combination, at other times the situation is simply intolerable to (post)modern minds.

Two recent examples. June Campbell in *Travellers in Space* recounts her experiences as a secret consort of a very-well known Tibetan 'rimpoche'. As she tells her story, and starts talking to other women in her adopted tradition. it turns out that most if not all Tibetan teachers have such consorts, not practicing any Tantric techniques, but available for the physical needs that they cannot openly express. While perfectly understandable, it is easy to see how this system is demeaning to women, who have to hide the truth and are forced in submissive relationships. Another example of tensions between the premodern and (post)modern is the phenomena of scumbag gurus which were so prevalent in the

seventies and eighties, before the publication of the seminal Guru Papers by the Kramers. Abuses of power, the extraction of money for private enjoyment, and abusive forms of sex were rife, and so were the victims, gullible Westerners in search for spiritual solace but without any solid spiritual culture themselves. The gurus came from largely feudal environments, were used to relationships of obedience, but in the West they retained the latter, but married it with the freedom in mores, without the limits provided by the checks and balances of tradition and convention. So the general point I want to make is that every form of religion is subject to betterment, if it would adapt the great democratic and humanist principles first originating in the European Enlightenment. For a contemporary individual it seems to be a requirement that the traditions need to adapt themselves to basic requirements such as human rights, and I would argue, an adapted 'scientific' approach to the building of spiritual knowledge. This is where peer to peer, as the most recent of civilisational formats with its own set of requirements, comes into the picture as well.

In theoretical terms, Ken Wilber had formulated the hypothesis that the esoteric core of religions, these aspects based on the transmission of real numinous experiences and active psychotechnologies rather than convention and the need for a social and political control of the masses, were very similar in their operation to the workings of science. There is an injunction, 'do this, in order to experience that' in order to generate the subjective experiencing, there are concrete 'objective' methodologies that can validate the process. Finally, everything is also intersubjectively validated by the community of advanced practicioners. But one can question whether this is really the case in the 'real world' of religion. Even in a broadly nondual tradition such as Tibetan Buddhism, there are in fact numerous different sects, which differ with one another in their interpretation, and again, the very authority structure is thoroughly feudal, making sure that those in authority can validate or invalidate the experiences of others of a lesser status. Furthermore, postmodern epistemological challenges would question whether there is such an eternally validated and objective spiritual truth (we will return to that in our section on integralism).

More and more, we are witnessing a huge cultural change, at

least in the Western countries, the birth of a kind of third culture, that differs both from the believers in premodern traditional religions, and from the modernist rejection of anything spiritual and religious. These 'postmodern' or 'transmodern' cultural creatives (according to the research of sociologist of Paul Ray), constitute about one third of the Western population, are the only section growing in numbers, compared to the declining numbers of premoderns, and the static number of moderns. They are open to the spiritual search and in search of concrete experiences and psychotechnologies to validate their belief in human betterment, but they want a spirituality that reflects their modern values, postmodern epistemological sophistication, and needs for democracy and human rights, including gender equality. With the reference to the postmodern I essentially mean the increasing conviction that truth is not to be found in one place, in one tradition, but is something that is collectively build confronting various perspectives, and that this can only come from personal experience and maturation, not belief or generational transmission.

Often, they do not seem to find it in the traditional religions, and many of them are already out of the traditions in which they were born and raised, if they were raised in one at all, as at least in Europe, numerous people can be said to have grown up in atheistic and humanistic households, and sometimes in overtly anti-religious environments without access to the traditions. They have many times a typical postmodern attitude of mixing various elements in the making of a kind of personal religion. In many cases, they did try to find answers in their own 'Western' traditions, but found them wanting, esteeming them unable to face the current slate of civilizational and ecological crises, let alone being of assistance in their personal hunger for a meaningful existence in these in many ways dislocated postmodern times.

Of course, there is a lot to be criticized in that milieu and social environment as well, as it is there that the various modern religious phenomena, and the New Age marketplace, have originated. But it is in this context that the need for a peer to peer conception of spirituality has originated, and is already emerging as a concrete practice.

A first expression of this feeling and new cultural understanding of religion has come from John Heron, who wrote *Sacred Science* and

pioneered a form of collective research called cooperative inquiry. In his experience-based system, no spiritual truths are taking for granted, but the various spiritual questions are explored, using the variety of psychotechnologies from different traditions. Needless to say that all the participants in these types of inquiry are considered to be equals, and everyone's experience is taking into account. Another milestone has been the work of Jorge Ferrer, who wrote *"Revisioning Transpersonal Psychology: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality"*. Both authors are also criticizing the integrative work of Ken Wilber, which may be considered the most sophisticated current integrator and defender of the idea of a common truth and structure in the various religions. Ferrer says that unlike this traditional notion of the transcendent unity of religions, which uses the metaphor of various paths leading to the same mountaintop, one has to use the metaphor of the many beaches on the Ocean of the Divine. The difference is subtle but fundamental. Indeed, for Jorge Ferrer we are co-creating the universe, and co-creating our spiritual experiences, therefore there is not one mountaintop, but a vast ocean of possible experiences, some of which have yet to be written as future experience has yet to be created and take place. With this kind of conception, we totally abandon the conception of an Absolute Truth, but we enter an era of the collective creation of spiritual realities, through personal experience and intersubjective dialogue. A dialogue of equals, hence this is a true expression of the peer to peer sensibility, and following the logic of the first section of my essay, the expression in the spiritual world of this new civilisational format.

Apart from these theoretical developments, there has been a concomitant growth in this type of spiritual groups. Of course, this peer to peer format is not the privilege of the socially progressive, but can also be used by other forces. Hence, peer to peer formats of organization have been used by Al Qaeda (which is also a feudal structure of obedience, and a well-organised corporation) and by what is reportedly the fastest growing religion in the US: i.e. extreme right wing Odinism which has adopted the peer to peer strategy of 'leaderless resistance'.

In conclusion: peer to peer is already an objectively emerging format for social organizing and subjective feeling/knowing, which also finds its expression in the world of spirituality and religion. But is also a

new requirement for existing religious movements: a series of normative rules that their practices are adapted to the current democratic and postdemocratic (with this we mean non-represential formats of participation) demand level of postmodern humanity. Those movements that will not adapt, will limit their memberships to premodern 'conventionals', those that do adapt will be able to attract cultural creatives and the like. But more likely, we will see the continuing emergence of peer to peer based spiritual groups, unaffiliated with any tradition. However, we will see how these, by itself very radical requirements of nonrepresentational democracy in the spiritual sphere, are to be paired and toned down by a second set of requirements that result from an 'integralist' understanding of sprituality, which we discuss in the next session, and which demand a respectful and integrative attitude towards each sedimented layer of social-spiritual practice.

II. CHALLENGE TWO: INTEGRALISM

II.1. CONSERVATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 'PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY'

The author of this essay does not have sufficient theological background to state exactly when the idea of the transcendent unity of religions arose, but it seems to be a truly modern conception. Before, exclusionary convictions that one's own religious group had privileged access to an objective Absolute Truth was the dominant conception. Hence the history of religion is not only a beautiful story of the civilisational aspects of religion, but also one of forced conversion, physical elimination of non-believers, civil wars with heretical groups of one's own tradition, etc... Faced with this divisive reality, one can either desire to go on a path of dialogue, i.e. recognizing the differences but trying to go beyond them, or one can try to find common elements of truth, and become an adherent of the unity of religions. Today still, religion is often one of the basic divisive issues leading to civil strife with a concrete danger of a globalised struggle between civilizations based on different religious convictions, as described by Samuel Huntington.

One of its first broader expressions of objective unity was with the German Idealist movement, which defended the idea that the life of

Spirit was objectifying itself through human history, on a global and universal scale, as most beautifully expressed by Hegel. From that moment on, the idea was more and more distributed amongst many spiritual seekers, though in my opinion the conventional majority of believers would rather intuitively support the concept of a simple dialogue of religions. In this conception, radical differences remain, but they are relegated to the private sphere, while the public sphere operates according to the rules of civil society and religious tolerance. Religions continue to compete to save souls according to the true religion, but the way the competition is now organized, protects civil peace.

However, even as the mainstream modern culture got secularized and became materialistic in its philosophical conceptions, the idea of the transcendent unity of religions was being expressed by smaller philosophical and religious movements. Most vocal proponents of this thesis were conservative 'traditionalists' such as Rene Guenon, Julius Evola, Fritjof Schuon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and contemporary writers such as Seyed Hossein Nasr and Huston Smith. Most of these authors hold the conviction that common religions should be divided into a culturally dependent outer exoteric side, which mainly functions as a system of social control, and a inner core of esoteric teachings based on access to the same Absolute Truth. Following the invention of the nondual tradition, seen by most of these authors as the highest expression of spiritual truth, it is said that these Truths is outside time and space, but it does inform the various exoteric religions and most believers who desire this would have access to it. At the same time, these authors differ in the assessment of the actual religions closeness to this core truth, most of them agreeing that it is only faintly present still in Catholicism, more so in Orthodoxy, almost totally absent from Protestantism, and much more part and parcel of the Eastern religions. Most of these authors are also strict "devolutionists", i.e. they reject Modernity, the Enlightenment, the ideologies of social liberation and their attendant for them 'catastrophic' revolutions. On the contrary they reject theories of evolution, if not on the physical plane, then on the spiritual plane, and see the unfolding of history as a constant regression from a high period where Tradition was still upheld. Even the more democratic and progressive amongst them, such as Huston Smith, who basically accept modernity, would hold that

since the Truth comes from access to the Formless, it is not impacted by the changing world of form. These group of thinkers are best suited to be called 'perennialists', as they are proponents of an eternally fixed form of spiritual liberation or enlightenment. They are indeed the conservative wing concerning conceptions of the 'transcendent unity of religions'. It should also be said that these theories are in fact based on metaphysical preconceptions, hence 'unprovable', and that they therefore generally fall short of postmodern epistemological requirements, which would demand a 'post-metaphysical' spirituality (as first described Jurgen Habermas and discussed by Ken Wilber in an essay on the author forum of the shambhala.org site).

In terms of an analysis of the types of millenialist movements (definitions from David Landes), it would seem that the former set of theories also belong to the subset of 'catastrophic millenialism', since they all expect that, before a new cycle of cosmic history is to begin, this cycle will be totally destroyed first.

II.2. PROGRESSIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION: THE INTEGRALISTS

What then are integralists? They basically share the same conviction of a transcendent unity of religion, but accept evolution, not only on the physical plane, but also in the world of spiritual experience and maturation, and this not only on an individual level, but on the collective level of spiritual groups and even civilizations. In fact, they see progress on all levels of cosmological and human history, despite its many setbacks, pathologies and regressions, though they insist that the evolution on the social and spiritual plane is not deterministic, but dependent on human agency.

Again here, we should note that the German Idealists were probably the first to give expression to such conceptions that the world was actually spiritually evolving, though they were talking about an Objective Spirit. But then came two spiritual giants, one Western, one Eastern, who gave voice to a totally new spiritual conception that informed their spiritual practice. In the West, we have of course the Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, who tried to marry evolution with his Catholic theology. Basically, he saw the creation of the geosphere

consisting of dead matter, the birth of a biosphere based on life, and the subsequent creation of a noosphere based on the cultural evolution of mankind. This evolution is not the result of any divine intervention, but based on the inherent logic of the principles active in the phenomenological world. The evolution is towards ever more complexity and integration and the human world, rather than participating in the laws of entropy and disintegration, is on the contrary an element of extropy, of increased integration and structure in the world, not only in the cultural world of his own making, but through his physical and technological interventions, in the physical cosmos as well. As matter and life evolve, so does the moral sphere, were through love and solidarity, mankind is increasingly integrated, until the moment it becomes a kind of collective entity which recreates or merges with the Godhead. For the first time, an explicitly religious person accepts the world and its evolution, as a prime part of the divine plan for perfection, rather than as the source of evil and distraction. Very similar in its logic is the work of Sri Aurobindo, who combined Hinduism with a thorough immersion in western philosophy and science, and in particularly evolutionary theories and developed a similar sets of conception where the world of spirit is not static, but participates in the positive evolution of the cosmos. With this conception, we arrive at a concept of Evolutionary Enlightenment (a concept recently formulated by Ken Wilber in dialogue with Andrew Cohen in the magazine *'What is Enlightenment'*, issue 21, on the 'future of religion', sie wie.org). In contrast with traditional Hinduism, and especially original Buddhism, rather than seeing an eternally fixed Enlightenment that can be obtained by a detachment from the world of samsara, this new conception requires an active participation in the world. But just as important the very form of Enlightenment also changes, since from the nondual perspective of Aurobindo, the physical world is just as real as the world of the formless, and both influence each other. In Buddhism, we see an evolution that is described by David Loy as the 'three turns of the wheel'. The first was when the Buddha showed how to liberate oneself through detachment from desire and the world, the second came with Nagarjuna, and the subsequent reforms, where the boddhisatva vow stated that rather than reach Nirvana on an individual basis, compassionate masters would return until every living being was

liberated. And the turning of the third wheel occurs when the realization sets in that in order to achieve this, one has to actively participate in the creation of a better world where such a process would be possible. But in any case, the world is no longer just seen as samsaric, but as a very part of the divine itself, equally evolving towards perfection, though in need of the conscious intervention of Man to do so. Indeed, if in feudal societies the social order was seen as given and divinely ordained, this is no longer the case with the advent of modernity, where the social order is clearly seen as a human construct, and hence '(post)modernized' spiritualities have to integrate this new set of ethical demands for a more just society.

Amongst the important secular authors who have taken up this line of thinking are the Swiss cultural historian Jean Gebser, inventor of the concept of the integral mode of consciousness. Gebser has written a remarkable overview of cultural evolution, called *The Ever-Present Origin*. His main thesis is that the self is a structure that evolves, giving rise to very distinct mentalities that determine the structure of society. He distinguishes the archaic, that state close to the animal kingdom of which little can be known; he describes the magical mode of consciousness, active in tribal societies, where every object is animated; he describes the mythological mode of consciousness, which dominates agricultural societies; and he describes the emergence of what he calls the mental-rational, born in Greece but dominant in the industrial world. He argues that for each phase, there is a period of positive integration, and a subsequent period where, when objective conditions are changing so that it is no longer operative in a positive way, this same mentality becomes pathological, pointing to the need for its replacement. Often, it will be the new religious forms that are the agency of such a needed 'consciousness upgrade'.

But most original in his work is the description of the birth of a new form of integral consciousness born at the beginning of last century, amongst the most advanced minds in art, culture, science, technology, etc.. and his book is a most impressive elucidation of the change of culture that took place then, with numerous examples showing an amazingly wide erudition. The integral consciousness differs from all the previous one in the important aspect in that it is the first mode to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Indeed, all the previous modes were repressive

towards the mode that preceded it. Each mentality considers the previous mode as essentially negative and demonic. And indeed, who needs to be reminded of the atrocities of the monotheistic religions in combating paganism, and of the anti-religious and anti-traditional attitude of modernism, with its ambition for a tabula rasa. Integralism is different: here, individuals start for the first time to recognize that their self is constituted from these different layers, and that each has a particularly useful function in specific contexts. Hence integral consciousness abandons the destructive attitude of modernism towards tradition, but instead strives for transparency, learning individuals and collectives to recognize such modes of operation, but also crucially, when their use is inappropriate and pathological. In purely psychological terms, this work has been elaborated by Clare Graves and popularized by the system of Spiral Dynamics. Integralism is also essentially multi- or a-perspectival. Unlike modernity, characterized by the invention of perspective, a fixed individual looking at a knowable objective world, integral trans-modernity sees, following the work of the great masters of doubt, that such an individual has a personal unconscious (Jung, Freud), a social unconscious (Marx) and is part of various webs of language (Derrida), power (Foucault) etc.. so that he is always part of systems that preclude such objectivity. The world is rather constituted by contrasting various perspectives, and thus, essentially a dialogical construct. The aim of the integral person is to be able to see such differing perspectives, while being unattached to a particular one, so as to see and create the richest world possible.

But Jean Gebser has a glaring weakness, he did not know, or did not write about, any specific spiritual perspective. And his definition and description of the integral mode of consciousness lacks any recognition of any trans-mental or trans-rational state that may disclose further aspects of reality. And this is wherein lies the fundamental importance of the work of Ken Wilber.

Ken Wilber burst into fame when he already wrote an impressive integrative masterpiece at the age of 23, *"The Spectrum of Consciousness"*, for which he was already called an "Einstein of Consciousness" by various icons of the transpersonal psychology movement. In this book, he offered an integrative description of the

development of the ego, using the items of consensus from among at least thirteen psychological schools. But he did not stop there. Based on an amazing amount of reading into all the world's major traditions, and their sacred texts and reports on meditative/contemplative practices and achievements, he posited that all the major religions shared a very similar story of post-Ego development, with psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual stages or modes of spiritual consciousness. This thesis was defended with not only very sound theoretical underpinnings but with a mountain of citations, constituting irrefutable proofs of commonality, from the major traditions East and West. Thus for the very first time in history, we had a development framework, not only based on the scientific achievements of western psychological science, but also on the major spiritual achievements of the East, with evidence not just from one tradition, but from all, including data from the western Christian contemplative traditions, which were shown to be similar in their pronouncements. That at least was the claim of Wilber and his defenders, and I must admit that for about fifteen years, I was a staunch supporter of such a claim. Suddenly, the claim to a transcendent unity of religion was no longer based on a speculative understanding and ideological position, but based on scientific data from psychology and the rational study of religion. No mean feat for a 23-year old. Wilber did not stop there. If his first book was based on the development and transcendence of an individual self (further elaborated in "The Atman Project" and more recently in "Integral Pscychology"), his fourth book made clear the sociological and political implications of his claim, because in *"Up from Eden"* he fleshes out a second thesis, namely that sociogenesis follows psychogenesis. Following Gebser, the book is an outline of the evolution of the world and the succession of civilizations, but he goes one step further in predictive power or ambition. He concludes that societies are indeed dominated by successive mentalities or value-systems, the industrial world now largely by mental-rational consciousness, moving towards integral conceptions in its culturally leading minorities, but that the evolution of society will in all likelihood broadly follow the evolution shown by the modes of consciousness of the spiritual elites (though he stresses the non-deterministic nature of this hypothesis). And Wilber usefully updates Gebser, making the schemes more realistic, by distinguishing between

the average mode of consciousness, responsible for society as a whole and its governing elites (the temporal powers), and the mode of consciousness of its most advanced practitioner, which acts as a 'strange attractor'. (see the distance between Christ and the actual practice of the Churches, or the distance between a Buddha and the actual practices of popular and institutional Buddhism). Also important is that Ken Wilber, like Gebser, but with more fleshing out, claims that secular humanism and postmodernism, are equally spiritual, respectively echoing mental-rational and integral modes even though sometimes in their pathological aspects, thereby arguing that they are more able to deal with complexity, and more apt to integration, than the magical, mythological, and mythical-rational modes typical of the mainstream believers and power elites who hold sway over organized religion. But these modes are equally less sophisticated and encompassing of the full spectrum of human and societal possibility, than the modes of consciousness and functioning of saints and sages in the psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual modes. Since writing these two fundamental books early in his career, Wilber has continued to write further integrations, notable in his major work *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*, in *A Brief History of Everything*, and in, *A Theory of Everything*, which for the first time fleshes out an active program of social and political intervention based on his theorising.

In these latter books, he also developed the four-quadrant heuristic scheme that I discussed above, which has the advantages that it is not deterministic, since quadrants influence each other, but not 'determine' the other, rather it is a case of recognizing correlations and the inner logic behind them. The integration of the inner-outer polarity avoids any physicalist or materialist reductionism, and points to the need to always take into account I, and 'we' perspectives, next to the objective 'It' perspective. The agency-communion polarity avoids any individualistic or essentialist traps, as everything has always to be considered in its various systemic applications.

II.3. POSSIBLE CRITICISMS OF INTEGRALISM

As the integral movement has gathered strength and become more visible, it has also generated more and more criticism.

It is clear that postmodern consciousness would have a hard time,

with a conception of development that is hierarchical, consisting of successive integrations that are each 'higher' or 'more encompassing' than the other. Despite Wilber's emphatic denials, is this not another 'grand narrative' based on a discredited 'ideology of progress'? And does he not give more credence and superiority to Western rationality and postmodernity rather than to the magical and mythological experience in the Eastern popular religions? (to which he would reply: "yes, I do, but I also point out that these Western modes, which are universal anyway, are less developed and encompassing than the wisdom modes of these eastern religions, as Western Christianity has, for particular historical reasons that I have explained, made these attainments impossible within the framework of the Churches, despite the occasional exceptions such as Master Eckhardt etc..").

Despite his structural correlations, does Wilber not make short shrift of the differences between religions? Contrast Wilber's approach with that of Professor Libbrecht in Belgium, who, as a master of comparative religions, describes how each religion brings a unique perspective, that is of use to each individual who would make the effort to look beyond its tradition. It is precisely because they are not the same that they are interesting, and any structural similarities are actually superficial compared to their profound differences. Thus, even though we can admit to fundamental differences, these are not necessarily to be seen as antagonistic, but rather as complementary. Is Wilber's theorizing not itself an expression of an outmoded form of consciousness, showing a need for unity where none actually exists, and he would be better off accepting diversity and playing with it, in true postmodern fashion.

Peer to peer theorists such as John Heron and Jorge Ferrer, are also anti-Wilberians, and point out that his system is deterministic, and does not allow for autopoesis and co-creation of spiritual realities. It is not because some sages have attained certain particular experiences in the past, that the future will necessarily bring the same. And Wilber's fails to see how the past expressions of religion and spirituality are fundamentally determined by the prevalent and exploitative social structures of their time and can in no way be a full guide to the present. Present and future spiritual experiences will have to be informed by the cultural and social relationships of today and tomorrow, with the latter

being beyond prediction. They also claim that he is biased towards the nondual tradition, and that in any case, his integration only includes the 'state religions' (i.e. not taking fully into account the pre-historical religions). In concrete spiritual experiencing they say, there is no such thing as the seemingly orderly progression of stages that Wilber describes.

Other criticisms are more political. Many note that his whole system is, despite the four quadrants, biased towards the experience of the self, and only marginally takes into account the collective aspects of religion. Socially engaged Buddhists rarely appreciate Wilber for example, and find books like *'One Taste'*, which describe Wilber's personal spiritual experiences, a distasteful expression of a narcissistic personality, not to mention the negative reactions to his novel *'Boomeritis'*. He is also taken to task for failing to clearly condemn 'scumbag gurus' that he has supported in the past, such as the notorious Da Free John, that Wilber himself touted as the most advanced expression of spiritual consciousness to date, but who has been accused of numerous abuses by ex-followers. In the last few years, Wilber has more or less merged his concerns with those of Don Beck, a disciple of psychologist Clare Graves, who has popularized and simplified the latter's system in the form of 'value-systems' that succeed each other. But Don Beck is a defender of George Bush and Ken Wilber a staunch advocate of Tony Blair, which he sees as the epitome of an integral politician, despite the latter's Iraqi adventure and dubious use of evidence, which lost him the confidence of his own electorate. These kind of concrete political choices are not immune from criticism in the real world of strife, and can be seen as clearly taken sides, perhaps on the wrong side of the fence.

The kind of political integration that Wilber is after, often looks quintessentially American, as a kind of synthesis of liberal Democrats and culturally progressive Republicans, and thus in fact, very limited. What in any case is in my mind clearly lacking in Wilber is an integral 'critical' theory, which would also integrate critical analysis of the current society and its dominant socio-economic forms, and thus not reduce everything to the 'limited stage of consciousness' of the players. Wilber himself has on occasion called for precisely such 'critical integral theory', but it has not been forthcoming. Instead, the movement seemed to have split between a mainstream now closely allied with the ideas of Spiral

Dynamics of Don Beck, and a series of 'left-wing' integralists which have found a home in such collaborative environments as the postconpol (postconventional politics) mailing list, with writers and researchers such as Ray Harris, Greg Wilpert, and others.

Are these just matters of errors of judgments in areas that Wilber cannot expect to master all by himself? Or is there something wrong with his basic political orientation. Since Wilber's discovery and endorsement of Spiral Dynamics, Wilber has focused his critical work on what he calls Boomerities, a pathological form of postmodernism, which he sees as dominant in American academia. And increasingly, his work has been focused on combating this spiritual disease, implying that it is the major drawback to the emergence of a healthy integral consciousness, aligning himself with the neoconservative ideology of Don Beck. Using his own colour-coding of value-memes from the interpretative system of Spiral Dynamics, the debate is framed as follows: "is the key problem facing the world not the 'mean orange meme' of unbridled neoliberalism, i.e. the pathology of the 'modern' mental-rational form of consciousness, or rather the 'mean green meme', i.e. the narcissism of postmodern theorisers, i.e. the pathology associated with the postmodern form of consciousness"?

But here indeed one can question whether the world is really dominated by postmodern academics, rather than by a political and economic system run by greed and lust for power, expressions of rather earlier modes of consciousness. Wilber's political functioning in fact proceed from this fundamental interpretation of what mode of consciousness is responsible for the actual state of the world, and by pinpointing the mentality of the Boomers as the key impediment, he echoes the culture wars being waged against postmodernity by the neoconservatives, who have a very similar culprit in their struggle against what they call 'political correctness'. Echoing the 'battle of colour epithets' which is a regular feature of SD and 'integralism' inspired political debates, Beck's former colleague and co-founder of Spiral Dynamics, calls the former a 'blue Republican', harking back to an even earlier mode of 'value-memes', associated with the fundamentalist religion informing many in the Bush team.

To add a personal criticism as well, evolving out of my own

concern for the emergence of peer to peer as new civilizational format and form of spiritual practice. Wilber himself hardly talks about it, if he ever did, and his vision of the human being seems to me largely dominated by the view that they are those that 'get it', because they have gone 'beyond ego', thereby acquiring the spiritual authority to have a discourse with their peer group, and those that don't 'get it'. The question would seem to be: is a mental-rational consciousness, whether or not in its integral form, not already sufficient to have a rational and solidarity-based discourse that could formulate answers to contemporary world problems, or do we need more spiritual development by larger groups of people (Wilber himself estimates the current percentage of the population able to reason 'integrally' at two percent at the most, so the higher transpersonal stages are hardly present)? And is spiritual development by itself the answer, at least formulated in the sense of having stable access to the socalled higher stages of consciousness. In the context of the many scandals and turpitudes involving spiritual masters and their followers, I would strongly question such a view. If 'spiritual masters' have indeed mastered domains of consciousness unbeknownst to the most of us, it does not at all follow that they have equally developed their moral sense and capacity of action on behalf of others (i.e. positive social intervention), as well as a knowledge of the contemporary phenomenological world and its huge complexities. Contrarywise, many people and activists, at many different stages of consciousness, have developed such capacities.

Also, after many years of personal seeking and experience, I would also like to question the negative conceptions of the ego that are pervasive in Wilberian literature, especially in the context of the current emphasis in Wilber's writings on the purported narcissism of the boomer generation. I believe that there are 'progressive' spiritual traditions that focus on the possibilities of betterment for all, with little specific stress on ego-death and the evils of the ego, that see spiritual evolution as essentially continuous, and other 'negative' traditions, culminating in the dualist traditions associated with gnosticism and Manicheism, but present in all traditions, of a 'war' against the ego, and that are essentially 'discontinous'. In my view, an emphasis of the latter has often a distinct correlate of hatred of the self and the world, and is not necessarily conducive to spiritual development, especially in the sense of higher moral

capabilities for selfless action. Wilberian writings increasingly fit the discontinuous scheme. Does a P2P conception, insisting on a common spiritual authority of a brother/sisterhood of seekers, not a healthier conception?

Finally, let me contrast the peer to peer set of ideas and the Wilberian form of integralism. The problem with the first, if we would want to extent it from a simple anthropological description of existing tendencies to a normative program and solution for the current civilisational crises, is that it indeed has to cope with, has to integrate, the very strong 'hierarchical' realities that dominate the human race up to the present. Will the emergence of a fully peer to peer civilization not founder on the essentially dominating/dominated nature of human relationships? Or, in other words, will the Pelagian optimism that P2P exhibits, not again be defeated by the Augustinian 'original sin', the conviction and reality that mankind is essentially evil? But Wilber has an opposite and equally serious problem. The worldview is essentially hierarchical, posits forms of consciousness that are superior and more encompassing than others. How to square this with the democratic equality of all citizens? With the postmodern distaste for authority? And, with the aspirations for truly peer-based relations which is growing every day in the new generations. This is a weakness of Wilberian discourse so far, a lack of capability of framing their otherwise interesting and valid ideas in a format that does not fly in the face of current sensibilities.

What is the import all this for the issue of globalisation of religion? My own take is that Wilber is an enormously stimulating integrator, but that indeed, the system occludes true diversity. Hence, while it is enormously useful to look at structural and developmental similarities between the worlds' major religions, it is equally useful to look at them in their unique differences, and to focus on the unique existential positioning that they are based on. So in my opinion, the future of religion is dialogic and cross-experiential. Unlike before, we now live in an age, where the fullness of that diversity is visible and open to experiencing and verification, so that each individual can enrich his human potential and discover 'the other' in the process. The result of such intermingling will not be a new world religion (see the relative failure of the Bahai religion, as the last such attempt, as it has remained peripheral on a world

scale), but a worldwide process of dialogue. What we need then is some kind of 'contributive theology', which takes building blocks from each religion, so that each individual can enrich his edifice of understanding and meaning. But Wilber has been enormously useful in pointing out some structural similarities in the experiences of the mystics and contemplatives, and in pointing out which psycho-technologies have been used to attain and experience them. This has taken religion out of the realm of sole belief and convention, and into the realm of personal and collective verification on a world scale. In a modern world, which rejected spirituality and religion, because it rejected any belief based on simple authority, Wilber has infused the world with the necessary idea that the experiences are real, and that, in my opinion is a most important and stunning achievement, which will eventually make a true science of religion possible. This work has in fact already begun, with for example Michael Murphy's *The Future of the Body*, and the later summary for the general reader, God and the Evolving Universe, which document more than a century and a half of research. These books are a clear indication of the birth of an explicit spiritual transhumanism, a practice for developing other potentialities and concretely enhancing our capacities for understanding and love, that goes beyond any specific religion, but extracts their psycho-technologies and achievements for the whole of humanity. These moral, ethical and physical capabilities existed before, but they are now for the first time extracted from their magical and mythological shells, and made available for cross-comparison. At a time where neoliberalism is reducing the human to a simple utility to be used in the productive process, this is a vital development. It is also vital to balance the dangers of the third challenge, i.e. technological transhumanism, which we will discuss in the third section.

III. CHALLENGE THREE: TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSHUMANISM

Peer to peer is a challenge and a solution to globalised religion in that it offers a tool to introduce into religious practice the requirements of radical democracy, and cleanse it of the exploitative residue of the past. Integralism is a challenge and a solution in that it offers a way to

position oneself towards a globalised reality where every religion is now available and interacting worldwide. But the third challenge is one that is perhaps the most important of all, because it concerns the very future of humanity. Indeed, technological transhumanism clearly poses the challenge of the End of Man, or of an emergence of a destructive TechnoCalypse on a cosmic scale.

Let us remember the three grand technological programs of the current age. Three technologies that can effectively be called transhuman, because they radically extend the natural and cultural limits of mankind: artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology.

The first one concerns the noosphere, and the life of the Mind: Artificial Intelligence is a program that reduces human knowledge and operative power to its informational digital format of bits and bytes, in order to operate universal machines that will one day be able to reproduce themselves. In religious terms it expresses the dream of the Golem, the building of an artificial human that can undertake any tasks. With technological dreams like the uploading (adding add-on's to our brains) or downloading (downloading our consciousness in machines) of consciousness, and the dream and realities of the cyborg (mixed human/artificial beings), the question on the horizon is: will human minds become obsolete.

The second concerns the biosphere, life itself and our very genetic constitution. Biotechnology reduces our genetic life program to its informational underpinning through the manipulation of DNA. Through the Human Genome project, artificial reproduction technologies, the creation of chimeras (new combined species that never existed before), and biotechnology generally, mankind is repositioning itself to obtain power for a Second Genesis, solely operated by humans. Jeremy Rifkin adds that we can either choose that hard path, characteristic of an antagonistic and utilitarian attitude towards nature, or a "soft path", which seeks to understand existing evolution, in order to better integrate ourselves within that process. The question on the horizon here is: are our bodies obsolete? Since biotechnology and especially cognitive neuroscience also gains increasing power to chemically manipulate our minds, it also poses again the first question.

The third technology concerns the geosphere, the world of matter.

Nanotechnology reduces matter to its informational underpinnings in the molecular and atomic structure, thereby realizing the dream of unlimited control and transformation of the material world. Through nanotechnology we can envision a time where any kind of matter can be transformed into any other. Merging the three technologies described here, we can envision smart and self-reproductive nanomachines. The three technologies taken together, paint a picture of almost total power and control over the natural world, which includes our own biology and intelligence. In fact, some say, such as Kurzweil, Moravec, et al., that we are in the very process of creating a superior life-form, which will transcend our own limits.

This technocalyptic program that mankind has embarked upon, has a series of serious spiritual implications. The first concerns our very identity as human beings in the current natural world, where we can change both terms of the equation at an unprecedented level. How far do we want to go in these transformations? The second concerns the control of our own destiny. Of course, we have always been subject to natural systems, including our own biology, and its determinations, and to a social system out of control, but here we step into a wholly other level of lack of control of our own self-created technological systems, with possible devastating dehumanizing effects, which are in fact already clearly visible today. As McLuhan had already pointed out, each technology is an externalization of the body and its powers, creating a much stronger collective human being, but weaker individuals, where technology actually functions as a handicap, because it destroys our own natural capacities. (for example, the automobile inhibits our capacity to walk). But we also create technologies that are based on very limited aspects of ourselves. We created machines based on the mechanical nature of our limbs, and then the industrial system (which is actually an expression of our digestive system), forces us to adapt ourselves to the purely mechanical nature of this machinery. We create computers based on the logical workings of our nervous system, then the system forces us to adapt to the highly abstract and logical nature of these computers, which furthermore operate in nanoseconds, creating inhumane stress through the speed-inducing culture that it forces upon us. Thus, we have to be very thoughtful about the nature of the technologies that we are creating,

making sure that they actually exhibit as much of our deeper spiritual and human natures that they possibly can. Our communication technologies are in many ways anti-meditative, creating a culture of constant reactivity. There are thus many, many pitfalls to be faced.

More importantly, we have to gain an understanding that we are in fact undertaking a spiritual quest. Our quest and yearning for technology is deeply spiritual but in a special sense. My hypothesis, which I formulated in the documentary *'TechnoCalyps'*, is the following:

- Somewhere in the sixteenth century, the cultural elites in the West, stopped believing in the possibilities of spiritual transhumanism, which carried the same type of dreams of superhuman powers, witness the yoga siddhis in Hinduism (where it is very easy to associate a particular siddhi or power with an actually existing technology, as has been demonstrated by Richard Thompson), the Taoist alchemy of immortality, or the Western traditions of a body of light, particularly the imagery of alchemy, and the belief and desire for a fully physical reincarnation of soul AND body so central to the Christian tradition, along with the miracles associated with the saints. The reasons for this process of abandoning the explicitly religious worldviews and sensibility have been widely discussed, amongst others in the fundamental book by Marchel Gauchet, *"Le Desenchantement du Monde"* which explains how the specificities of Christianity itself were responsible for the process of secularization. It may also be connected with the particular dualistic conception of Man vs. God in the Christian tradition, where it was specifically ruled out and prohibited, that a human being could be God like or Christ like and where the Church developed a particularly harsh policy of repression towards higher functionings, see its relentless struggle against the surviving pagan medicine women under the guise of the witchhunts for example. Official Christianity has historically lacked esoteric traditions such as Sufism within Islam, or the Kabbalah within Judaism, which could be the vehicle of access for such different functioning of the human bodymind. But whatever the reason, the cultural elites did indeed stop believing in spiritual transhumanism. The result is well known: the West became a thoroughly materialistic (in the philosophical and scientific sense) and secular civilization. But the urge to transcendence is not a marginal but a crucial aspect of human existence,

and hence, it can be argued, and I would strongly suggest that it is so, that the transcendent urge did not disappear, but instead went underground. The dreams and aspirations formerly expressed in religious and spiritual terms, became unconscious, and therefore started to express themselves in secular terms. Hence our quest for technology and its associated dreams of cosmic power, immortality and perpetual well-being, are thoroughly spiritual in nature, although we could speak of a repressed and therefore distorted form of spirituality, since most technologists would be unaware of this. But scratch beyond the surface of any founder of the above technologies, as David Noble has done in his *'Religion of Technology'*, and you will find explicitly spiritual, and often explicitly religious dreams of a perfect world. This is the case for Erik Drexler, founder of nanotechnology, who explicitly dreamed of immortality in the suppressed chapter of his first book *Engines of Creation*, of Marvin Minsky, instructed specifically into the mythology of the Golem on his Bar Mitzvah, and the specific spiritual ambitions of the founders of the space program and biotech. (These aspects are documented in detail not only by Noble, but also in a 3-part TV documentary that the author of this essay co-produced with Frank Theys, entitled TechnoCalyps: the Metaphysics of Technology and the End of Man, the third part being explicitly devoted to spiritual and religious interpretations of this technological eschatology). Associated readings to document this hypothesis are *Cybergrace* by Jennifer Cobb, *Technonosis* by Erik Davis, the *Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, by Margaret Wertheim.

The latter is a history of the conceptions of space since the Middle Ages, starting with Dante, and up to the contemporary emergence of cyberspace. Wertheim shows how the changing conceptions on space reflect deep-seated worldviews on the self and the universe. Her history summarises the move from the medieval dualistic conception of space, with room for a physicalist earth and a spiritualised heaven (and thus with room for body AND soul), to the homogenized monist concept of just one physicalist space in the universe (and literally with no longer room for the soul and the divine). The current re-emergence of a non-physicalist cyberspace is thus indicative to her, of a coming revival of a spiritual conception of the human being.

Please also note the spiritual nature of the universally networked

machine that we are building. If we extrapolate to the far future, as Frank Tipler has done in the *Physics of Immortality*, we can see a machine that is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, not without accident three of the traditional characteristics of the Godhead (excluding omnibenevolence, though some Extropians argue that such a powerful God-machine 'must' be benevolent, if it is to survive the different civilisational stages of its growth, as described in the cosmic future history of Micheo Kaku). In Teilhardian-like but materialist fashion, Tipler foresees that humanity will one day leave the earth, driven by its own survival in escaping the eventual destruction of the solar system, and will bring life and intelligence to the rest of the universe, creating a cosmic supercomputer of awesome power in the process. This vision is not exceptional but shared in one form or another by many other technological visionaries such as Ray Kurzweil (The Age of Spiritual Machines), Hans Moravec (Children of the Mind), Max More of the Extropy Institute, and many more. In terms of millennialism, and as comparison with our judgment of the conservative perennialists above, these visions seem to be secular visions of transformative millennialism, answering to the same human need for hope, but carrying the same dangers asscociated with unchecked utopianism. According to many commentators, including myself, they often function as real 'crypto-religions', to their followers, despite their own, often visceral, dislike of anything religious or spiritual.

It is sometimes hard to know how far humanity will be able to go in the realization of these technological dreams, but at the very least we have to acknowledge that the technological machine is accelerating its development. Technological transhumanism, the desire to create a paradise on earth rather than in heaven, seems equally fundamental to our human nature. Hence, I do not believe it will be eradicated. But if we look at it in an integrative fashion, we can see how a renewed and informed practice of spiritual transhumanism, can be beneficial in balancing the former quest. Indeed, spiritual practices remind us that our higher potential for love and transformation are also available through inner practices. Spiritual practices have explicit warnings about spiritual materialism, the propensity for seekers to want to 'have' experiences, and to hold on to them. In the world of the Sufi's: heaven is the hell of the saints. Spiritual transhumanism also has highly evolved ethical systems and reminds us

that if we ever want to control our machines, we need an upgrade of our own wetware, i.e. our own moral capacities. We also have to constantly remind ourselves of our capacity for selfdetermination, and we have to radically disbelieve fixed scenarios for the future. Technological transhumanists and the forces supporting them in this for-profit economic system, often want to convince us that we have no choice. But we have. If technology is inevitable, it can take many forms, many of which are more respectful of nature and of our fellow human beings, and of our own nature, than the technologies being proposed. We have to start, not only in terms of externalizing, to think about technologies, about the powers of our bodies, and our nervous systems, but also to think about their higher ethical potential. Least of all we have to remind ourselves that our social and political systems are also technologies, and that they should also be influenced by the conscious agency of all, rather than solely of exploitative elites.

Thus again, what we need is an informed dialogue between the two competing perspectives of technological and spiritual transhumanism: both are part of our human yearning for transcendence, and both have their pathologies. A conscious dialogue, an openness to the offerings of both coupled with an openness to the 'shadows' of both, would be hugely beneficial to mankind, and possibly, one of the essential features of our salvation from technologically induced destruction. Let me remind you of the triple meaning of the Apocalypse, and hence of the Technocalypse: it is an unveiling of the hidden truth, it is the destruction of a dysfunctional world, but it is also the creation of a better world for all, not only in the physical world where our bodies live, but in the noospheric world where our souls communicate, allowing for a communion with the common spirit which sustains all and everything. That is the greatest challenge of them all, to create a humane world where this is truly possible and infused with love.

And this is simply impossible without the further development of wisdom, the enduring legacy of spiritual transhumanism, though we may indeed hypothesise the adaptation of its existing forms to that of a peer to peer civilization.