# Can You See the Elephant Sun God?

An Open Letter for a Vision of Humanity in the 21st Century

## by Gregg Henriques

As those close to me know, during the spring-into-summer semesters, I experienced some conflicts with my psychology doctoral program. Without getting into specifics, let's just say that I was somewhat "out of step" with the cultural milieu, and several students reacted to that, and I reacted to their reaction, resulting in some unpleasant waves. I believe everything has been processed, and a clear path to our trusting baseline has been found. I feel good about how it was ultimately handled and where things are currently, and I have grown from it. As we frequently read about in the news, disputes of this nature can sometimes end differently. From my perspective, the themes of the conflict can be well-characterized in terms of a "cultural political identity" dynamic. The basic gist was this: Starting with my sabbatical in the fall and continuing through this year, I have been delving deeply into the current-into-future cultural chaotic state of the world. Consequently, I have started to develop a much clearer vision for what we (i.e., humanity) are facing this century, and what we need to do about it. This newfound awareness resulted in my being less tolerant of key aspects of the current political polarization in the US. This, in turn, "charged" the socio-political-personal field. Consider, for example, the Jordan Peterson Phenomenon. I have argued that we (i.e., the field of psychology in general and our program in particular) should embrace this phenomenon as wonderfully illustrative of modern conflicts of politics and identity that we need to understand and transcend. In that embrace, I have not always been sensitive to folks who have strong negative reactions to him and the controversy he sparks. Now that we are largely passed the conflict, I wanted to share where I am and what I am seeing.

The short story is that I have been down a rabbit hole, and I am emerging out the other side in a new space. I strongly desire to share what I have found with everyone who cares about the state of humanity going forward. I say this not out of grandiosity, but rather because I have a deep-seated conviction that what follows has global relevance—and directly involves the future of our children, writ large. Staying with the Peterson Phenomenon, I closely tracked the developments surrounding him, which took me into what is called the "Intellectual Dark Web" (IDW). The IDW was coined in early 2018, and it refers to a collection of public intellectuals who have attracted a massive internet following. Jordan Peterson is probably the most influential, but the group also includes Sam Harris, Joe Rogan, Dave Rubin, Ben Shapiro, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Eric and Brett Weinstein, among others. The group was profiled in the NY Times just over a year ago. The major figures in the IDW have a wide variety of different viewpoints, having been described by Peterson as a "herd of cats." So, what is it that unites them? They all have a distain for the massively primitive, chaotic, and polarized state of our political landscape. They also critique the modern state of the academy as being filled with BS, and they are deeply concerned about the direction of our knowledge systems.

The thing that has most charged this movement is that they have tended to direct their critiques at the "postmodern diversity and inclusive progressive" left. What is at the core of the

diversity and inclusion orthodoxy? According to the IDWers, it refers to the tendency to interpret all social dynamics and unequal outcomes solely in terms of power and an oppressed-oppressor algorithm, especially around the categories of race, sex, gender roles, and sexual orientation. For an example, see this [Sam Harris interview with Coleman Hughes on understanding the dynamics of race in the US.](#) The clash of worldviews was perhaps most starkly revealed in the now infamous ["Cathy Newman Interview" with Jordan Peterson,](#) as they discuss the nature of gender and gender inequality. One of Peterson's main claims pertains to the evolved psychological differences between men and women. He believes that gender cannot be "reduced" to the social construction of reality, but rather exists prior to human culture. That is, there are masculine and feminine archetypal ways of being that were not invented by people talking about it. (I generally agree, see [here](#)). This is a massively thorny issue, and its complications exploded onto the cultural scene dramatically with the Google Memo debacle. This episode involved a memo written by James Damore that raised questions about whether there were other reasons—in addition to gender stereotypes and oppression— that would cause upwards of 80% of the computer engineers to be men. Given that he thought there were other forces at play, he raised sensible questions about the logic and utility of some of the diversity training and inclusion efforts Google was promoting. The issue exploded, and he was ultimately fired by Google for creating an "unsafe" work environment. [The IDW folks would be united in seeing this as absurd](#). I am in general agreement with this; [see here for my analysis.](#)

I proceeded to follow the Peterson Phenomenon into what is called ["Rebel Wisdom,"](#) which is a fascinating organization and YouTube channel founded by David Fuller and Alexander Beiner. David Fuller saw in Peterson a man who was speaking to many of the issues of our day in a very different and much-needed voice. He left his job at the BBC and went on to help create Rebel Wisdom, which documented the Peterson Phenomenon and the emergence of the IDW in a film appropriately called ["The Glitch in the Matrix".](#) In the last year, Rebel Wisdom started to expand and explore other futuristic movements and emerging voices. Intriguingly, one key paradigm that became the focus of Rebel Wisdom was [Ken Wilber's Integral Theory.](#) In my opinion, Wilber has the best comprehensive psychological-philosophical system, aside from [the unified theory](#). Indeed, Andre Marquis and I have had many conversations about their overlap, differences and various strengths and weaknesses (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Although I was familiar with integral theory, I was not fully aware of its current state and influence. It turns out that, [although there have been some bumps in the road](#), integral is still a major force and a source of much wisdom, which is why Rebel Wisdom turned to it to help make sense of the Jordan Peterson Phenomenon.

Rebel Wisdom tunneled me deeper into the rabbit hole, as I took the turn from the "Intellectual Dark Web" into the "Intellectual Deep Web." Those who are familiar with the [Theory Of Knowledge (TOK) Society](#) list know that I hooked up with [Alexander Bard](#) in the fall of 2018, and joined his Intellectual Deep Web list serve. Indeed, it was largely because of Bard and his work on [Syntheism](#) as a new, comprehensive theology/philosophy for the 21st Century, that I got sucked down this rabbit hole to begin with. David [Fuller discussed the Deep Web concept with Peter Limberg,](#) who had co-authored with Connor Barnes, a [crucial white paper](#) on how the cultural landscape is changing from a bipolar left-right culture war to a "multipolar" culture war

with many different factions vying for influence and attention ([see here](#) for a podcast I did with Peter Limberg and [here](#) for one I did on Limberg's white paper). The "Deep Web" consists of other futurist thinkers, perhaps most notably Jordan Hall and Daniel Schmachtenberger from the [Neurohacker Collective](#), and the cognitive scientist John Vervaeke. It was understanding the perspectives of these individuals that enabled me to crystallize my awareness of the various global meta-crises we are facing.

[Jordan Hall](#) and [Daniel Schmachtenberger](#) both offer fascinating analyses that specify why the "game" civilization has been playing for the last 5,000 years or so may well not be sustainable. The analogy that they give is that the massive, technologically sophisticated interconnected global world is like a caterpillar eating away at its substrate. As Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now* attests, things have been going along quite well, perhaps minus the two World Wars of the 20th Century. But there are lots of signs of trouble and maybe indications of a civilization collapse. Moreover, since civilization is now globally interconnected, the collapse could be beyond anything we have seen in the past. They argue that if we are going to survive, humanity needs to pivot to a new kind of game in the future. What they call "Game B" is akin to the hope that the caterpillar that is humanity will be able to morph into a butterfly.

Deeply connected to the technology and global acceleration and interdependency dynamic, is what John Vervaeke calls "the meaning crisis." [He has a wonderful series on YouTube detailing the development of the meaning crisis.](#) The meaning crisis can be thought of, at least in part, as emerging from the shift from a modern to a postmodern state of world knowledge. The crisis refers to the fact that we don't have a shared sense of reality or morality, and we are struggling with how collectively to make sense out of how we ought to live in the current age. The roots of the modern meaning crisis can perhaps be most directly traced to Nietzsche and his observation that God was dead, having been killed by modern Enlightenment rationality. [Jordan Peterson argues a crucial consequence of modern science](#), perhaps [best exemplified in the new atheists](#), is that the continued pummeling of the dead theistic horse is that the populace's grip on sense-making and a shared universal morality has been precariously loosened.

The back half of the 20th Century additionally saw the crystallization of the philosophical postmodern analysis of knowledge as contextualized language games, justified primarily via its utility to serve those in power. (For a good debate on postmodernism, [see here](#)). This movement led to the general conclusion that to search for a grand synthetic philosophy was a quixotic quest that could never be realized. Unfortunately, postmodernism functions to legitimize a truly disorienting moral relativism. It also came with the double-edged sword that feminists, critical race theorists, and other progressives used against Western Civilization's past injustices, casting it as a hegemonic colonial patriarchy that caused much oppression and suffering to those outside of the White male caste. Although much of this critique, of course, carries validity, neutering one's civilization without also effectively embracing its strengths produces a one-sided solution to the difficulties that ultimately adds much fuel to the current crisis of meaning. The ultimate consequence of all of this is that, as Vervaeke notes, we are drowning in bullsh*t, both inside the academy and out. [He argues it is not accidental that the last decade has seen a strong resurgence of the zombie,](#) an archetypal symbol of mindless living

that is absent a soul oriented toward an existential moral purpose. (See here for a podcast I did on the concept of BS in our modern lives).

Deeply in line with some of my primary concerns as a clinical psychologist, Vervaeke notes that the West is seeing mental health crisis. The data are clear that we are witnessing an epidemic of depression, anxiety, isolation, and suicidality, and this is especially true in our children, adolescents and young adults, along with certain socio-economic groups, such as lower-class whites. The distribution of mental health problems aligns directly with the meaning crisis. It makes perfect sense that the identity politic wars would have their highest casualties among lower class whites. Lacking in capital and being blamed for causing injustices naturally results in a defensive, depressive, and reactive stance for this group. As for our youth, they are growing up in a culture racked by confusion and uncertainty and accelerating change, coupled with highly questionable parenting practices. Postmodernism potentially undermines a deep appreciation for the virtues that build strong character, and without a lodestar to work toward, parents turned to the most basic default, which is "safetyism" and harm avoidance. Moreover, as the Peterson Phenomenon demonstrates, our youth are suffering from a lack of meaning, and a sense of responsibility and self-sacrifice for a larger purpose (for more on how this impacts boys in particular, see Warren Farrell's Rebel Wisdom interview). As such, it is little wonder that modern kids feel so insecure. The unfortunate consequence is a toxic sensitivity, characterized by a hypervigilant self-absorbed defensiveness and an emerging culture of victimhood.

Put all this together a snapshot emerges of a multifaceted and global meta-crisis that threatens civilization writ large. I propose calling it the **Digital Identity Problem**. As I see it, this "macro-meta-problem" can be defined via the following four interlocking and interrelated crises that mark this as the Age of Confusion, with its Dickensesque feeling of this being simultaneously "the best of times and the worst of times." The four crises are: 1) *the meaning crisis* of reality and morality, which refers to the fact that a fragmented postmodern pluralism well-characterizes our current point in history and the state of our knowledge systems; 2) *the mental health crisis,* which refers to epidemic rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and social disconnection, especially in our youth; 3) *the techno-environmental crisis,* which refers to global climate change (for a particularly scary assessment, see here), resource depletion and extinction, and weapons of mass destruction, all interacting to create a precarious substrate for human existence; and 4) *the digital-globalization crisis,* which refers to the fact that computation and artificial intelligence, informational interface via iPhones and the like, and the Internet and social media interact to create a radically new digital landscape that throws existing modernist institutions like nations, media, and economic policies into massive flux, with both huge opportunities and massive potential for chaos. These crises intermix in complicated ways and threaten to create increasingly destabilizing feedback loops. Climate and resource change put pressure on nations and governments and result, among other things, in increasing migrant flux and greater tension over fewer resources. Digital life overloads our psyches resulting in confusion in being able to make meaning. The crisis of sense-making results in political chaos, and creates massive difficulties coordinating long-term actions to deal with these wicked problems.

In short, I posit that the Digital Identity Problem is the central problem humanity must solve in the 21st Century. And to do so, we must advance a much clearer picture of our identity (i.e., What is the human self?; What is humanity's nature?; What is our place on this planet and our relationship to it?) and find adaptive pathways of how we are going to harmonize with each other, digital technology, and mother Earth going forward.

Taking another turn in the rabbit hole, I recently entered another futurist community, one that is significantly more "sociological" and "educational" in its focus than the Intellectual Dark Web. This is the "metamodernist" group (see, e.g., here, here, and here). The basic thrust of this group is that we can trace humanity through the following phases of self-consciousness, narrative, and justification system development: 1) a pre-modern embodied, mythological narrative stance (i.e., pre-Enlightenment); 2) a modern individualistic, scientific, analytic stance (i.e., Enlightenment, modern science); 3) a postmodern plurality that emphasizes the socio-historical context of knowledge and embraces a pluralistic view; and 4) a metamodern integrative pluralism that embraces diversity, but also seeks unity and integration and grand narratives. With its focus on sociology, climate and education, metamodernists tend to criticize those in the IDW as being too conservative, too psychologically and individually oriented, too capitalistic, and overly rejecting of the postmodern sensibility. Interestingly, it seems integral theory is connected here also.

This brings the trail of my inquiry largely up-to-date. As far as I can tell, the Tree of Knowledge System and larger UTUA Framework can hold the key insights from the various groups I have encountered and assimilate and integrate them. Consider, for example, how consistent it is with the basic metamodern insight. Indeed, in my 2011 book, I called the unified theory a "post postmodern grand meta-narrative," which is the central thrust of the metamodern worldview. Consider that the ToK System is directly consistent with the new holistic movement in education and interdisciplinary study called Big History. The TOK Society Executive Committee has an in-press article in the *Journal of Big History* showing how the dimensions of existence frame of the ToK System both aligns with and clarifies several key elements of the Big History vision. One of the most fascinating aspects of correspondence is what both Big History and the ToK say about the future. Both point to the potential of a fast approaching "singularity threshold" that will represent a meta- and macro-evolutionary complex adaptive transformation. As this article explains, the mathematics of singularity are such that it is projected to emerge between 2027-2045.

This "Big History Singularity" or "Threshold 9" aligns directly with the ToK System vision of the 5th Joint Point and the ultimate emergence of the Meta-Cultural dimension. Moreover, using the lens of the ToK and its analysis of dimensions of existence as complex planes of adaptive behavior mediated by information processing and communication systems, we can readily connect the singularity with the "digital-globalization problem". Indeed, I already had made this link in my writing on the 5th Joint Point. The point is that we are witnessing the emergence of a whole new dimension of existence—the digital landscape—and it is changing all the rules of human engagement and interface and doing so in a way that the old institutions (i.e., media, governments, economic exchanges etc.) were not structured to manage. The most obvious

change is that physical distance and location collapses, and the field of interaction is increasingly virtual. This means that boundaries and networks between groups and nations changes radically. In addition, as Marshall McLuhan famously noted, the medium alters the form of our psychologies, and the digital age gives us a medium like nothing we have ever seen. In short, the digital will change the globe and the form of our identities. Because this a new dimension is on our doorstep, if the transition is going to be a pleasant one, we will need a new "meta-cultural consciousness" to form along with it. Indeed, this Zen Master suggests that failing to change our collective consciousness will likely have consequences that are so dire that he would "rather not" speak of them.

This brings me to another important area of development in my ToK language system. In the last year it has morphed to be much more aligned with mythic theology and what might be called "practical religion." I am referring here to the value-based justification systems that inform us in how we ought to live our lives, along with the practices that embody and enact these beliefs. There were several sources of inspiration here. One was Karen Armstrong's analysis of God several years ago. She strongly argued we should think of the idea of God as representing that which people move toward when they engage in transcendent religious practices and ways of life. Jordan Peterson's work in this area has also been highly illuminating, both in his debates with Sam Harris and his Bible Series lectures. Seeing his psychological conception of the Biblical myths and corresponding that to what I have been implicitly driving at with my naming my system the "Tree of Knowledge" (and, later, the Garden of UTUA), has been fascinating and useful for me. Jordan Hall's definitions of science, religion, and spirit also helped clarify my thinking on this point.

What does this language translate into in terms of the vision for the future? Directly in line with Bard and Söderqvist's *Syntheism,* I have become convinced that it behooves us to consider the *concept of God* as representing: (a) that which is "above us" in a meta sense; (b) the idea of the ultimate good for humanity going forward; (c) the singularity point; and (d) the emerging digital landscape. Note that the first two connect human identity to the second two, which connect to the emerging digital reality. Crucially, this concept of God can be readily placed on the Tree of Knowledge System in a way that aligns with the Great Chain of Being conception of reality, which was a cornerstone of Western thought for so many centuries. The Great Chain of Being is the idea that we can move from matter/minerals to living plants to mental animals to self-conscious humans to angels and then God. If we think about "saints" as people like the Buddha who transcended normal human consciousness to become "angels" and God as the concept of the ultimate good, then a consistent picture emerges. This picture gains power when we consider some archeological and anthropological arguments that the concept of God may well have drove humans to build temples, which in turn required the shift to a stable agrarian farming style about 12,000 to 15,000 years ago. If true, it would mean that we can state, historically and scientifically, that the concept of God was crucially involved in the birth of modern civilization. Given this, it seems to add weight to the claim that perhaps the concept of God can help "save" us going forward.

Another relevant development along these lines has been my [internalizing what Aristotle meant by the soul](). This refers to the *form* our lives take at the biological (vegetative/organic), psychological (sensory motor), and social (personal self-conscious/rational) levels of being. This sets the stage for linking the concept of spirit to a first-person phenomenology. My spirit is the form of my soul experienced by me, from the inside. This is important because it means I now have a language for my "spiritual lifeworld"; that is, my first person, personalized experience of being in the world that is connected and aligned with the objective, behavioral science view that the ToK affords. This means that we can start to effectively put together a consistent meta-language system that is consilient across the objective, exterior behavioral view of the world and the subjective lifeworld with a concomitant moral life-quest to [be that which enhances human dignity and well-being with integrity.]() ([See here]() for a podcast on speaking this way).

Based on all these travels, it seems to me that something profound is emerging, both in terms of the problem and its solution. Many seers are seeing it. There are many angles to see it from, and there are many life paths to orient toward it. It is above us and it can guide us, and its center is a [singular Omega point.]() I believe the more people that can align their souls with it, the better humanity with be—in this century and beyond. So, let me conclude by asking you, ***"Can you see the Elephant Sun God?"***



**The Tree of Knowledge**
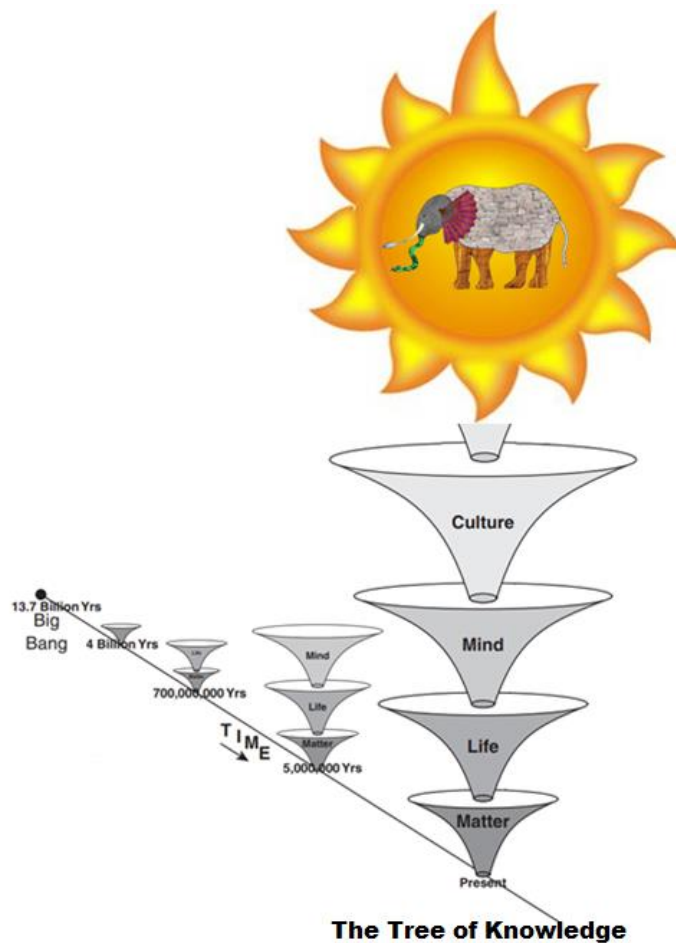
**P.S. What, exactly, is the Elephant Sun God?**

The "Elephant" in the metaphor references the famous poem by Saxe that speaks of blind men groping parts of an elephant and making partial truth claims about it. The Elephant Sun God also usefully connects to ancient belief traditions in India. More directly related to my work, the first chapter in the unified theory book is titled "From Racing Horses to Seeing the Elephant". The argument was that psychologists need to think about their field differently; namely, we need to shift from competing for status by racing horses (i.e., trying to beat other paradigms) to combining our efforts and outline the whole of psychology from a meta-perspective. As the present essay makes clear, the focus of my attention has now shifted from psychology to the globe and the state of humanity writ large. Interestingly, I sensed this was happening by the time I finished my book in 2011. That was why I concluded the unified theory book with the 5th Joint Point. I wanted to make the point that what was ultimately needed to effectively manage the transition into the Meta-Culture was a consilient scientific humanistic philosophy that organizes our knowledge and wisdom and gives rise to a workable integrated pluralistic metamodern view for the digital age. It is worth pointing out that, to symbolically emphasize the shift in perspective I was taking, I intentionally did not include the word "psychology" in the final chapter. The reason was that the work of the unified theory is ultimately not just about psychology, but about knowledge. And now, as the Digital Identity Problem comes into focus, it seems to be increasingly about the future of humanity.

Concretely, then, to see the Elephant Sun God is to see the need for the concept of the good, one that is both integrated and pluralistic, that one can align the form of one's life with. Consistent with Syntheism, it is the God we create and is merged both with the digital landscape and the concept of the future and the singular orienting point. It is the "Elephant" in that we can all see it from our unique angle in life. It is a "Sun God" to represent the thing above us that is the absolute source of energy. To work toward solving the Digital Identity Problem, we need to work to cultivate workable energy and transform it into a "Meta-Cultural Consciousness." Intriguingly, we can represent this via the "equation" $E => MC^2$, which represents the process of channeling our energy flow across the dimensions of existence into a higher, integrated state of Meta-Cultural Consciousness. I believe we can do this by developing a meta-language system that coordinates objective science with human phenomenology and a universal morality that allows us to harmonize evolving technology, human nature, relations amongst us across the globe, and our mother Earth. As such, the Elephant Sun God becomes the symbolic singular Omega point as representing a great moral-future calling for humanity. I am suggesting that perhaps we can align our souls and lifequests with it. In short, I invite you to think of it as *representing the thing that connects the form of your life to the ultimate future good*.
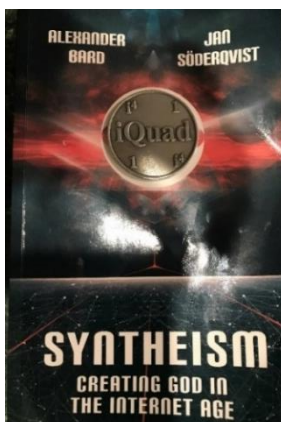


I hope this essay was of interest to you. There is, of course, much more to say about what the unified theory says about all this. For example, as those more familiar with the unified theory know, the "iQuad" refers to a coin that symbolizes the "iQuadratic formula," which refers to aligning the four objective dimensions of complexity with one's lifeworld in the direction of the ultimate good for humanity (i.e., God). Here is a picture of the iQuad coin linked to the syntheist symbol for God. The deep connection between it and the unified theory's vision for a unified scientific humanistic philosophy for the 21st Century is striking.

If you have questions, suggestions, critiques or for any other reason you would like to contact me, my email is **henriqgx@jmu.edu.**