

Cultural Genetics and the Mystery of Human Dignity:

The “Big Horizon” of Science, Understanding and Wisdom

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Toward the end of his groundbreaking book, *A New Unified Theory of Psychology*,

Gregg Henriques says:

“I have come to see the value in the unified theory as not being the extent to which it is true but the extent to which it increases the good. Consider that if I believe the unified theory was both true but also that it would lead to widespread destruction and suffering if shared, I would not promote it. A purely scientific worldview is insufficient because analytic truth value is not an end in itself but ultimately must work in the service of moral goals. My purpose in life – my ultimate justification – is to *be that which enhances dignity and well-being integrity*. (268)

There are many good reasons to ponder Gregg’s statement carefully, but among them, I would like to highlight one in particular. Gregg affirms that the truth of even the “Biggest” Theory of Knowledge is relative to its capacity to enhance human dignity, well-being and integrity. This not only points to the need to unify the sciences and humanities, but it also makes clear that the proper context within which to work toward that goal is the context of a philosophy of education and a cultural pedagogy which recognizes, as Plato did, that education is the work of society as a whole, and furthermore, that educating the whole person into the dignity of citizenship is society’s primary responsibility, indeed the only wholly satisfactory

reason for its existence. We must not allow this responsibility to be subordinated either to political nor economic concerns. Consequently, I think it is accurate to say that one of the most central elements of the Wisdom tradition that is our cultural legacy is the Liberal Arts tradition of education which the Greeks, and especially Plato and Aristotle conceptualized in detail, making it clear why the education of the whole person through the integration of theory and practice and of science and humanities is the most urgent challenge of our contemporary society.

Now moving forward, in this paper I would like to offer three specific proposals for making progress toward the goal which Gregg articulates at that point in his book: making a transition through a fifth nodal point in the Theory to a higher dimension of reality in which the true and the good would be effectively correlated in the form of Wisdom. I wholeheartedly share Gregg's ambition, and the following proposals are offered in the hope of moving closer to achieving that goal. Doing so is a matter of the utmost urgency. Let me first list the proposals I wish to make and then make some preliminary remarks on the how and the why of each, with the caveat that within the scope of this presentation only a bare schematic outline is possible. I offer apologies in advance for what might appear to be the apodictic certainty with which some assertions might be made, even though it is clear, even to me, that they would require a great deal more by way of explanation and argumentation.

First proposal then, the **articulation of a notion of Mystery** as the necessary correlative of any unified theory of knowledge of reality as a whole. Here it is argued that, at its most fundamental level, Reality as a whole is necessarily mysterious, and that a conception of Mystery is both the original center and the vanishing point of every horizon of knowledge,

understanding and practical wisdom that truthfully pertains to the human situation. No Mystery, no philosophical questions; no philosophical questions, no love of Wisdom. No loving search for a Wisdom that always eludes us yet always beckons, then only fragmentary parts which forever lack the horizon of the whole.

Second proposal, the development of a **fully articulated Fifth Dimension of Behavior** within the ToK: that is, the realm of Personal Dignity, governed by the Principle of Responsibility which arises from the nodal point of Freedom, connecting the dimension of Culture with the dimension of Personal Identity. Here it is argued that only a conception of Personal Identity which constitutes its own distinct dimension of reality can support the claim of absolute, universal and inviolable dignity that characterizes all human beings, and which can effectively function as the ultimate normative criterion of all more specific truth and value claims.

Third, the introduction of the notion of **Cultural Genetics** as an extension of both the realms of analytic scientific knowledge and philosophical Ethics, on the one hand, and the wisdom traditions that have developed across cultures until now, on the other. The realities that populate the Fifth dimension of reality are Personal Identities that are constituted by the meaning and value structures that have emerged with the history of human cultures. I argue here that the development of meanings and values can be understood by analogy with the evolutionary and genetic dynamics which govern all biological development. I would further argue that the current paralysis of the human cultural imagination typified by the phenomenon of “culture wars” must be understood in epigenetic terms so as to open up

alternative horizons of cultural and personal imagination adequate to addressing the broad range of menace to human dignity which cultural warfare currently and progressively poses.

I – Mystery: The Unitary Horizon of Human Existence

So now moving forward, let me make a few remarks about what I take to be my own most basic personal and intellectual conviction, namely, that the experience of mystery is both the dynamic center and core of all human existence, and at the same time the ultimate horizon against which every question that arises for human existence projects itself and toward which all questioning is directed as its final vanishing point.

Some might wonder at my abrupt introduction of the word “mystery” into a context which presumably is centered on an intellectual pursuit of knowledge and the rationally guided application of that knowledge to the circumstances of our lives. Ironically, however, in referring to Mystery, I emphatically do not have anything “mystical” in mind; nothing that cannot be experientially verified both cosmically and existentially. Mystery as I am using it here refers to the most fundamental and universal structure of human consciousness, self-awareness and interpretive understanding of the world as a whole. That structure is the correlative dynamic of transcendence and finitude. More prosaically stated, it is the both/and structure of all experience, referring to every aspect of human existence as limited, partialized and localized in countless ways, yet also equally directed beyond itself to the “Other,” beyond every partiality and localized situation toward the horizon of the Whole, which itself never appears but which powerfully beckons attention, questioning and responsibility under the penalty of chaos. The logic of rationality identifies mystery in the principle of Sufficient Reason:

nothing contingent or conditional except in correlation to something absolute. Mystery is that absolute silence to which all language and symbol, as well as all discursive reason ultimately refer.

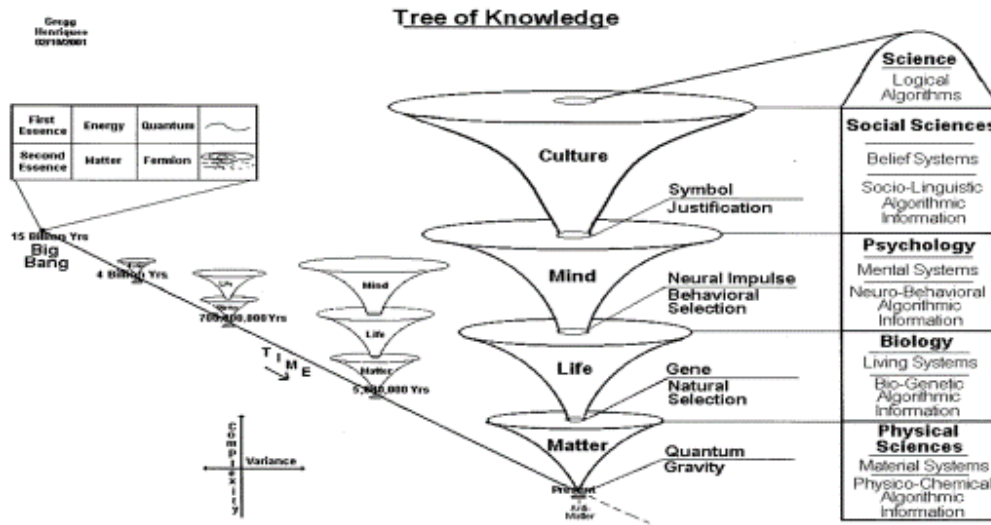
But in a sense, these are all only conceptual articulations and perspectives on mystery. The reality of mystery is structurally inscribed in every existing person and in every possible human experience. Life and Death name the Revelation in human experience of Mystery in its truth and its goodness. Whatever is human must be altogether interpenetrated at all times and in all situations by both Life and Death. Neither Life nor Death meaningfully exists without the other, and the intimacy of their absolute correlation shows itself in the insufficiency of reason ever to move beyond the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Mystery always reveals itself as the experience of paradox, and paradox is embodied at the core of human existence itself as the absolute incommensurability of Death and Life. That a living person, whose very identity is to be self-aware, and as self-aware, absolutely certain that it must cease to be self-aware, this is the black hole in the horizon of all horizons into which all knowledge and all action, all questioning and striving must vanish without so much as a trace left behind. This mystery of human existence and the dignity of such existence resides precisely in the stipulation that the mystery of the human person is the only horizon against which Reality as whole could possibly be projected. Only human persons can raise the question the meaning of one Life and Death together, the meaning and value of Reality as a whole. Personal existence (limited to human personal existence, for the time being as far as we know) alone, as such, possesses the dignity of bearing the weight of responsibility for the meaning and value of reality as a whole.

Mystery plays a central role in the great monotheistic scriptural religions, as well as in each of the wisdom traditions of the East, but arguably the clearest testimony to the original unity of the paths of theoretical knowledge and the love of wisdom as a practical way of life is to be found in the character of Socrates for whom the highest wisdom lay in knowing that one does not know. Far from putting knowledge and wisdom at odds with one another, Socratic personal identity attests to the unbreakable correlation between the two. Only by accepting the inevitable limits of theoretical knowledge can one be opened up to the possibilities of authentic transcendence in relation to these limits. We have no way of knowing precisely what Socrates's attitude was toward the mainstream Olympian religious tradition of the Greeks of his time, or to the so-called mystery religions that had found their way into Greece from Egypt, Mesopotamia and ultimately from the Indus subcontinent, but he did tell us what he experienced as he approached the shrine of Apollo and saw the two inscriptions written above the Oracle's seat of pronouncement: "Know Thyself," and "Nothing Too Much." Taken together, Socrates eventually realized, these two scriptures reveal the truth of mystery that lies behind all religion, all science and all morality. Know who you are: a human being, doomed to death by harsh necessity; therefore observe the limits that both hem the human in, but which, at the same time, also make the place of your confinement your own sovereign kingdom. Avoid the hubris that transgresses the boundaries laid down for you as the condition of your humanity; know what you are, and what you are not, so that within those limits you may sit in judgment over yourself and possess the dignity of autonomy and freedom.

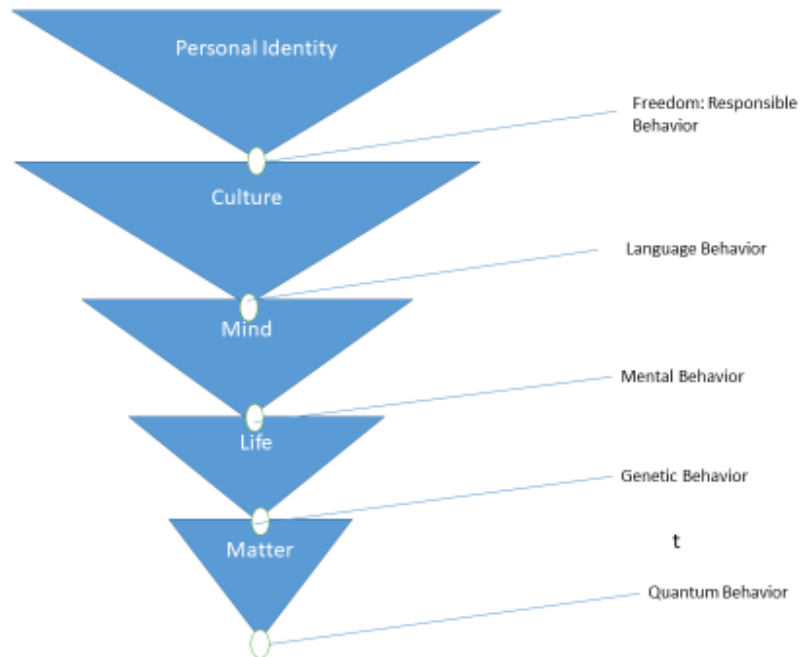
By calling our very existence into question, Mystery confers on each of us the dignity of Freedom: the ultimate and inviolable freedom of conscience by which we take responsibility not just for what we claim to know or what we do, but for who we are, for our identities, the totality of what we are as persons projected against the horizon of Mystery. And so it is through the power of Mystery that education becomes a liberation into the inviolable human dignity of both having the responsibility to decide what the meaning and value of that humanity shall be, and at the same time, being able to grow into discovering ways to respond to the question of our identities through the liberating process of education.

II – The Fifth Dimension of Reality: Human Personal Identity

This leads us to our second proposal for the development of the ToK toward its stated goal: the development of a fully articulated Fifth Dimension of Behavior within the ToK: the realm of Personal Dignity, governed by the Principle of Responsibility which arises from the nodal point of Freedom, connecting the dimension of Culture with the dimension of Personal Identity. Here it is argued that only a conception of Personal Dignity which constitutes its own distinctive dimension of reality can support the claim of absolute, universal and inviolable dignity that characterizes all human beings, and which would extend to include all personal beings which humankind might encounter.



(Gregg Henriques- Schema of ToK)



(Frank Ambrosio –Proposed extension of ToK)

What specifically is at stake in this proposal? By proposing a fifth dimension of Behavior, we assert a realm of meanings and values which emerge from and are dependent upon the prior dimensions, but which exhibit a new and distinctive mode of information processing, Responsibility, which in turn exhibits a new emergent characteristic or quality. This emergent quality is Dignity, the property of being ultimately self-justifying. As such, dignity implies the further characteristics of absoluteness, universality and inviolability. More precisely, what we are confronted with here is the inseparability of Freedom and Necessity, the paradox that stands behind the first principle of Metaphysics – the principle of sufficient Reason. For Reason to function at all, it must have a starting point that stands absolutely firm, so that, pushing off from there, it can get underway and keep on going into the world. [Metaphysics had its version of the Singularity long before contemporary physics did]. So it is a necessity of Reason that we posit either an absolute Being or that we endow a being that exists contingently, as just another product of evolution, with a dignity that sets it apart and frees it from all causality necessity. Here we can clearly see why Reason has always been regarded as the source of human transcendence, but we also cannot help but recognize that Reason's supremacy must be recognized as stemming from the Freedom which posits itself as Absolute, that is, without sufficient reason. As, in my view, Jean-Paul Sartre has convincingly argued, any metaphysical absolute is incompatible with authentic human freedom. If there is to be Freedom in the Universe then it must reside in the dignity of Human persons who although not being absolute decide to make themselves responsible for treating that Freedom as the origin of all meaning and values, of all truth and all good. Until the cultural upheaval of the two world wars in the mid-20th century, there was no viable alternative to metaphysical,

epistemological and ethical foundationalism. Within that transformative crucible, however, the potential for a unified horizon of human identity and dignity emerged in such a way as to present precisely that possibility.

Three issues arising from this proposal need to be addressed or at least identified as requiring further treatment in another context. (a)The first issue is to spell out the meaning of personal identity itself. (b)The second is disambiguate the question of human freedom from the closely related notion of liberty of choice. Without a sufficiently robust conception of the meaning of freedom neither responsibility nor the normative quality of human dignity make any sense. (c)The third issue is the challenge of attributing universal legitimating authority to a mode of information processing as notoriously fragile and fallible as personal responsibility.

(a) Briefly, the first point: with what sort of reality are we dealing in this fifth dimension when we characterize it as “Personal Identity.” To what do we refer when we endeavor to understand the meaning, or for that matter the value, of the one who recklessly and arrogantly says “I?” What one? How one? The “I” of identity seems to be nothing more than function, a kind of algorithm for processing culturally generated data according to complex semiotic and semantics rules expressed as meanings and values structures. The philosophical and empirical challenges to the unity and identity of the “Self” are too numerous and too well known to bear rehearsal here. The key point, however is to recognize that Identity is a characteristic of embodied persons, not merely of a “Self,” or “Agent” The object, “Self,” is nowhere to be found; the polymorphic variability of the subjective “Self” is altogether indeterminate. And even the Self that occupies the cultural sphere of Intersubjectivity cannot bear the burden of normative responsibility. Rather, Identity is a characteristic of existentially

embodied persons, and persons are easily identifiable in the historical space of responsibility. Persons are the ones who haltingly, agonizingly, and altogether fallibly struggle to give accounts of themselves, to explain what they believe and why they believe it regarding those few questions which are existentially fundamental and universal in the human condition; questions like who am I? What is death? Am I a stranger in the world of nature or is it my home? What should I do? What can I hope for, if anything? Why bother? Persons are the ones capable of taking responsibility for themselves and who are expected by others to do so. The range of this capacity and expectation includes not just what a person can to some extent regulate, their choices, actions and commitments, but also their relationships, their physical embodiment, their historical and cultural situatedness, and perhaps most especially, the way in which they deal with the horizon of mystery which surrounds them altogether. For as we have seen, mystery is best understood as the wholeness to which and for which we are responsible. The unity and integrity of personal identity is correlative to the wholeness of mystery. Personal identity lies in the aspiration to make oneself entirely at home at the center of the limitless horizon of mystery, and in the willingness to bear the risk and the consequences of attempting to do so. Personal identity is mysterious and therefore we should not be shocked when we continually discover it to be so.

(b) The second consideration pertaining to the Fifth Dimension: bluntly stated, no freedom, no responsibility; no responsibility, no dignity; no dignity, no nonrelative judgments of truth and value. Freedom cannot be viewed a fact about humanity which we are waiting to either verify or falsify. If mystery, then freedom. If as a human being you not only do not know, but also know that you cannot know, then you must decide, and if you decide, you will be held

responsible. The decision might be a wise or foolish one, the judgment of responsibility might be insightful or obtuse, the consequences of being held responsible might be just or unjust, but quite literally, there is no other choice. Freedom is not a characteristic of the evolutionary construction of our nervous systems or brains. It is a stipulative condition of our embodied, historical, linguistic, cultural and psychological Identity as persons. In other words, Freedom is the name we give to the human capacity to process the paradoxical revelations of Mystery and transformatively reimagine them as metaphoric expressions of meaning and value which we hope may prove adaptively sustainable to some limited extent within our physical, cultural and historical environments.

To become clear about how things stand with human freedom, especially its inseparable correlation both to mystery and dignity, it very much helps to distinguish sharply between freedom and liberty of choice. This is by no means a purely semantic issue. Liberty of choice is circumstantially inscribed into culture. It is the menu of options available today at this restaurant: if it is on the menu, you can have it; if it isn't, then either choose something else or go to another restaurant. Liberty of choice is the business of society and particularly of political institutions. It is also the business of neuroscience, ethics and of psychology as a science. Freedom, on the other hand has a different domain, the domain of conscience, of knowing that we don't know, and of knowing that we are responsible for our decisions about how we deploy the freedom that mystery guarantees is always open to us no matter how tightly constricting the circumstances might be. No physical circumstance, no cultural norm, no political institution or government can confer freedom nor take it away. Freedom is an ontological and existential structure of the one who says "I."

This is the freedom to which Victor Frankl referred in his now classic book, *Man's Search For Meaning*, as the "Ultimate Freedom," and that characterization is obviously relevant to Gregg's statement that I quoted earlier. Ultimate freedom is concerned with seeking meaning in life, with deciding what one's attitude will be toward one's existential situation, even when all liberty of choice is stripped away as it had been for Frankl and all the others in the interned in the Nazi death camps. Responsibility is the textured fabric of meaning and value woven out of actions where and to the extent action is possible, but also out of compassionate solidarity with others similarly constrained, and resolute dignity in the face of unavoidable suffering. This is the absolute freedom of total responsibility for all that constitutes our identity as persons in relation to other persons and society.

(c) The third point is barely even a gesture. The gesture is one of bewilderment: are you kidding me? the notorious fallibility of human responsibility as the authority underlying human dignity and functioning as the normative criterion of all truth and value claims? Seriously?? Responsibility is the human payback for the woeful inadequacy of natural selection as the functional norm of evolution. Natural Selection holds itself to no higher principle than sustainability: the transmission through space-time of certain algorithmic genetics functions. Human dignity holds itself to the same mediocre standard, just good enough to keep going. The difference is only one of perspective: genes "care" about genes; persons care about persons. The patent unreliability of human responsibility cannot be used as an excuse for not asserting personal identity as demanding absolute respect. Neither certainty nor the elimination of risk are luxuries which humans can afford.

III - Cultural Genetics: An Evolutionary Approach to the Human Search for Meaning and Values

The last of the original three proposals I am making regarding development of Gregg's TOK-UTUA Theory, is the incorporation of Cultural Genetics as both a hermeneutic way of understanding the historical development of cultural meaning and value structures, and also as a practical approach to the problem of "culture warfare," the breakdown of communal norms for applying human dignity as the ultimate criterion of truth and value claims. The approach taken here is based on the hypothesis of a strong analogy between some of the basic dynamics of biological evolutionary and genetic processes on the one hand, and the historical record of evidence concerning the development, variation and decline of major world cultures on the other. Important cultural meanings and values may be understood as functioning socially in ways quite similar to genes with regard to random variation, natural selection, replication, mutation and adaptation, survival and extinction, as well as genomic encoding.

This hypothesis needs to be scrutinized by testing its ability to aid in identifying and understanding patterns of similarity and difference within and across historical cultures concerning their cultural responses to fundamental and universal questions of human existence like: what is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of death? Who am I? How should I/we live? What can we hope for? What if anything makes life worth living? Questions such as these lead us to the core issue: What does Human Dignity mean? What is the origin and the destiny that gives meaning and value to every human life regardless of any and every contingency of time, place, culture, condition or achievement?

Throughout human history diverse cultures have responded to these questions in a bewildering variety of ways, but arguably, certain patterns can be traced across time and across societies, and in so doing two characteristics of these patterns emerge: 1) their occurrence and perdurance appear to follow genetic and evolutionary dynamics; and 2) they can be broadly grouped into two major cultural genetic “meme pools,” metaphorically labeled the “Hero” and the “Saint.” Each metaphor represents a “worldview,” a way of looking at reality as a whole, an overarching structural framework that deploys the primary meanings and values shared broadly within a society with which individuals choose to identify themselves or against which they react, and in so doing form and identity for which they and others hold themselves responsible.

The two unifying strands of meaning structures that constitute evolved cultural and personal identities are derived from two distinct, independently arising cultural meme pools, each with its characteristic world view and value system: the Impersonalist and the Personalist meme pools. “Meme” is a term first coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his controversial 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* to function as a loose parallel to a biological gene but operating as a building block at the level of cultural meaning structures. Memes do not exist physically but show up as elements of concepts, ideas, values, and institutional structures, etc. Later, E.O. Wilson challenged Dawkins’ approach to this line of interpretation in his important work, *Consilience* (1997),

“In my own writings... I have argued that the etiology of culture wends its way torturously from the genes through the brain and senses to learning and social behavior. What we inherit are neurobiological traits that cause us to see the world in a particular way and to learn certain behaviors in preference to other behaviors. The genetically inherited traits are not memes, not units of culture,

but rather the propensity to invent and transmit certain kinds of these elements of memory in preference to others. (*Consilience*, 163)

Wilson goes on to argue,

In the 1990s, attention is beginning to in human sociobiology to gene-culture coevolution. In this new phase of research, the definition of epigenetic rules is the best means t make important advances in the understanding of human nature. Such and emphasis seems logically inescapable. The linkage between genes and culture is to be found in the sense organs and programs of the brain. Until this process is better known and taken into account, mathematical models of genetic evolution and cultural evolution will have very limited value. (*Consilience*, 164)

While there is much in Wilson's broader approach to gene-culture coevolution that I find unsatisfactory, his identification of the difference that taking epigenetics rules fully into account is, I believe, of critical importance, because in it is precisely in this sense that the transformation of all human behavior effected by its experiential mediation through language in the broadest sense, i.e. all forms of symbolic representation must be understood. It is only in this way, I would contend, that biologically structured human behavior within the environment of culture takes on the dimension of Freedom and can serve as the basis for the dignity we ascribe to human identity. The difference between brain activity and mind must be understood not only in terms of those brain activities that enable linguistic behavior, but in terms of the epigenetic rules that govern the behaviors of what Wittgenstein referred to as the "forms of life" that underlay the "language games" in terms of which alone the meaning of linguistic behavior and the values priorities that govern its lived embodiment can be understood.

I have elsewhere laid out the approach to the study of human cultural behavior that I refer to as Cultural Genetics¹. In its bare essentials, Cultural Genetics posits that the full

historical horizon of culture, can be usefully interpreted in terms of the development and subsequent interplay between two fundamental “worldviews:” Impersonalism and Personalism. Each worldview, in turn, can be metaphorically represented by an ideal type of person who embodies in exemplary fashion the characteristics which each worldview identifies as best suited to meaningful human living. The metaphoric character types are respectively; The Hero and the Saint. The Hero and Saint give flesh and blood voice to two wisdom traditions which, arguably have decisively shaped the development of human culture for at least the last 5,000 years.

The much older and more universal historical substratum of worldwide cultural evolution is the Impersonalist worldview. In the West, Impersonalism is most familiar to us through the Greco-Roman culture of secular humanism, but it must be emphasized that it equally but diversely includes the broad cultural wisdom traditions that grew up in the Indus valley and in China. Much later, in roughly the first millennium BCE, there began to emerge an alternative and eventual rival worldview and wisdom tradition, Personalism, embodied in the family of scriptural monotheisms that form the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic family of cultures. Taking the figures of the “hero” and of the “saint” as paradigmatic of each of these wisdom traditions respectively, cultural genetics examines first the basic characteristics of the path to wisdom that is traced by each of these exemplary explorers of the question of how to live a meaningful life, and then subsequently the complex web of interaction and “hybridization” between the two, without which our currently emerging global society would be incomprehensible. For example, the social structures and institutions associated with our modern notions of Individualism, democratic Liberalism, empirical Science and Capitalism all

have their origins in the Impersonalist worldview and clearly exhibit the major traits of that horizon. At the same time, each has become thoroughly entangled in consequential ways with elements of the Personalist worldview with which they are strictly incommensurate.

A first attempt to sketch out the horizon, or the worldview, that opens for us when we look out through the eyes of each figure might go like this. For the hero, reality appears as fundamentally shaped by the human struggle, the struggle with forces that are essentially impersonal; the forces of necessity and fate that are, in the end, indifferent to human hopes and fears; it is a world in which ultimately human beings are alone and on their own. For the saint, reality is appears quite differently. For the saint, reality is ultimately configured by the bonds of a covenant relationship among persons, human and divine, based on an exchange of promises offered in the mutual hope of lasting and unconditional trust. Put briefly, for the hero, the meaning of life is honor or self-esteem; for the saint, the meaning of life is love. We look to heroes with admiration and respect, seeking inspiration; we turn to saints with gratitude and humility, asking help. For the hero, the goal of living is self-fulfillment, the achievement of personal excellence, and the recognition and admiration that making a signal contribution to one's society through one's achievements carries with it. For the saint, life does not so much have a goal as a purpose for which each human being is responsible; and that purpose is love: the bonds of concern and care that responsibility for one's fellow human beings carries with it.

Limiting ourselves to the West for the time being, one line of descent in this genealogical history originates in Greek culture, beginning with Achilles and arriving at the figure of Socrates, the paragon of the philosophical way of life. Socrates inherits the heroic

legacy of the great myth cycles, the Homeric epics and Greek tragedy, and then transforms it into the way in which we inherit it in its most basic form: the idea of the citizen-hero. The other line of descent traces from Abraham, the father of faith, who enters into a covenant with God, carrying with it the promise of becoming the father of a son but also the patriarch of a great nation as well.

I want to pause here for just a second to emphasize that these two paradigms—the hero and the saint—and the way of life that descends from each, are really two fundamentally distinct and genuinely different visions of the human situation as a whole, and even of what it means to be a human being. They are two distinct and different ways of pursuing the question of the meaning of life.

Characteristics of the Impersonalist World

1. Reality as a whole is a coherent, integrated closed systemic unity governed by principles of absolute Necessity.
2. The primary characteristic of Necessity is “indifference.” Necessity functions as a zero sum game: no winners, no losers.
3. Within the Impersonalist worldview, persons and personal identity is necessarily at best a secondary and circumstantial function within the system as a whole. Human worldviews and value systems have no primary claim to reality, and the question of the “meaning of life” is of interest and significance only with the sphere of human experience. There is no higher meaning or purpose except indifferent Necessity.

4. The Impersonalist cultural meme pool gives rise to worldviews and value systems that may be metaphorically designated as “heroic.” One good example of a highly developed heroic culture is the classical Greek.
5. The primary source of meaning and value in a heroic culture is self-esteem or honor, the pursuit of individual excellence and courage in the face of death. In heroic culture the source of human dignity lies in the courage to live for oneself alone.

Characteristics of the Personalist Meme Pool

1. The primary characteristic of Reality within the personalist meme pool is love or compassion.
2. The World as a whole and all truth or value claims made about it are structured by the dynamics of interpersonal relationship and full mutuality of personal identity.
3. Within the Personalist worldview, personal identity is the most basic unit of meaning and value, and both meaning and value arise only in relationship with other persons.
4. Because the dynamics of interpersonal relationship is the most basic “law” of reality, each person owes his identity absolutely and totally to the “Other,” and therefore to all “others”
5. The Personalist worldview gives rise to culture traditions that may be metaphorically identified as “saintly,” whereof the monotheistic scriptural religions (Hebrew, Christian and Islamic) are the primary example.

The “Secular Saint” and the Hope of a New Rationality

Within the limits of what is possible and immediately relevant in the context of this paper, we now jump from starting points to destinations, marked by another ideal type, embodying the worldview of the “Secular Saint,” an arguably more sustainable metaphor of the meaning of life in the cultural conditions of the 21st century and beyond. The Secular Saint embodies a new type of rationality, described schematically below, and more importantly, a new, better adapted and more sustainable path of wisdom in pursuing the question of the meaning of life and death together. From a theoretical/Cultural Genetics perspective, the secular Saint is a metaphoric embodiment of a contemporary conception of human dignity which recognizes the truthfulness of both Impersonalism and Personalism as incommensurable worldviews without privileging either one as expressions of meaning and value. From the experiential/practical perspective, the Secular Saint metaphorically embodies a way of living and dying that allows human freedom to take responsibility for personal identity by practicing the “virtues” of both Hero and Saint according to the condition of human needs in the situation in which one finds oneself.

This advance in cultural evolutionary adaptation, while presented in terms of ideal types, must be understood in terms of the universal dignity of each and every human being in virtue of the fact that all must walk the path of the struggle for survival and the search for meaning and value in the full light of consciousness of the inevitability, not simply of demise, but of finitude in all its forms, psychic and social as well as physical. This struggle and search, undertaken in the freedom and responsibility that constitute personal identity is the sole basis on which a claim for universal human dignity and therefore is the sole basis on which a global culture of justice based on the rule of law and well as a global horizon of understanding that

includes both the sciences and the humanities, along with the full experiential reality and truth of both Impersonalism and Personalism, with the dynamic tension of a personal identity that has adapted the necessity to balance the two functionally, despite the fact that they cannot be synthesized theoretically. In this the secular saint must achieve in regard to cultural evolution what its distant hominid ancestors achieved biologically when they learned to walk upright and recalibrate the dynamics of binocularity to accommodate their newly enhanced vantage point.

So, by way hasty summary and conclusion, I would like to try to articulate, the “New Rationality” which the Secular Saint must strive toward embodying, characterized by a conception of objectivity which privileges neither the criteria of mathematical quantification and empirical falsification, nor the dynamics of personal experience, rooted in the search for meaning and value through responsibility for personal identity.

The functional authority of the “new rationality’ characteristic of the Secular Saint regarding truth and value claims, wherever and however they might be deployed must be understood as arising from and being rooted in the dignity that accrues to a freedom capable of taking responsibility for the identity it calls its own within the community of other freedoms mutually recognized as sharing that same responsibility. Among the characteristics of this new rationality which comprehensively incorporates scientific knowledge, hermeneutic understanding and practical wisdom,

1. Finite in the scope of its authority; transcendent in the scope of its imaginative capacity for meaning.

2. Historically situated within the dynamics of cultural, social and personal situatedness.
3. Linguistically based – Both Reason and Reality are linguistically constituted; truth and values claims “meaningless” in the most rigorous technical sense of the word apart from their use within language.
4. Communitarian -- Personal identity is inseparable from the traditions of social practice in which the person finds him or herself rooted;
5. Dialogical -- governed by the logic of question and response (responsibility);
6. Deliberative – dialogue, because of its finite capacity must be sustained and extended by deliberation concerning how the search for meaning can be continued by the posing of more effective forms of the question; and finally
7. Polymorphic -- the criteria of responsibility which confer legitimating authority for making truth and value claims will vary according to the normative demands of the fundamental questions around which communities achieve their solidarity; according to the historical situation in which the community is situated; and according to the deliberative judgments by which the community chooses to take responsibility for the finitude of its self-knowledge and knowledge of reality as a whole.

Cultural Genetics explores the question of human dignity as the basis for the meaning and value structures which world cultures, in their wide diversity throughout history, have generated in the struggle to sustain, nurture and defend the existence of the human race. One of the primary goals of Cultural Genetics is to refine and recalibrate the way in which we understand the notion of rationality so as to make apparent the unity amid diversity that must necessarily characterize a conception of rationality if it is to do justice to the full spectrum ways in which human questioning and existential concern encounter the horizon of the human situation as a whole. This objective requires in turn a reconceptualization of the function of “objectivity” in both

the so-called “hard sciences” and also the social sciences so as to make clear that objectivity in this sense occupies only a portion of the spectrum of truth and value claims that can be made against the total unified horizon of human existence as a whole. The portion of that entire spectrum governed by the criterion of objectivity understood in the scientific sense (knowledge authorized by sufficient empirical evidence that meets the test of falsifiability) is extremely broad and critically important. At the same time, however, it needs to be made clear that this type of empirical objectivity is by no means adequate to function as a universal criterion of the authority that is needed to warrant and legitimate the full range of concerns that individuals and societies must have in order to establish the necessary shared bases of reliable communication and cooperation essential to human wellbeing and flourishing. Scientific objectivity is an adequate criterion of assertion only when the human interests involved can be adequately framed in terms of the relation of a “subject” to an “object.” As has been mentioned, however, persons are not simply either “subjects” or “agents;” rather persons have identities for which they are uniquely responsible. It is necessary, therefore, to recognize that “objectivity” in the normal sense is the appropriate criterion of responsibility for an indispensable but nonetheless limited subset of the full range of truth and value claims which persons and societies’ have distinct evolutionary and cultural interests in making. “Objectivity” is one case of the more general problem of justification or social legitimation of the authority that warrants different types of truth and value claims. Once the threshold of the fourth dimension of reality as defined in the ToK system, the dimension of culture, has been crossed, then objects cease to be objects and becomes “things” within the life world, either naturally occurring or artificial. As a result the criterion by which assertions of truth or value regarding those things changes from empirically quantifiable evidence into personal responsibility for interpreting the historical record of cultural artifacts, the broadest and most authoritative of which are those that are recorded in linguistic form. This is the realm of human understanding and wisdom as distinct from empirically evidenced scientific knowledge, which itself is, of course, a function of cultural expression using

mathematical rather than verbal representation. The fundamental units of cultural reality, therefore, emerge from physical processes but they are necessarily mediated by symbolic representations functioning as “language games” which are in turn rooted in the embodied practice of human “forms of life,” to borrow Wittgenstein’s expression. As a result, their reality and its expression as truths or values is constituted linguistically out of complex configurations of meaning as distinguished from physical matter. But the important point is that the truth claims of human hermeneutic (interpretive) understanding and the value claims of the cultural wisdom traditions are in no way less authoritatively warranted in publically available criteria than the mathematically quantified and empirically verifiable claims of the sciences, despite the fact that the criteria of personal responsibility assert their authority through the functions of dialogue and deliberative judgement exercised within communities of mutually recognized membership.

To summarize, the legitimating authority of rationality across the full horizon of its functioning as scientific knowledge, cultural understanding and practical wisdom is rooted in personal responsibility for one’s own identity and for maintaining effective bonds of solidarity and dialogue among persons. These bonds are centered on authentic openness to mystery; compassionate respect for the vulnerability of all life to suffering; and the fundamental and universal obligation to the inviolability of human freedom of conscience.

ⁱ See, “Measuring the Horizon: Objectivity, Subjectivity and the Dignity of Human Personal Identity,” Francis J. Ambrosio, Elisabetta Lanzilao; OJPP> Vol.3 No.4A, November 2013;
<http://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?PaperID=39963>