

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Notes

spirituality, the quality or state of being spiritual or of being attached to or concerned with religious questions and values broadly conceived. The term is also frequently used in a non- (or even anti-) religious sense to designate a preoccupation with or capacity for understanding fundamental moral, existential, or metaphysical questions, especially regarding the nature of the self (or soul, or person), the meaning of life, the nature of mind or consciousness, and the possibility of immortality.

Spiritual evolution, also called higher evolution, is the idea that the mind or spirit, in analogy to biological evolution, collectively evolves from a simple form dominated by nature, to a higher form dominated by the Spiritual or Divine. It is differentiated from the "lower" or biological evolution, and thought to be foreshadowed by enlightened beings who have already evolved to this advanced stage.

Samkhya is one of the six systems of Hindu philosophy; proto-Samkhya ideas can be found in the Upanishads, Jainism, and Buddhism. Samkhya posits two ontological entities, Purusha (witness-consciousness) and prakriti ('nature'), which includes mind,

congnition, and the perceived objects). According to Samkhya, when purusha comes into proximity with prakriti it disturbs the equilibrium of prakriti. As a result, a number of successive essences called tattvas evolve from prakriti. The most subtle tattvas emerge first, then progressively grosser ones, each in a particular order, and finally the elements and the organs of sense. Adherents of samkhya-Yoga adhere to the release of purusha from prakriti, and the return of prakriti to the unmanifest condition.

Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin both describe a progression from inanimate matter to a future state of Divine consciousness. Teilhard de Chardin refers to this as the Omega Point, and Sri Aurobindo as the Supermind.

Teilhard, who was a Jesuit Paleontologist who played an important role in the discovery of Peking Man, presented a teleological view of planetary and cosmic evolution, according to which the formation of atoms, molecules and inanimate matter is followed by the development of the biosphere and organic evolution, then the appearance of man and the noosphere as the total envelope of human thought. According to Teilhard evolution does not cease here but continues on to its culmination and unification in the Omega Point, which he identifies with Christ.

Theories of spiritual evolution are important in many Occult and Esoteric teachings, which emphasise the progression and development of the individual either after death (spiritualism) or through successive reincarnations (Theosophy, Hermeticism).

We understand that a recent United Nations study reported on the status, or well-being, of the people of member nations regarding challenges those people face daily. They took all the responses received and boiled them down to one word to describe the overall condition of the people of these nations. That word is "meaningless." Henry David Thoreau, in the mid 1800s, wrote, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them." A century and a half has passed, and Thoreau's words still strongly echo in our lives. Consider the current levels of war, poverty, sickness, starvation, etc. present in the world today. We understand that a recent United Nations study reported on the status, or well-being, of the people of member nations regarding challenges those people face daily. They took all the responses received and boiled them down to one word to describe the overall condition of the people of these nations. That word is "meaningless." And lest we egotistically think that such studies are only descriptive of so-called underdeveloped countries, do we not have ample evidence much closer to home that reflects this same condition? Consider distressingly high teen suicide rates, bulging prison populations, rampant family disharmony and pervasive political dissension. Imagine, for huge numbers of people alive at this time, perhaps including you, that life is experienced as meaningless.

But Thoreau said "most men," and "most" is not "all." Who, then, are those who did not, or will not, die without fully singing the song they were born to sing?

The concept of *spiritual evolution* is also complemented by the idea of a creative impulse in human beings, known as epigenesis

The Persian poet Rumi had a clue when he stated, "Your task is not to seek for love, your task is to seek and find all the barriers you have built against it." And to that we would add: "And to dissolve them." At USM, we refer to Rumi's "barriers" as "unresolved issues," which are at the core of almost all emotional suffering. Thus, sexuality, love, social life and artistic pursuits are considered vectors of *spiritual evolution*. It's our unresolved issues (barriers) that

keep us asleep and unaware of who we are: divine beings whose essential nature is loving. And what's an unresolved issue? "Anything that disturbs your peace." And we do mean anything. In fact, we've devised a simple, foolproof test for identifying unresolved issues. According to *spiritual evolution*, humans build upon that which has already been created, but add new elements because of the activity of the spirit. They are the ones who realize that true and lasting happiness and fulfillment can never be won on the battlefield of material success, no matter how powerful or wealthy one becomes, or how adept one is at surrounding oneself with the "right" people or circumstances. The songsters among us are those who have come to know that, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin reminded us, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." That one sentence has profound implications, for how does one live in the conscious awareness of his or her spiritual nature?

The single message of those who have realized such potential has always been the same, and basically, it comes down to this: True and lasting happiness and fulfillment are an individual affair and can only be found by going deep within, where one's true essence is vividly and stunningly revealed as love -- and then living into the reality of that awareness. Today its purpose is in working on the *spiritual evolution* of humanity by means of development and advancement of the individual being.

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The great chain of being

The concept of the great chain of being developed by Plato and Aristotle whose ideas were taken up and synthesised by Plotinus. Plotinus in turn heavily influenced Augustine's theology, and from there Aquinas and the Scholastics. The Great Chain of Being was an important theme in Renaissance and Elizabethan thought, had an under-acknowledged influence on the shaping of the ideas of the Enlightenment and played a large part in the worldview of 18th century Europe. And while essentially a static worldview, by the 18th and early 19th century it had been "temporalized" by the concept of the soul ascending or progressing spiritually through the successive rungs or stages, and thus growing or evolving closer to God. It also had at this time an impact on theories of biological evolution.

E. F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*, has recently proposed a sort of simplified Great Chain of Being, based on the idea of four "kingdoms" (mineral, vegetable, animal, human). Schumacher rejects modernist and scientific themes, his approach recalling the universalist orientation of writers like Huston Smith, and likely contributing to Ken Wilber's "holonomic" hierarchy or "Great Nest of Being"

Spiritualism - Spiritualists reacted with uncertainty to the theories of evolution in the late 19th and early 20th century. Broadly speaking, the concept of evolution fit the spiritualist thought of the progressive development of humanity. At the same time, however, a belief in the animal origins of man threatened the foundation of the immortality of the spirit, for if man had not been created, it was scarcely plausible that he would be specially endowed with a spirit. This led to spiritualists embracing spiritual evolution.

In the 19th century, Anglo-American Spiritualist ideas emphasized the progression of the soul after death to higher states of existence, in contrast to Spiritism which admits to reincarnation.

Spiritualism taught that after death, spirits progressed to new spheres of existence. According to this idea, evolution occurred in the spirit world “at a rate more rapid and under conditions more favorable to growth” than encountered on earth.

The biologist and spiritualist Alfred Russel Wallace believed that qualitative novelties could arise through the process of spiritual evolution, in particular, the phenomena of life and mind. Wallace attributed these novelties to a supernatural agency. Later in his life, Wallace was an advocate of spiritualism and believed in an immaterial origin for the higher mental faculties of humans. He believed that evolution suggested the universe had a purpose, and that certain aspects of living organisms are not explainable in terms of purely materialistic processes. In a 1909 magazine article entitled *The World of Life*, which he later expanded into a book of the same name^[9] Wallace argued in his 1911 book *World of life* for a spiritual approach to evolution and described evolution as “creative power, directive mind and ultimate purpose”. Wallace believed natural selection could not explain intelligence or morality in the human being so suggested that non-material spiritual forces accounted for these. Wallace believed the spiritual nature of man could not have come about by natural selection alone, the origins of the spiritual nature must originate “in the unseen universe of spirit”.

Robert Broom in his book *The Coming of Man: Was it Accident or Design?* claimed that "spiritual agencies" had guided evolution as animals and plants were too complex to have arisen by chance. According to Broom there were at least two different kinds of spiritual forces, and psychics are capable of seeing them. Broom claimed there was a plan and purpose in evolution and that the origin of *Homo sapiens* is the ultimate purpose behind evolution. According to Broom "Much of evolution looks as if it had been planned to result in man, and in other animals and plants to make the world a suitable place for him to dwell in.

The Anglo-American position recalls (and is presumably inspired by) 18th century concepts regarding the temporalization of The Great Chain of Being. Spiritual evolution, rather than being a physical (or physico-spiritual) process is based on the idea of realms or stages through which the soul or spirit passes in a non-temporal, qualitative way. This is still an important part of some spiritualist ideas today, and is similar to some mainline (as opposed to fundamentalist) Protestant Christian beliefs, according to which after death the person goes to "summerland" (see Spirit world