We are living during a time of fundamental paradigm-shift from fragmentation to holism. The great question of our time is whether the shift to holism will happen in time to save humanity from self-extinction. Will the human project be terminated through some forms of climate collapse or nuclear holocaust? Or will we transform our relationships with one another to the point where we create a holistic, just, loving, and sustainable planetary civilization? My new book, *One World Renaissance: Holistic Planetary Transformation Through a Global Social Contract*, from which this article draws, explores these issues at some depth.

Holism is the most fundamental discovery of 20th century science. It is a discovery of every science from astrophysics to quantum physics to environmental science to psychology to anthropology. It is the discovery that the entire universe is an integral whole, and that the basic organizational principle of the universe is the field principle: the universe consists of fields within fields, levels of wholeness and integration that mirror in fundamental ways, and integrate with, the ultimate, cosmic whole.

This discovery has overthrown the early-modern Newtonian paradigm in the sciences, which was predicated on atomism, causal determinism, mechanism, and a materialism that was discerned, it was thought, by a narrow empiricism. The holism of the ancient and medieval thinkers was superseded by this early-modern Newtonian paradigm in the 16th and 17th centuries. This development generated a host of assumptions about the world and human beings that became determinate for the basic world view that most people and institutions continue to hold today.

For many thinkers and religious teachers throughout this history, holism was the dominant thought, and the harmony that it implies has most often been understood to encompass cosmic, civilizational, and personal dimensions. Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Lord Krishna, Lao Tzu, and Confucius all give us visions of transformative harmony, a transformative harmony that derives from a deep relation to the holism of the cosmos. Human beings are microcosms of that holism and must seek ways to allow it to emerge within their lives and cultures. The early-modern paradigm reversed this holism and saw the world in atomistic and mechanistic terms. Human beings were not microcosms but rather the human mind, consciousness, and our needs for love and solidarity were seen as merely subjective epiphenomena not deeply related to the “cold, hard facts” supposedly discovered by science.

Today the holism of the ancients has been rediscovered on a higher level. We understand, very much more clearly than these ancient thinkers, that human beings are deeply historical beings, moving from a past, through a dynamic present, toward a future that we are deeply involved in creating. We create our future through a vision and comprehension of its possibilities. Revolutionary holism is just that: a holism that can transform everything from disharmony to harmony, from war to peace, from hate to love. Ethics, law, education, and government are all historically grounded aspects of human life. This means they are subject to holistic transformation, to “a new heaven and a new Earth,” that, indeed, has much in common with what the ancient teachers said about holism and harmony.

Holism is not simply an intellectual perception of harmony, for in holism we are included in the wholes, wholes that we discern at the deepest levels with our entire being. We both discern and embody the holism of humanity, of the earth, of the cosmos, and of the divine. Holism means not only reason but love, indeed, it involves the synthesis of reason, intuition, and love. If reason has discovered this pervasive holism through the sciences, the love taught by the ancient religious teachers complements and embodies that holism. Jesus taught the oneness of humanity within the embrace of divine love: “When you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me.” In his teaching, recognition of our common humanity within the ontological love of God is the foundation for a transformed human community, the bringing of the kingdom of God to Earth.

The reality of ourselves as persons is not that of abstract, disconnected individuals possessing a priori rights against other people and society. This conception that human beings are a collection of individuals for whom civilization and the social order are second-order relationships is a product of the early-modern, Newtonian paradigm that forms the conceptual basis for both capitalism and the system of sovereign nation-states. Within capitalism, the fundamental nature of the
social bond is ignored and denied. People and corporations are considered abstract atoms promoting their rational self-interest in competition with all other such entities. Under the nation-state system, the planet is divided into a multiplicity of militarized territorial units, each promoting its own national interests vis-à-vis the rest of humanity, again institutionally denying our common human reality and our holistic interdependence with all other persons and with nature.

The reality is that our individuality and our social-ontological bond with civilization and the rest of humanity arise simultaneously. We are connected to all others and the entire human project. From this connection comes about abilities for language, reason, love, compassion, social harmony, and transformative justice. Our fundamental reality is not that of abstract atoms within a fragmented world disorder in a Darwinian struggle for survival. Our reality is our common humanity, interdependent with one another, needing solidarity and mutual recognition, and living within a fragile planetary ecosystem in which all living creatures are also interdependent. The reasons why human beings continue to wallow in disharmony, violence, and chaos arise in large measure from our misunderstanding of who and what we are. We need to understand ever more clearly the tremendous significance of the emergent holism and our vital role within the new “universe story” (Swimme and Berry 1992).

A global consciousness has begun to emerge that was very rare in human beings prior to the mid-20th century. It is a consciousness that we now face global crises and global issues that threaten our existence on Earth. It began to dawn on thoughtful people everywhere that we are faced with impending climate collapse—the transformation of our planetary climate into forms that no longer sustain higher forms of life and that could, in the process of collapse, engender out of control patterns of devastation such as mass extinctions or pandemics that wipe out the human species and destroy civilization (Speth, 2005). “What we are experiencing today,” philosopher Hans Jonas writes, “is the paradoxa of excessive success that threatens to turn into a catastrophe by destroying its own foundation in the natural world” (1996: 53).

In his book *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethics*, Hans Küng agrees that the early-modern paradigm must be replaced by a “holistic way of thinking,” by a “new covenant.” He calls into question “the modern paradigm” which consists of “a science free of ethics; an omnipotent macrotechnology; an industry which destroys the environment; a democracy which is purely a legal form.” “Modern scientific and technological thought,” he says, “has from the beginning proved incapable of providing the foundation for universal values, human rights, and ethical criteria” (1991: 41-42). In the modern conception, he says, “reason, which is not involved in any cosmos and to which nothing is sacred, destroys itself.” Harmony does not exist. On the other hand, in the new holism reason is again grounded cosmically and therefore can serve as a foundation for a new ethics of global responsibility.

Human life is clearly an evolutionary whole. But human institutions and consciousness have not evolved to manifest this wholeness. Rational loyalty and compassionate solidarity with the wholes of which we are a part is still missing. Rather, our institutions and ways of life are fragmented, broken, and endangering our future on the earth. If human institutions reflected the wholeness of humanity, the transformation of consciousness would soon follow in a pattern that has been repeatedly shown throughout human history. The kind of institutions in which we live influence the kind of persons we become and the ways in which we relate to one another. Changing the conceptual foundations of our laws and institutions can allow the spirituality of love and compassionate justice to enter society. Peter Gabel, for example, describes the goals of the Integrating Spirituality, Law, and Politics project within the United States:

> Our aim is to transform law into the building of a binding culture in public space—in public rooms like courthouses and courtrooms, in written discourses like law books and legislation—that attempts to foster empathy and compassion and human understanding, a force of healing and mutual recognition, rather than the mere parceling out of rights among solitary and adversarial individuals. (2013: 180)

We need to establish planetary democratic world law on exactly these principles. According to the principle of holism on which the universe is constructed, if we want a future on this planet we must unite under democratic world law founded on the holistic principle of unity in diversity. Uniting humanity under democratic world law would engender a qualitative leap: the whole is more than merely the sum of its parts. New qualities would emerge with the wholeness of human institutions and consciousness that would be very powerful, liberating, and would give us our best prospect for a world based on peace, justice, and sustainability.
The new holistic paradigm must serve as the presupposition for the meaning of the parts on every level, from the cosmos to the planetary biosphere to human life. We must make a paradigm-shift from starting with the parts and trying to build wholes (peace, justice, sustainability, etc.) to an orientation that starts from the whole on every level. We must think of our individuality, our culture, our economics, and our nation as deriving from the holism of humanity, not the reverse. The transformation of primary perspective, of starting point, is one of the keys to human liberation. The Constitution for the Federation of Earth, written by hundreds of world citizens over a period of some 23 years from 1968-1991, is predicated precisely on this holism of planetary unity in diversity (Martin 2010). It starts from the whole, and then addresses the institutional means for governing the unity in diversity that constitutes human civilization.

The paradigm-shift to holism with respect to government and law requires that we recognize the illegitimacy of the global political-economic system that is today rapidly shredding the possibility for any viable future for human beings on Earth. The dominant political and economic system of the world today violates wholeness, and, focusing as both nations and corporations do on external relations, violates the possibility of harmony. For every nation today, national and sectarian interests take priority over planetary interests, but planetary interests are those of the whole of humanity and future generations. They arise from our holistic situation and require a holistic perspective and set of institutions to address them.

The holistic paradigm of law and government identifies a planetary common good, transcending the localized common goods of territorial nation-states. The clear principles of our planetary common good include peace, disarmament, ecological sustainability, and the elimination of the scourge of global poverty. It recognizes that the fate of all people is linked together, both because we are all human beings and because a globalized world has forced awareness of these rights to peace and a protected environment upon us all. Engendering a new global democratic order will establish government and law directed toward making the world a decent place for all its citizens, not just the one percent, and not just those in North America, Europe, or Japan. The very nature of holistic law demands this: the purpose of government and law is intrinsically moral and intrinsically demands universal application through compassionate justice and ecological sustainability.

It is important to be clear that the process of emergence of this world peace system, and the planetary social democracy it entails, is not simply one arbitrary option among the various possibilities that we encounter as we reflect on our common future. We have seen that a dynamic principle of holism is fundamental to all the processes of the universe including human evolutionary development. Democratic world law is implicit within our emerging human holism. We can, of course, derail this process through environmental collapse or nuclear war, but the potential for harmony and unity in diversity of a nonviolent planetary legal order is at the heart of the emergent ethics of holism and the unity of our human condition.

This new world-peace system will not abolish national administrative and governmental units but will substantially remove the conflict of national partisan interests. National governments under the Earth Constitution function more like states within the US or Pradesh within India. Holistic law recognizes that the cooperative governing of everyone together engenders “positive freedom,” a freedom for each that is so much greater than the so-called “freedom” of isolated units trying to serve egoistic interests while in conflict with others and while resisting governmental authority. The nations and peoples of Earth will begin working together in ways deemed unimaginable during most of modern history since the Renaissance. The redemption of humanity from war, chaos, and self-destruction requires that we unite together under a global social contract.

Capitalism and sovereign nation-states as institutions bring out our potential for fear, greed, conflict, and lust for power. They lead people to thoughts and actions presupposing external relationships, rather than internal (moral) relationships. A social democratic world government will bring out our potential for cooperation and mutual participation. The League of Nations was supposed to be a place for nations to talk out their differences and the world’s problems rather than go to war, but such a nonbinding framework for militarized sovereign nation-states in aggressive economic competition with one another will necessarily fail to fulfill that purpose. The same thing is true of the United Nations with its undemocratic and powerless General Assembly and Security Council veto. Under the system of sovereign nations, the General Assembly becomes little more than a forum for ideology, posturing, and recrimination, not a forum for genuine dialogue, and clearly not a public space for effective use of human intelligence to address global problems.
To actualize the universal a priori rule of law implicit in human sociality, rationality, and morality, we must begin with these presuppositions. You cannot succeed by presupposing precisely what prevents universal law from actualizing itself, namely, sovereign nation-states and unrestrained global economic competition. That is why the Constitution for the Federation of Earth must be the presupposition of our endeavors to create a world parliament, a world court system, and to initiate the rule of universal positive law for humanity. By presupposing the holism and universality of law in all our endeavors (symbolized and concretized in the Earth Constitution), we bring our concrete, particular activities in the current state of fragmentation into a transformed actuality that recognizes our common humanity.

Legitimate sovereignty belongs to humankind, not to fragmented militarized state territories. Legitimate sovereignty is embodied in the Earth Constitution, resulting in the embrace of humanity and our planet in a governmental regime of compassionate justice, peace, and ecological sustainability. As philosopher Errol E. Harris expresses this: “If the implications of this scientific revolution and the new paradigm it produces are taken seriously, holism should be the dominating concept in all our thinking” (2000: 90). We must begin with the sovereignty and holism of humanity under the Constitution for the Federation of Earth. From that beginning alone, follows the preservation and redemption of humanity.

Citations:


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