

On Spiritual Teachers and Teachings

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ABSTRACT This article examines the dynamics of authority in educational contexts where teachers and students engage with religious or spiritual subject matter. The aim here is to offer a framework that can be used to sort “good” educational relationships of this type from “bad” ones. After positioning the spiritual teacher in the context of eclectic traditions in American moral education, I look into the structure of *teacherly authority* and into the dynamics of this authority when it is exercised in religious contexts. In the process I tease apart two types of teacherly authority for heuristic purposes, the *Classic* and the *Modern*. I discuss their respective liabilities, affordances, and most typical spiritual teachings. Finally, I suggest that some contemporary spiritual teachers and teachings may be harbingers of new emerging configurations of religious authority—configurations dubbed *Integral*. This rough triadic typology—*Classic, Modern, and Integral*—allows us to critically discuss the kinds of authority assumed by different types of spiritual teachers. Specifically, I use EnlightenNext (Andrew Cohen) and the Integral Spiritual Experience (Marc Gafni) as case studies, demonstrating how to use the framework I have developed as a way to explore preferable possibilities for the future of religion and the spiritual marketplace.

Introduction: Religiosity Revisited

Sociologically speaking I have not studied any of the new de-institutionalized and de-differentiated forms of religiosity.... maybe not everything on the market is Californian claptrap and neopaganism.

– Jürgen Habermasⁱ

There has been a resurgence of interest in religious phenomena in recent years. Scholars and intellectuals from diverse camps have been led to reflect on the role of faith, reason, and religion in the public sphere. Mainstream media outlets focus countless hours on religious topics and events. Religious actions and policies have been a ubiquitous aspect of 21st-century politics and culture. And yet for a significant period in intellectual history, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers were predicting the decline of religion.ⁱⁱ The ‘disenchantment of nature’ and the modernization of culture and industry were predicted to disintegrate structures of religious authority. And indeed they did in many major respects, rendering the separation of church and state and the rise of scientific knowledge production processes. However, for most of the post-industrial West—but especially Americans—religion never receded from

exercising a major influence, especially in the realm of moral education. For most of the rest of the world local religious life continues to be of profound significance, even as local customs are transformed by a growing influx of global communications and commerce. The ‘decline-of-religion-hypothesis’ has not panned out, leading some to suggest that we have entered a ‘post-secular’ era.ⁱⁱⁱ Religion is a key node in the emerging trans-national constellations that will radically shape the future of global civilization.

This paper is about contemporary structures of *religious authority*, and how it is legitimated and justified. I am especially interested in the unique kind of *teacherly authority* that occurs in educational contexts where teachers and students are focused on religious topics. Moreover, it will be the non-(or-quasi)-institutionalized religious teacher—the *spiritual teacher*, to whom I give the most attention. The dynamics of religious authority in other parts of the world are complex and important—from terrorism to liberation theology—but I focus on the post-industrial West because it is where I live and because I think it is the site of complex new emerging forms of religious authority.

Of course, the term *religion* and its cognates have been variously defined,^{iv} and these days other words have come to have comparable definitions. Religiosity has become *spirituality*, and the religious, *the spiritual*. I use these terms as nearly co-extensive because I define religion very broadly, including any and all beliefs and practices that address topics of ‘Ultimate Concern.’ However, I will tend toward a usage wherein religion has connotations of institutionalization, while spirituality is related with non-institutionalized and often eclectic beliefs and practices. Both terms refer to configurations of education, practice, and belief that are basically ways of addressing topics of Ultimate Concern.

That religion (and thus spirituality) has to do with topics of Ultimate Concern is a Tillichian sentiment.^v I think it works because it covers a broad range of phenomena that in some way thematize or reference the human condition in its broadest possible context. Themes such as the meaning of life, death, love, and morality are classically topical. More recent and unavoidably religious topics would include *the self-inflicted extinction of the human species*—the ‘end of days’ as they appear today, if you will.

Eschatological visions remain common in the broad public imagination, from movies to the nightly news. After Hiroshima and the Nuremburg trials, and now in the context of an ecological crisis of

unknown proportions, the idea that every human could die as a result of human decisions is a consideration that is hard to ignore. And so is the related idea of a universe in which humanity has come and gone, flourishing for a time only to be extinguished. Evoking religious themes is very difficult to avoid when discussing these topics—after seeing a news story on T.V. perhaps—let alone when issuing action-orienting counsel as a parent or teacher. Thus some speak of the irreplaceable (and often untapped) semantic potentials that reside in religious language.^{vi}

However, at least since Kant wrote that a good child of the Enlightenment should be embarrassed to be caught praying, the use of religious language has come with a great deal of baggage. This is the result of shifting views about *the justification of religious validity claims* and related processes for *legitimizing religious authority*. As I explore below, new configurations of religious authority have emerged during the course of socio-cultural evolution. Today there are a set of co-existing religious authority structures and related worldviews wherein the dynamics of authority vary greatly. These different normative structures result in very different educational practices, and in particular, very different kinds of teachers and teachings.

The *spiritual teacher*, as I will explore below, is a fascinating emergent role in post-industrial multicultural societies. This is an individual without an official position in a religious organization, who nevertheless appeals to the public at large while assuming (and often being granted) a certain type of moral and religious authority. This is a unique form of authority, in so far as it is more or less non-institutionalized and typically built around market transactions and exchanges (books, lectures, retreats). The spiritual teacher—like the religious fundamentalist—is a uniquely modern figure and agent.

But spiritual teachers are also unique because they can appeal to a much wider variety of sources to ostensibly justify their claims and legitimize their *teacherly authority*. The traditional religious teacher—e.g., the Rabbi or Priest—typically deploys a lineage-specific justificatory strategy. The spiritual teacher, on the other hand, can deploy a trans-lineage justificatory strategy, and sometimes will deploy justificatory strategies that are totally unaffiliated with any religious tradition. And while it is true that the dynamics of teacherly authority vary even within a single tradition, it is still the case that spiritual

teachers are authorities with more ambiguous and complex modes for securing the legitimacy of their authority.

However, the goal here is not to describe the wilderness of the current spiritual marketplace, but to build a language that might allow us to discuss the value of the various wares on offer. In other words, the aim here is to offer an evaluative framework—the first words in a “language of strong evaluation”^{vii}—that can be used to sort the ‘good’ teachers from the ‘bad’ ones.^{viii} I begin by positioning the spiritual teacher in the context of eclectic traditions in the history of American moral education. Then I look into the structure of teacherly authority and into the dynamics of this authority when it is exercised in religious or spiritual contexts. In the process I tease apart two types of teacherly authority for heuristic purposes, *Classic* and *Modern*. I discuss their respective affordances and their most typical spiritual teachings. Finally, I also suggest that some contemporary spiritual teachers and teachings may be indicative of new emerging configurations of religious authority—configurations dubbed *Integral*. This rough triadic typology^{ix} allows us to critically discuss the kinds of authority assumed by different types of spiritual teachers. Specifically, I take EnlightenNext (Cohen) and the Integral Spiritual Experience (Gafni) as case studies, demonstrating how to use the framework I’ve developed as a way to explore preferable possibilities for the future of religion and the spiritual marketplace.

Spiritual Teachers as Moral Educators

The liberal state has an interest in the free expression of religious voices... because it cannot be sure that secular society would not otherwise cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity.... Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life. This potential makes religious speech into a serious vehicle for possible truth contents.... It would be unreasonable to reject out of hand the idea that the major world religions can claim a place within the differentiated architecture of modernity because their cognitive substance has not yet been exhausted. At any rate, we cannot exclude that they involve semantic potentials capable of exercising an inspirational force on society *as a whole* as soon as they divulge their profane truth contents.

– Jürgen Habermas^x

Nearly all of the most important educational institutions in the world began as the result of religious organizations,^{xi} and without a doubt the most influential teachers have been religious ones. What were Christ and Buddha if not teachers? Moreover, the ultimate purpose of education (a Good Life, if you will) has nearly always been taken as a religious question, while the method of religion has typically been *to educate the world*. In the United States, for example, the most successful educational campaigns of the 18th and 19th Centuries were not the struggling public schools, but networks of religious initiatives arranged to shape the development of the next generation. The so-called “Great Awakenings” that swept across the country between 1730 and 1910 have been convincingly characterized as complex educational configurations, with organized economic and institutional arrangements, information dissemination strategies, teacher training, and youth outreach. Indeed, the complex public school system that emerged in the 20th Century was imbued with a potent kind of American “civil religion,” which is just now coming under scrutiny as trends toward multiculturalism have forced changes in American ideology.

Today the extramural markets for religious education have never been bigger or more diverse. Everyday people are increasingly lured toward Fundamentalist revivals or New Age retreats, or distracted by endless streams of religious books, television programs, and web-content. So while the public schools have been famously and controversially separated from religion, the majority of the population nevertheless participates in religious configurations of some variety. Some of these configurations simply involve private schools or churches, others involve publishing and media outlets, and still others involve spiritual teachers of one type or another.

It is interesting to look into what historical precedence there is for the role of the spiritual teacher in America. It should first be noted that a distinctly modern understanding of religious authority has allowed revival and evangelical movements to overwhelmingly characterize religious life in the United States. This has made it historically a land in which any Protestant farm boy with a bible and a voice could conceivably establish a ministry and a flock. The democratization of authority that has characterized modernity cannot be separated from the antinomianism of the Reformation and the concomitant individualization of religious insight and attainment. The early American colonists and

revolutionaries exemplified these emerging modern forms of religious practice and belief—antidogmatic, pluralistic, individualized—as hundreds of different religious groups could be found in New York City when its population was still only several hundred thousand.^{xii}

Of course, since the literary great awakening in Concord, an influx of Eastern religious traditions has broadened the horizons of non-denominational spiritual seekers. Specifically, the broad and important influence of Emerson as a religious educator has not gone unnoticed; he was perhaps the first best selling author, lecture-circuit running, post-traditional American spiritual teacher.^{xiii} The 1890's saw both the popular appeal and scholarly praise of James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Vivekananda's influential appearance at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. These events signaled the close of a Century in which multitudinous religious configurations diversified across the country, a trend that would continue throughout the next Century and into our own.

After World War II, large swaths of the country—especially the West Coast—firmly embraced the Eastern traditions they had been flirting with for decades. Multicultural, pop-cultural, and psychoactive spiritual marketplaces would emerge, breaking into mainstream consciousness with the advent of celebrities worshiping Gurus and hippies writing books on LSD. And as if in reaction to the almost anarchistic eclecticism of the spiritual counter culture, a new wave of evangelical Christianity began to flourish. In the closing decades of the century, a large, wealthy, and politically powerful network of Christian religious organizations established massive and effective educational configurations that have shaped the life of the country as a whole, and continue to do so today. By contrast, the spiritual counter culture expanded, diversified, and commercialized into a polycentric and dynamic marketplace, but with little political influence and only pockets of wealth and institutional organization.

Today it can be accurately stated that America is simultaneously the country that is the most religious and the most modern, the most spiritual and the most materialistic.^{xiv} There are a vast array of religious and spiritual teachers and teachings on display or for sale. Most individuals are not forced into one form of religious engagement, but are positioned to choose among many, reflectively. This is an unprecedentedly complex educational environment that is no doubt greatly affecting the life-trajectories

of current generations. In particular, and to the point, where and how are processes of moral education being carried out and justified? And even more specifically, to whom and for what kinds of reasons do we grant a teacher the *authority* to shape the religious and spiritual contours of our lives? When we choose to join a church, begin meditation instruction, change our behaviors in light of a ‘self-help’ book, or participate in religious observances, we Moderns must ask, why these teachings, this teacher, and not some other? The indelible pluralism of the contemporary scene has engendered unique configurations of religious authority. The result has been dynamics that are ambiguous and obscure, with forms of authority ranging from the self-effacing total control of the classic Guru to the relativistic self-indulgence of some teachers in the post-modern spiritual marketplace. These different forms of teacherly authority warrant more careful attention.

The Structure of Teacherly Authority

The teacher has a peculiar form of authority. It is viewed as nonproblematic because, (1) it is effecting development, and (2) it is *phase-temporary* or *phase-specific*. That is, the teacher’s authority over the pupil is temporary; it effectively evaporates once the pupil’s degree of understanding approaches that of the teacher.... Phase-specific authority seems inescapable in any process of education (development).... Either religious teachers are there to bring you up to their level—in which case their authority is phase-temporary—or they exist to keep you in your place, which by definition is somewhere below or under them.

– Ken Wilber^{xv}

In most of the post-industrial West the terms *religious authority* and *moral authority* have negative connotations. They are sometimes used as terms of derision or cynicism. The terms *scientific authority* and *medical authority* have enjoyed non-ironic usage for the past half-century or so, but they too are frequently and increasingly focuses of concern. *Political authority* is of course the type of authority most well known, and its contestation is what we typically call history. As new global conditions jeopardize the authority of national governments—particularly transnational economic and ecological crises—there is a growing concern about the shape of the global authorities to come, from the

UN to Google. And in our own lives we grant and are given authority over a wide variety of spheres, from the cook's dominion over the kitchen to the raising of children.

The structure of authority is complex, from the micro to the macro. But it always involves relationships in which normative force is non-reciprocally distributed. That is, authority is a dynamic property of relationships wherein one party is granted unique responsibilities and allowances with regards to the other. For example, the parent acts with authority over the child in setting rules. The scientist speaks with authority to the press about what is the case. The teacher professes authoritatively to the student about a subject in which they share an interest. In each case, one role (parent, scientist, teacher) is positioned asymmetrically "above" the other—there is an imbalance of knowledge and power (among other things). Importantly, for authority to work this asymmetry must be recognized and agreed to by all parties. If you speak as an authority but are not recognized as one by your audience, you will not affect your audience as an authority might. Authority must be granted or given. You must arrange to be seen as an authority.

Importantly, the ways in which authority is negotiated and arranged tell us if it is *justified* or *unjustified*. There has been a great deal of discussion about what 'good' and 'bad' forms of authority look like. The dynamics of authority have been discussed in the sociological literature.^{xvi} And they have been tied into post-modern critical studies of the relationship between knowledge and power.^{xvii} Likewise there is work in developmental psychology about authority, where several taxonomies of authority-type are already in use.^{xviii} It has been a topic in post-positivist philosophy of science (epistemic authority)^{xix} and, of course, in political theory.^{xx}

However, the dynamics of *teacherly authority* have received less attention, and the unique forms of authority deployed by 21st Century spiritual teachers have received almost none.^{xxi} Formal institutionalized forms of teacherly authority have existed throughout history, from ancient apprenticeship systems to post-industrial public school systems. Informal non-institutionalized forms of teacherly authority have likewise been historically ubiquitous. The basic structure of teacherly authority is such an important part of human interaction, and serves such an essential function in the transmission of cultures,

skills, and knowledge, that some theorists have suggested that something like teacherly authority is a species specific trait unique to *homo sapiens*.^{xxii}

Teacherly authority is a property of relationships where *knowledge* is non-reciprocally distributed; both parties recognize this, and both agree that the person with more knowledge is entitled to instruct, teach, inform, or otherwise assist the other. Contrast this with political authority or parental authority, where power and the legitimate use of force are the qualities that are non-reciprocally distributed. Of course, parents and politicians can be teachers, and different forms of authority can overlap and interact. Scientific authority is easily turned into teacherly authority; a disgraced leader can maintain political authority even after losing their status as a moral authority, and so on. The point here is not to give a definitive classification of authority types, but rather to focus on the structure of teacherly authority itself, and on religious or spiritual teacherly authority in particular.

If I grant you teacherly authority, I give you the right to lead me in my thinking. I trust you to tell me what is good in the way of belief, and I consent to do as you instruct so that my mind might be changed along the lines you suggest. While there are debates about the differences between implicit and explicit knowledge and the differences between skills, knowledge, dispositions, and capabilities, the basic structure of teacherly authority is simple; just use the psychological constructs that make the most sense for the interaction in question—sometimes it's a skill (like tying a shoe), sometimes it's knowledge (like American history). Regardless of *what* is being dealt with, teacherly authority concerns relationships established when you and I don't meet on equal epistemic ground, and I would like to be brought up to where you stand. We mutually recognize this and consent to the authority dynamics that allow you to be the teacher and me the student.

It is in the *legitimacy* and *justification* of teacherly authority where things get truly complex. Teacherly authority allows one person to influence the development of another; this entails a source of legitimacy and some form of related justification. That is, teacherly authority needs to be both situated and to have some form of backing—*who* is seen as a legitimate authority and *why* are they seen that way? For example, in a contemporary American public school the classroom teacher is not the final source of

legitimacy. Rather, legitimate teacherly authority is radically distributed, from textbook publishers to heads of school. This multi-centric form of legitimacy is backed by a variety of modern political, economic, and philosophical justificatory strategies. This is very different from the teacherly authority of a parent offering instructions to their child in shoe tying, where there is only one source of legitimacy backed by the kinds of informal justificatory strategies that color family life (“because I said so” being a classic parental justificatory trump card). So the structure of teacherly authority has to do with both *who* has authority and *why* they have it.

But of course, there are also the essential *how* and *what* of teacherly authority—*how* does the teacher exercise their authority and *what* is being taught? These aspects interact with the aspects just discussed to yield a complex picture of the different possible configurations of teacherly authority. To return to the example of American public education, the classroom teacher is one source of legitimate authority in a complex network of teachers who are justified by the state to teach a broad curriculum during a limited part of the day through the use of didactic instruction methods. Contrast this with ancient apprentice systems that often involved a single legitimate source of teacherly authority, one justified by both tradition and demonstrated mastery, exercising control over almost the entire day and life of their apprentice, and using hands-on techniques and threats of corporal punishment to instill a narrow range of professional skills.

Of course, history teaches that when the *what* is religious subject matter, and the *who* is a religious or spiritual teacher, the configurations of teacherly authority become powerful and potentially problematic. Moreover, as the sketch just offered suggests, configurations of teacherly authority have changed during the course of history such that today there are multitudinous educational endeavors characterized by a wide variety of authority dynamics.

Spiritual Teachers and Teachings: Classic, Modern, and Integral

In modern societies, religious doctrine has to accommodate itself to an unavoidable competition with other forms of faith, and other claims to truth.... Thus modern faith becomes reflexive. Only through self-criticism can it stabilize the inclusive attitude that it

assumes within a universe of discourse delimited by secular knowledge and shared with other religions. This decentered background consciousness of the relativity of one's own standpoint... is characteristic of modern forms of religious faith....

– Jürgen Habermas^{xxiii}

The sweeping revolutions of modernity—industrialization, democratization, individualization, globalization—have been consistently accompanied by a discourse about the sources of legitimate authority. This can be seen, for example, in both the rise of the sciences over religion and in the rise of democracy over the divine right of kings. In both cases, the very structure of authority shifted profoundly. Not just *who* had authority but also *why* they had it—how it was legitimated and justified. The dynamics of authority implicate deep normative structures, the most basic rules and norms that regulate the interactions that constitute a society.

Some theorists think it is possible to trace the historical development of these kinds of normative structures. Their strategy has been to *rationaly reconstruct* the rules and norms that structure social interactions and arrive at a rough taxonomy of structure-types. The methodological issues surrounding this kind of developmental structuralism and its ideal-type-heuristics are reserved for a footnote.^{xxiv} Above all, it is important to keep in mind that such structure-types are only meant to serve only a heuristic purpose. As a set of orienting generalizations they provide only a set of potentially useful terms and distinctions—they are only one part of the language of evaluation I am attempting to construct.

For the purposes of the discussion here, three adjacent structure-types are of interest. There are the *Classic Structures* of normative authority out of which the major world religions emerged. There are the *Modern Structures* of normative authority that emerged from the classic structures and then generated political, scientific, and cultural dynamics that have profoundly shaped the post-industrial West. Lastly, there are the *Integral Structures* that are just beginning to take shape, emerging in part from the confluences and tensions between the Classic and the Modern structures. The Integral Structures are thus dialectically complex, addressing the imbalances of both Modern and Classic. Each structure-type can be elaborated in terms of certain characteristic forms of *authority*, which are based on distinct processes of *legitimation* and *justification*. And each structure-type also has its characteristic religious or spiritual

teachings, which are built around distinct *epistemological/hermeneutic* engagements, *metaphysical* postulates and *ethical* orientations. Needless to say I only have room to briefly sketch the structures.^{xxv}

The Classic Structures justify authority as a *metaphysical status*. Authority is granted to those who attain a position in an explicit religious hierarchy in which ontological realities and institutional positions are not clearly differentiated. A variety of background assumptions are in play, including an emphasis on the impersonal nature of religious truths and the general subordination of individuality to the life of the group. The authority of the teacher is wholistic, affecting every aspect of the student's life. The use of normative force or teacherly authority—as in when the teacher tells the student what is good for them—is legitimated by a single source of inerrant justifications. These are the Classic Gurus and Monastic Totem-Priests, who are taken as embodiments of Truth and thus given near total authority to shape the lives of their students.

The teachings characteristic of the *Classic Structures* tend to be built around the infallible personal illumination of a leader/founder, or the inerrant textual traditions of a specific lineage. The metaphysical systems are cosmocentric or theocentric, wherein humanity is beholden to universal and impersonal (cosmic or divine) laws, patterns, and demands. Ethical orientations are collectivist, as right action is considered to be what conforms to the aforementioned cosmic laws—an orientation that tends to override the interests of the individual in service the group. In short, these kinds of teachings are the stuff of traditional religiosity; an unquestioned (and unquestionable) lineage positions the individual in a world where humanity is subsumed in the cosmic or divine law, just as the individual is subsumed in collectivist energies.

The Modern Structures justify authority as a *social status*. Authority is co-constructed between individuals who would otherwise reciprocally recognize one another as persons of equal worth. The background assumptions concern the primacy of personal truths and of the individual over the group. The authority of the teacher is transitory and non-specific, affecting different relatively isolated aspects of a student's life, as relationships and techniques are negotiated as marketable products. This weak normative force is radically de-centered, spanning multiple incongruent perspectives and sources of justification.

These are the meditation instructors, yoga teachers, and Sunday morning ministers, who would not want to overstep their domains of expertise, impinge upon the other pursuits of their students, or prescribe how they might navigate their complex roles in the world beyond the yoga studio or church.

The teachings characteristic of the *Modern Structures* tend to be built around reflective textual traditions and interpretive practices, which are held tentatively in light of both the claims of other traditions and the claims of secular science. The metaphysical systems are generally humanistic or anthropocentric, suggesting that humanity creates its own laws, which supervene on preexisting natural and cosmic ones; we posit or create the (transcendental) goals we pursue. And thus the ethical orientations are individualistic, as right action is considered to be a matter of personal judgments, calculations of utility, and estimations of happiness. All in all, these kinds of teachings are the stuff of rationalized, self-critical, and pluralistic religious engagement. Self-consciously error-prone traditions, well aware of competing cultural orientations, position the individual as the locus of responsibility, innovation, and judgment, claiming to offer only non-authoritative forms of spiritual guidance.

The Integral Structures justify authority as a *normative status*. Authority is negotiated in light of a post-metaphysical hierarchy of values where persons are taken as *fundamentally equal* while being nevertheless *ethically distinguishable*.^{xxvi} The background assumptions of this structure make clear the *partialness* of both personal insights and impersonal generalizations when it comes to religious topics. The authority of the teacher is phase specific—it is a targeted normative force, developmentally appropriate, and employed with the consent of the student. The teacher’s pedagogy ends up being only as wholistic as it needs to be, touching only those aspects of the student’s life that might affect their shared educational goal: the whole-person transformation of the student. This dialectical teacherly authority is legitimated from multiple sources or centers—stemming from multiple traditions and the checks and balances of collegial teachers. These centers of normative authority are, despite their diversity, aligned concentrically and hierarchically in light of certain universal axes of value and authenticity, giving coherence, comprehensiveness, and directionality to the educational process. These are the collaborative

gnostic intermediaries with ambitions to administer comprehensive care, who are partnered in co-devotional and reciprocally educative relations with students.

The teachings characteristic of the *Integral Structures* tend to be built around enactive trans-lineage, post-traditional hermeneutic, and epistemological procedures. These involve the implementation of inter-subjectively verifiable contemplative disclosures and principled doctrinal self-corrective mechanisms. The metaphysical systems tend toward acosmic humanism or panentheistic evolutionary nonduality, wherein the self-legislative capacities of humanity are seen as autonomous continuations of cosmic processes, and are thus capable of instantiating universal and non-relative values.^{xxvii} The ethical orientations focus on individual autonomy as it arises at the interface of personal, cultural, and cosmic ethical realities, with the goal of clarifying the evaluative contexts that shape the trajectory of each individual's unique life. These kinds of teachings accompany emerging forms of global, integrative, and transformative spirituality. This is tomorrow's religiosity, comprehending all prior traditions, and pursuant of universal values and authentic religious experience.

It is important to see that these three broad structure-types coexist and mingle in the post-industrial West. This is not a simple story of growth to goodness in which old undesirable structures are overcome by better ones. Rather, today's eclecticism and fundamentalisms represent mongrel forms of religiosity, where authority dynamics and concomitant teachings embody characteristics of multiple structure-types simultaneously. We have meditation retreats where Modern individualists choose to purchase the experience of Classic religious engagements (e.g., an Enlightened Master controlling your life for a week or two). We also have evangelical revivals wherein Classic teachings based on inerrant texts espousing theocentric metaphysics are consumed by Modern individualists, who are thus alienated from their broader cultural milieu where scientific claims and the claims of other religious traditions figure prominently. The dynamics of religious teacherly authority on the contemporary scene are complex. The discussion above provides a framework that can be used to disclose and clarify the various aspects of different religious and spiritual engagements.

One way of operationalizing this framework is to literally chart the various aspects of religious teacherly authority and related types of teachings instantiated by different types of engagements. I demonstrate how this is done in a footnote.^{xxviii} These charts are, again, simply heuristic devices that help clarify the authority dynamics in play. With this framework in place I now turn to discuss the contemporary scene, with an eye toward the various affordances and values of different religious educational configurations. In particular, I discuss two sophisticated emerging spiritual teachings and teachers both making explicit claims to be pioneering innovations that instantiate *Integral Structures* of teacherly authority.

Teacherly Authority and the Metaphysics of Personhood: Two Case Studies

If we accept the notion that social revolutions essentially involve a fundamental re-ordering of the social structure, and if we accept the supposition that the social order is essentially viewed as a moral phenomenon by the members of the collectivity, then there must be a new source of morality involved in societal change, one that both desecrates the present system and paves the way for the acceptance of a new order. Since established religion represents a compromise with the ongoing secular institutions, the only other possible host of revolutionary thought, however unwittingly, is the non-institutionalized religious sector.

– Edward Tiryakian^{xxix}

Both Wilber and Habermas have reasonable itemized lists of the desirable and undesirable properties of different forms of religious engagement.^{xxx} Both of their accounts are based on explicit theoretical constructs like those offered above—cultural evolutionary structure-types tied into complex characterizations of the internal dynamics of religious engagements. Their conclusions about what is possible and preferable for the future of religiosity in the post-industrial West are in broad agreement with the implications of my account here. The common theme is that the contemporary scene presents unprecedented configurations of religious authority, doctrinal innovation, and structure-type inter-animation. It is not simply that older forms of religious engagement are bad and that newer forms are good. Rather, their aim is to draw attention to the fact that certain aspects of older forms are being combined with newer ones, resulting in unique configurations that are situated in radically poly-vocal

cultural contexts. Thus any evaluative distinctions between the various forms of religiosity currently available must be based on a nuanced understanding of how these forms affect the persons involved and how they relate to broader cultural, economic, political, and institutional realities.

Along these lines, in this section I aim to apply the conceptual framework sketched above to make a set of complex considered judgments about two contemporary educational configurations involving spiritual teachers and teachings. The goal here is to model the kinds of evaluative distinctions that are possible in light of the kind of framework I have built. A truly comprehensive evaluation of these two religious configurations would be a paper in itself—I offer only the first word. On one hand, the work of spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen and his organization, EnlightenNext (once know as The Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship), represents a confluence of Classic and Integral structural aspects, blending sophisticated doctrinal innovations and enactive contemplative injunctions with traditional forms of Guru-Disciple teacherly authority. On the other hand, Rabbi Marc Gafni and the Integral Spiritual Experience represent a mixture of Modern and Integral structural aspects, with trans-lineage religious and philosophical doctrines contextualizing diverse and multitudinous contemplative injunctions and polycentric forms of teacherly authority. It is my hope that the potentially controversial and contested content in this section will not distract the reader from the broader purposes of the paper. The goal here is just to show the kinds of considered judgments facilitated by the framework I offer, not to condemn or condone these teachers and their teacherly practices.^{xxxii}

As I will show, the key differences between these configurations hinge on how the content of what is being taught interfaces with the forms of teacherly authority that are being put into practice. Specifically, different doctrines about the metaphysics of personhood frame and justify different forms of teacherly authority. The question of whether there is a place for Classic Guru-Disciple relationships in the post-industrial West looms large, as do questions about the liabilities of spiritual eclecticism and the diverse forms of teacherly authority they engender. Overall, I think these two configurations represent some of the most complex and valuable forms of spiritual engagement available today, and yet they are built around radically dissimilar forms of teacherly authority. It is important to gain clarity about the

differences between these two configurations, if only for the sake of facilitating dialogue about their respective affordances and unique contributions (and liabilities).

Cohen's teachings of *evolutionary enlightenment* are best classified as part of a lineage of panentheistic evolutionary metaphysics that includes Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin. The kind of teacherly authority he deploys stems from the Guru traditions of Advaita Vedanta. Both traditions stress the *impersonal* realization of the awakened human. In an evolutionary context, the awakened individual is understood as, in essence, an impersonal evolutionary catalyst serving a cosmic function. By transcending the separate self of the ego, and by realizing the True Self, or Authentic Self, the individual is cleansed of the illusion of uniqueness and freed to participate without reservation or bias in the process of conscious evolution. The Authentic Self is everywhere the same—you and I are one in its realization—and the actions that follow from its realization are an expression of impartial, impersonal, and universal evolutionary impulses. The emphasis is on the *process* of cosmic evolution as it is instantiated in human history. This is a process that subsumes the individual, who is obligated to overcome their limitations and self-centeredness for the sake of the evolution of the whole.

The role of the Guru (i.e., Cohen) is to facilitate this transformation of the individual, from a partial and unique ego to a radically impersonal expression of cosmic evolution. Because the ultimate goal of the teaching is to create a dynamic community of individuals, all of whom are awakened to the same evolutionary impulse, the Classic *wholistic* authority of the teacher can be justified. The teacher is ostensibly already an expression of the Authentic Self, which means he is already in touch with the impersonal evolutionary impulse that the student strives to realize. Thus the teacher is taken as justified in enlisting the *conformity* of the student across a wide array of particulars affecting their life-trajectory. In the terms of the Classic Structure, the teacher is already that One without a second (the Authentic Self) and the student strives to be That. So the goal of the teachings and the scope of teacherly authority are aligned in that they focus on overcoming individuality for the sake of what is universal.^{xxxii}

This is significantly different from Gafni's teachings about the *Unique Self*, which are best classified as part of a tradition of a cosmic humanism that includes key figures from post-(Western)-

Enlightenment esoteric Judaism, especially Rabbi Mordechai Lainer and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kooke. The teacherly authority engendered by this lineage revolves around a kind of individualized instruction that enlists the participatory authorship of the student. This tradition argues that it is through the unique ‘sacred autobiography’ of each individual that spiritual awakening unfolds. Individuals are called to evolve beyond their egocentrism and to participate in the ethically significant story of human and cosmic history through the expression of their Unique Self. This Unique Self is different for each individual, appearing as they navigate the contours of their singular life in light of universal principles and processes. The goal is to radically enliven the unique affordances of each individual’s personality through an infusion of transpersonal insight and an opening toward the sanctity of life and human relationships.

The role of the teacher (i.e., Gafni and his colleagues) is to awaken the student to their unique and inimitable role, their intrinsic value and importance, and the ethical obligations entailed by who the student is and who they can become. Because the ultimate goal of the teaching is to promote a kind of inspired self-authorship, autonomy, and responsibility, the teacher must honor the unique story of each student, working with them toward the co-construction of an awakened personality. The teacher is ostensibly already expressing their Unique Self and participating fully in the world as a profoundly inspired ethical personality. This kind of insight and agency justifies only a certain range of teacherly authority. While the teacher knows what it means to live their Unique Self, they do not know what it means to live yours or mine. Thus, the teacher cannot enlist conformity but must serve only to guide and scaffold the student in coming to actualize their full potentials and responsibilities in light of the broadest possible ethical and cosmic contexts. And so the goal of the teachings and the scope of teacherly authority are aligned in that they focus on facilitating the refraction of the universal through the individual.^{xxxiii}

Both Cohen and Gafni have teachings that display Integral metaphysical and epistemological aspects. While they stem from specific traditions, they make trans-lineage justificatory moves, pulling from a wide array of traditional, non-traditional, and scientific sources. Both are prodigious interlocutors and communicators, which gives their views a multi-perspectival interpretive bent and inter-subjective validity. And both have catalyzed diverse and dynamic student bodies that engage in post-traditional

forms of spiritual practice and contemplative enactment. However, as noted above, the teacherly practices they deploy and aim to justify (and thus the texture of the authority dynamics in their communities) are almost diametrically opposed.

Putting an emphasis on *impersonal evolutionary processes* allows Cohen to justify Classic Guru relationships, the subordination of the individual to the cosmic process, and the homogenization of personality characteristics and modes of ethical engagement. In the context of the post-industrial West, the liability here is that these forms of student-teacher relationship are incongruent with broader cultural values, representing a step backward behind the advances made in the wake of the Western Enlightenment. One of the great dignities accompanying the emergence of Modern forms of authority are ethical views that stress the inviolability of the individual, views that aim to insure persons are treated as ends in themselves, and never merely as means to an end. Classic forms of authority are built around the idea that persons lack this kind of intrinsic value; instead, persons are understood as instances of a generic metaphysical type, to be valued in terms of their position in the Great Chain of Being, the dominant social hierarchy, or as facets of broader cosmic processes. So while Cohen's teachings represent a kind of sophisticated Integral view, they are nevertheless amenable to justifying authority dynamics that are out of step with some of the most important ethical innovations achieved by the West. Put bluntly: the greatest human rights violations in history have *all* followed in the wake of ideologies that subordinated the individual to broader processes and thus characterized persons as means to an end.

Gafni and the cohort of teachers involved with the Integral Spiritual Experience, on the other hand, emphasize the *interface* of unique personalities with universal spiritual values and processes. This justifies polycentric and individualized forms of teacherly authority and the valorization of heterogeneous forms of life and ethical engagement. The liability here is that these forms of authority are not dissimilar enough from the kind of relativistic and market driven spirituality that dominates post-industrial cultures. One of the great problems with Modern forms of authority is that they aim for democratization without necessarily facilitating the requisite forms of education and individual responsibility. Enlisting the participatory authorship of students entails that they are mature enough to be co-collaborators and self-

directed learners. Without a great deal of maturity on the part of the student, these forms of engagement can degenerate into ineffective and piecemeal pursuits—driven by a desire for novel experience, not genuine transformation.^{xxxiv}

I have discussed these two examples here because they are two instances of engagements that claim to be harbingers of emerging Integral forms of spirituality. Indeed, I have suggested that both rely heavily on unprecedentedly sophisticated doctrinal and contemplative procedures, which are best characterized as Integral. However, they also involve a complex mixture of other normative structures. Neither is Integral across the board; we are still forging tomorrow's religiosity. And while I think it is better to err on the side of eclectic individualism rather than evolutionary collectivism, I admit that both endeavors are still in process and continue to change and re-understand themselves. It is my hope that this brief and admittedly cursory discussion might bring some clarity to the various aspects of these spiritual educational configurations that require attention as apart of any comprehensive evaluation of their worth. I hope this discussion has also demonstrated the fruitfulness of the framework outlined in this paper, which is nothing more than a model useful in scaffolding complex and multifaceted evaluations of religious engagements.

Conclusion: Tomorrow's Religiosity

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism.... Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? We are now so far from the road to truth, that religious teachers dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are esteemed unsound and frivolous. But to sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical. Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test will be that it will explain all phenomena....

– Ralph Waldo Emerson^{xxxv}

I began this paper by raising the specter of the self-inflicted extinction of our species. I also noted that many prominent scholars have begun to recant on the hypothesis that modernization and secularization go hand-in-hand. I see these as interconnected. As public awareness grows of endemic

global crises that threaten to jeopardize the stability of civilization and life as we know it, there are a limited number of ways to make sense of what is likely to unfold over the course of the next century, a century which promises to be as ethically complex as the last. In a separate paper I have noted that the precariousness of our burgeoning global civilization has amplified the implications of a species-wide *identity crisis* in which we are currently embroiled.^{xxxvi}

The proliferation and fragmentation of knowledge-production processes in the academy—combined with the irrational and commoditized structure of the mass media—has rendered humanity nearly incomprehensible to itself. What it means to be a human has never been more contested. And so in the same moment our species faces its greatest *collective* challenges, there are unprecedented and widespread disagreements concerning the meaning of our very existence. The economic and ecological fallout from catastrophic climate change pales in comparison to how concomitantly massive humanitarian disasters will affect the *conscience* of those who survive. The idea that tragedies of global scope might be interpreted through the superficial forums and languages we currently have for public meaning making is a disturbing prospect to say the least.

In this light, arguments in favor of continuing to explore the untapped semantic potential of religious language should be taken with some urgency. In particular, the need for a *global spirituality* that transcends but includes multitudinous religious traditions is a remarkably valuable ideal. But as this paper has suggested, the dynamics of religious authority in the post-industrial West, are complex and problematic. The most sophisticated and well educated among us disagree about the appropriate dynamics of post-traditional religious engagement. Some have become mere consumers of experience, while others have relinquished autonomy and relevance in a retreat toward fundamentalism or Guru worship. It sometimes seems that the proliferation of new religious teachers and teachings is more a function of what the market will bear than a function of what humanity needs. Moreover, as life conditions around the globe continue to present remarkable challenges, the meaning-making market will grow. Any chance of building comprehensive and generative emergent forms of spirituality depends on our ability to make considered and complex judgments about what valuable forms of religiosity look like.

In this paper I have offered a framework that I think should be useful in catalyzing a more sophisticated discourse about the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of religious teacherly authority. In many respects my account raises more questions than it answers. But I have made no claims to be saying everything that needs saying. Indeed, the point here has been to suggest some key terms and distinctions that might allow us to speak with more nuance and rigor when we aim to address these kinds of complex and important issues.

NOTES

ⁱ Habermas (2002) “A conversation about God and the world.” p. 152.

ⁱⁱ E.g., Weber; Freud; Durkheim; Parsons, etc. And of course, many high profile scholars still denigrate religion for comparable reasons, see: Dennett (2006) *Breaking the Spell*.

ⁱⁱⁱ E.g., Habermas and Derrida: see Habermas (2009) “How to Answer the Ethical Question: Derrida and Religion.”

^{iv} See: Wilber (1983) *A Sociable God*. My definitions straddle several of his.

^v See: Tillich (1958) *Dynamics of faith*. There are, of course, a number of scholars who have been critical of Tillich’s views, and there is a history of definitional disputes from Durkheim, Weber, Freud, and Marx through Bruce Lincoln and Jonathan Z. Smith. I adopt the Tillich / Wilber view without argument, but I am aware of this complex conceptual terrain.

^{vi} E.g., Habermas (2008) Wilber (2006) Taylor (1989) Nussbaum (2001).

^{vii} This phrase is Taylor’s from *Sources of The Self*. In a series of other publications I have outlined comparable languages of evaluation, addressing issues in educational neuroscience, biotechnology, and developmental psychology, see: Stein *et al*, 2010; Stein, 2010b; Stein & Heikkien, 2009. It should be noted that the work done in this paper is mostly descriptive rather than prescriptive. The goal is to build a more robust way of characterizing religious/spiritual teacherly authority, which should reveal properties that bear on the normative worth of the enterprises in question. When it comes to building a language of evaluation, descriptive work unfolds so that richer more explicit prescriptive work may follow.

^{viii} This would be a *Preface to a Critique of Religious Education* were it published in another day, but here it is privileged to echo *A Sociable God* (Wilber, 1983) and *Communication and The Evolution of Society* (Habermas, 1979). Specifically, I will end up talking about *authority*, *justification*, and *legitimacy*, using them somewhat along the lines of Wilber (1983a) “Legitimacy, Authenticity, and Authority in the New Religions.” In that paper Wilber’s focus is mainly on *authenticity* and *depth*, how religions get people to *transform vertically*, as it were. Whereas I will focus mainly on religious *authority*, its conferral, and related teacherly dynamics, a topic he touches on explicitly, insightfully, but briefly in the paper just mentioned (Wilber, 1983a).

I will also be making use of three formal developmental structures—best understood as rational reconstructions or ‘ideal types’—these structures mirror those outlined by Habermas (1979) in his attempts at building a critical theory of cultural evolution. He marked off four historical epochs: *archaic*,

magical-animistic, mythic-rational, rational-reflective, and a fifth, *reflective-global*, which is currently emerging and self-structuring around us now. I think these reconstructions are a useful fiction—as would be any good model—and, for my purposes here, I'm only interested in the structures of the three most recent epochs. (see note 9)

^{ix} (see note 8) These three structures—Classic, Modern, Integral—are those identified through historical and anthropological reconstructions as *structurally distinct epochs* in cultural evolution by Wilber (1983), Habermas (1979), Gebser (1984) & Thompson (1981) among others (e.g., Aurobindo, 1916; Baldwin, 1913). The Classic Structures are roughly: Wilber: mythic-membership, Habermas: mythic-rational. The Modern Structures are roughly: Wilber: rational-egoic, Habermas: rational-reflective. The Integral Structures are roughly: Wilber: integral-centauric, Habermas: reflective-global. Some may wonder where the Post-modern structure is, but according to my readings, most of what is considered to be post-modern, is really just hyper-modern and not a qualitatively new and more integrative normative structure (See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*). (see note 24).

^x Habermas (2008) “Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the “Public Use of Reason” by Religious and Secular Citizens.” p. 131.

^{xi} Cremin’s (1970; 1980; 1988) Pulitzer Prize winning volumes on the history of American education also read like a history of religious cultural movements, as Cremin himself notes.

^{xii} Cremin (1970).

^{xiii} Cremin (1980) & Richardson (1995): *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*.

^{xiv} This kind of claim has been made in lots of places. I would note that this shows us these terms are not mutually exclusive: more modern does not equal less religious, etc.

^{xv} Wilber (1983) “Legitimacy, Authenticity, and Authority in the New Religions.”

^{xvi} Habermas (1984; 1987).

^{xvii} Foucault (1972).

^{xviii} Authoritative vs authoritarian parenting styles being the most famous issue in this area.

^{xix} See Brandom (1994).

^{xx} See Adorno *et al*, (1950) & Luhmann (2004).

^{xxi} Although see: Anthony, Becker, & Wilber (1987).

^{xxii} Tomasello (1999).

^{xxiii} Habermas (2002) “A conversation about God and the world.” p. 152.

^{xxiv} (See note 9 above) The goal of building a developmental model like this one is to provide a carefully constructed language for characterizing different related forms of religious engagement. Once you can see the different *types*, then you can think through their respective affordances. It is a practice that has been deployed at least since Baldwin (1906), and then more recently by Kohlberg (1981) and Fowler (1981), who both deployed the tools of developmental structuralism to religious questions in the 1980s. As noted above, Wilber and Habermas likewise offered models styled as *rational reconstructions* in the tradition of *developmental structuralism* around the same time.

It is important to note that these kinds of models do not entail any kind of simple growth to goodness. Integral structures are not necessarily better than modern ones. I have written extensively on the normative complexities surrounding developmental modes (Stein, 2009; 2010a; Stein & Hiekkinen, 2009). These same issues are on the table when considering the transformation of socio-cultural structures. But this is not the place to work out the non-obvious evaluative issues at play. The goal here is simply to begin to move toward a more robust descriptive language, which is a prerequisite for then evaluating the different types. (see note 25).

It should be noted that I have neglected to discuss the role of *state experiences* in this characterization of configurations of religious authority. The topic is too complex to handle in an adequate

way here, but there are very important issues at the interface of these structure-types and state experiences that can be reliably generated in some religious communities

^{xxv} (See note 24 above) Tables 1 & 2 represent the model in its most explicit and schematic form. Both offer a set of related concepts useful in characterizing the dynamics of religious authority. A spiritual teacher can conceivably show up across any three boxes in either table. A set of three boxes constitutes a type of teacherly authority. Another set of three a type of spiritual teaching. Combined, they yield a six-aspect profile of the authority dynamics in play for any given religious or spiritual engagement. Thus when thinking about the value of different forms of authority it is the overall profile of the engagement that is at issue. Specifically, one should worry about how the structural profile for authority dynamics in question fits into the cultural context and personality structures most directly implicated by the endeavor. (see note 28).

	Authority—(how) range of direct normative force over student.	Legitimacy—(who) source of authority.	Justification—(why) legitimacy's backing.
Classic	Wholistic: teacher influences every part of a student's life in light of traditional or neo-traditional teachings.	Centralized: normative authority is located in one person (or small set), representing a single tradition.	Metaphysical: legitimacy is justified by inerrant traditions and unquestionable demonstrations and arguments.
Modern	Specific: teacher influences isolated aspect(s) of a student's life in light of reflectively considered traditional or non-traditional teachings.	Multi-centric: normative authority is decentralized and individualized with competing traditions and conflicting claims.	Perspectival: legitimacy is justified relativistically and in the terms of self-consciously fallible traditions, yielding eclectic arguments and pastiche effects.
Integral	Phase-specific: teacher influences considered aspect(s) of student's life, with aim of affecting whole person change, and in light of post-traditional (trans-lineage) teachings.	Concentric: normative authority is polycentric but aligned along principled axes of value, depth, and significance.	Integral-aperspectival: legitimacy is justified processually and in light of post-traditional critical syntheses and reflective self-correction mechanisms.

Table 1. Displays the interface of three recent cultural epochs as they affect the structure of religious teacherly authority.

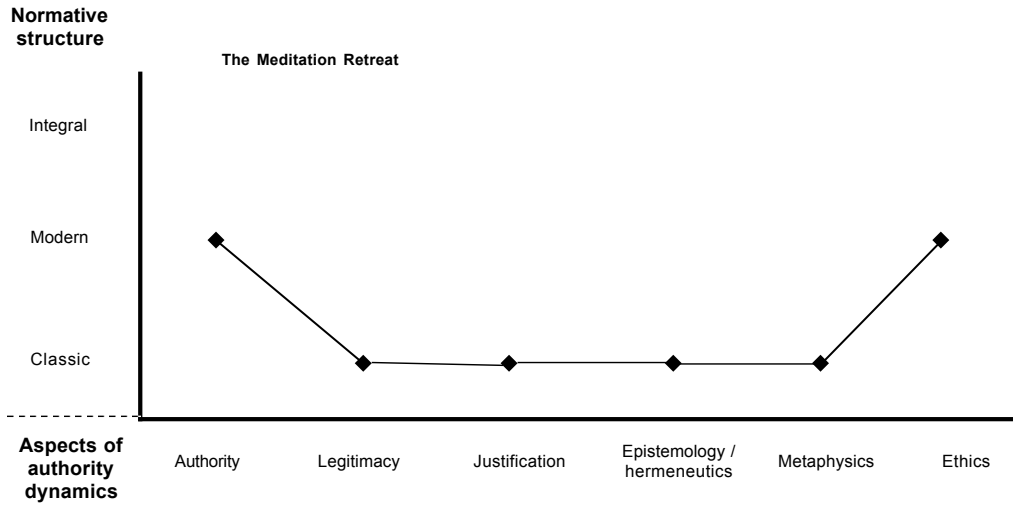
	Epistemology / Hermeneutics	Metaphysics	Ethics
Classic	Illumination: truth is revealed to individuals who issue inerrant interpretations of traditional texts and/or offer unquestionable new teachings resulting from personal revelation.	Cosmic: Reality (God/Tao) creates humanity and sets its laws and nature.	Collectivist: right action is what conforms to Reality (nature or metaphysical law) and furthers group interests.
Modern	Justification: truth is justified via tradition-specific reflective practices, eclectic and innovative texts and interpretations, remaining open to the truth of other traditions and science.	Humanistic: humanity creates Reality, sets laws that supervene on natural ones, positing transcendent goals and realities.	Individualist: right action is what conforms to individual's best judgment, calculations of utility, and estimations of happiness.
Integral	Enactment: truth is enacted and revealed through inter-subjective injunctions, cumulative and principled textual interpretations, and self-corrective engagements with out-of-group sources of knowledge.	Acosmic humanism: humanity and Reality are inter-participatory and co-constitutive, human action is a creative continuation of natural processes, and expression of Reality.	Autonomous: right action is what emerges from an individual's unique instantiation of universal and cultural values, Reality refracted through the structure of a unique personality.

Table 2. Displays the interface of three recent cultural epochs as they affect the parameters of religious teachings (the *what* of religious teacherly dynamics).

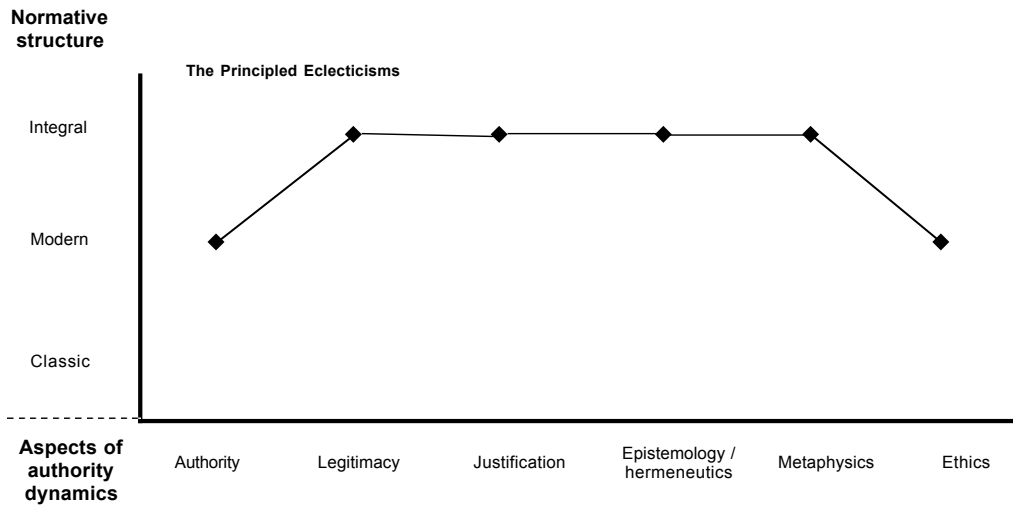
^{xxvi} See Wilber's (1995) discussion of *ground value*, *intrinsic value*, and *extrinsic value*. p. 544.

^{xxvii} The term 'acosmic humanism' is Gafni's (in press). The term *panentheistic evolutionary nonduality* is Wilber's (1995; 2006).

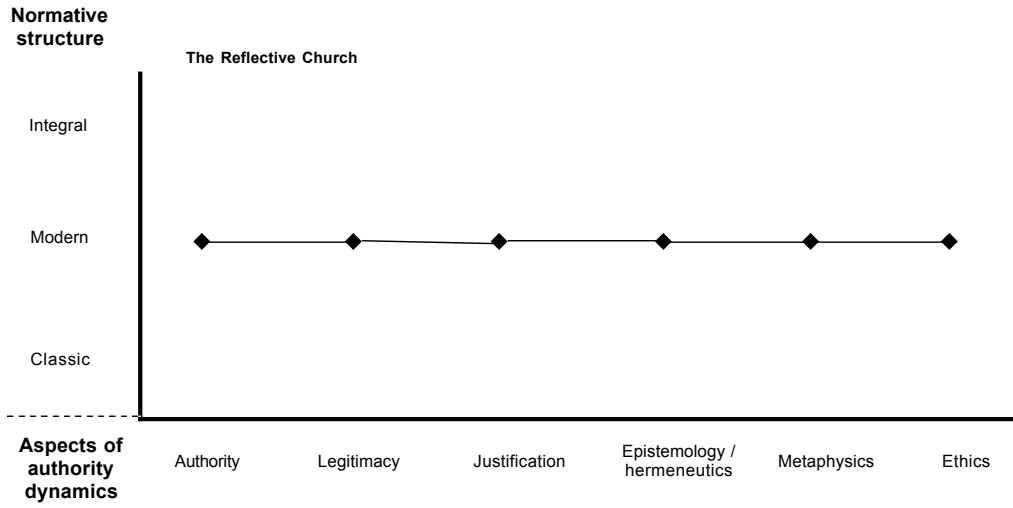
^{xxviii} (see note 25) The following figures use the framework introduced above to characterize a variety of contemporary religious and spiritual engagements.



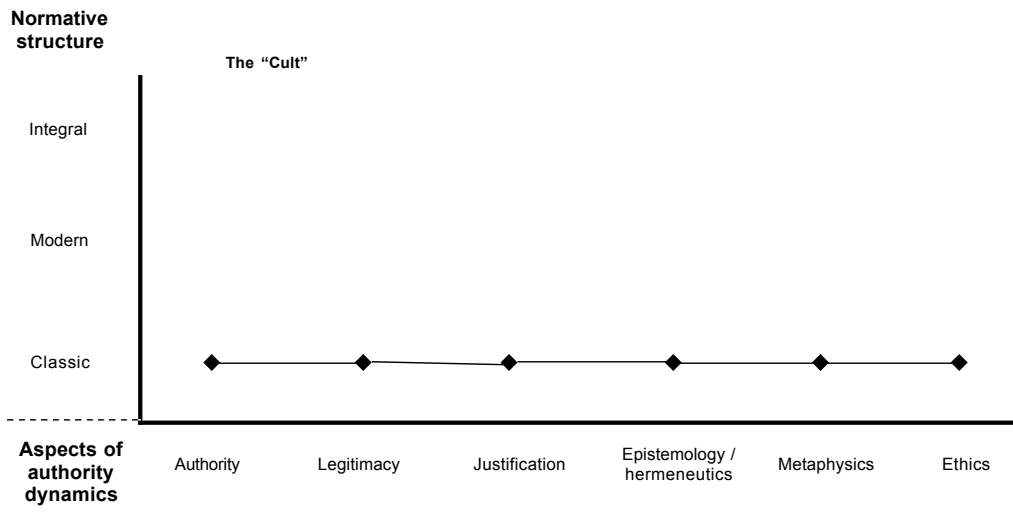
The Meditation Retreat: Individuals from the post-industrial West grant a specific kind of authority to a religious teacher, typically having to do with a meditation technique to be acquired via market transactions (books; retreats). This teacher acts as a centralized source of legitimacy with metaphysical backing; the teacher has attained a certain status in a Classic ontological-institutional hierarchy, which gives them an almost unquestionable teacherly authority on certain topics. The teachings are based on lineage specific forms of transmission and revelation, and are articulated in the context of a pre-modern cosmic metaphysical worldview. Ethical actions are not carefully governed by the teachings or teacher, as individuals' do not include these aspects of their lives as relevant to the teacher's specific authority, which has to do only with the technique being purchased.



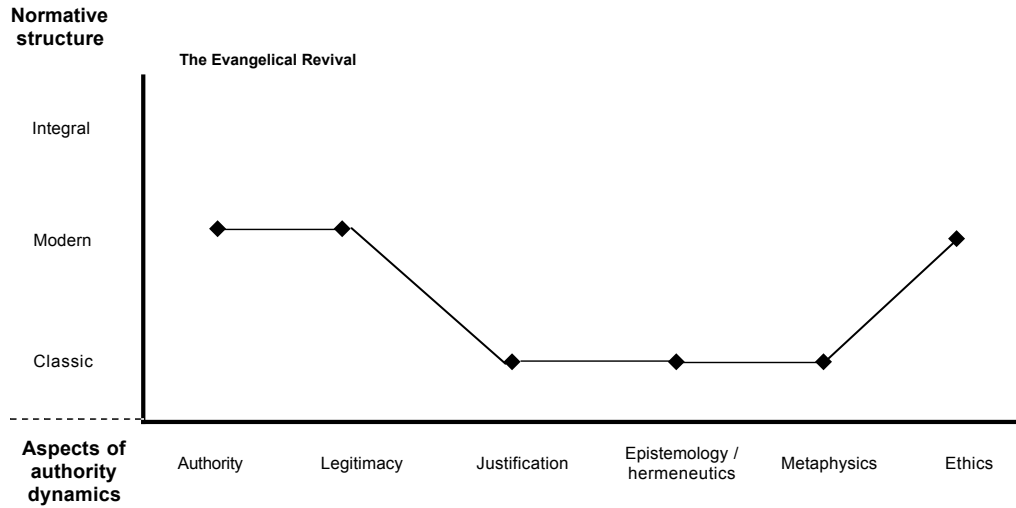
The Principled Eclecticism: Individuals from the post-industrial West grant specific forms of authority to a variety of teachers, typically in the context of market transactions, and in light of a principled pursuit of personal growth. Individuals work to align or organize diverse polycentric forms of legitimacy, moving toward integrated trans-lineage justificatory strategies. Complex hermeneutic and epistemological enactments typically frame a cosmic humanistic worldviews, wherein each teaching is taken as having a "partial truth" to offer. Ethical actions are informed by eclectic explorations, but remain based on the individual's personal judgment, calculations of utility, and estimations of happiness.



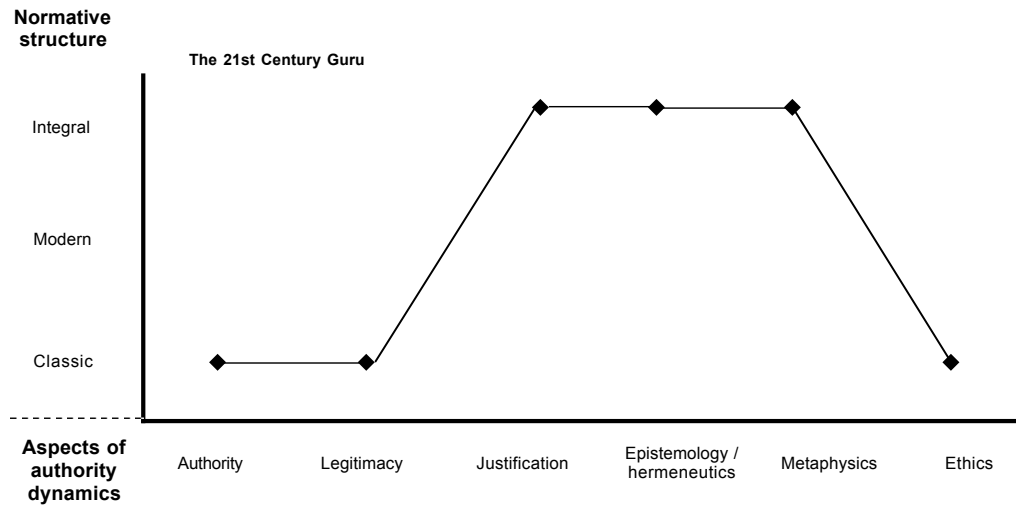
The Reflective Church: Individuals from the post-industrial West grant a specific form of authority to a religious teacher who serves as one source of legitimacy among many (including other religious traditions and secular-scientific authorities). This teacher deploys relativistic justificatory strategies that contextualize their admittedly error-prone lineage, pulling from a variety of non-lineage and secular sources. The worldview is humanistic, dovetailing with mainstream secular progressivism and scientific cosmologies. And the ethical actions of individuals, while informed by a reflective de-centered appropriation of their tradition, are based on the individual's personal judgment, calculations of utility, and estimations of happiness.



The "Cult": Individuals from the post-industrial West grant total holistic authority to a teacher who is seen as an embodiment of Truth, serving as a centralized source of legitimacy and backed by inerrant and unquestionable metaphysical forms of justification. The teachings are based on the individual revelation and illumination of the teacher, and are cosmic and collectivist, positing the primacy of the group in the Divine Plan (or a comparable message). The teacher strictly governs the ethical actions of individual members, as the totality of each person's life is subsumed by the group's norms and goals.



The Evangelical Revival: Individuals from the post-industrial West grant a specific form of authority to a religious teacher who serves as one source of legitimacy among many, including other teachers from the same tradition and unofficial preachers and thought-leaders (radio or TV personalities; authors). These teachers deploy tradition specific justificatory strategies that rely on inerrant textual interpretations and unquestionable demonstrations of charismatic testimony concerning the truth of their cosmic theocentric metaphysical worldview. The ethical actions of individuals, while informed by their dogmatic tradition, are mostly based on the individual's personal judgment, calculations of utility, and estimations of happiness.



The 21st Century Guru: Individuals from the post-industrial West grant total holistic authority to a teacher who is seen as an embodiment of Truth, and who acts as a centralized source of legitimacy. Yet this teacher deploys trans-lineage justificatory strategies and enactive and inter-subjectively sophisticated epistemological approaches in the context of panentheistic or acosmic humanistic metaphysical worldviews. But despite this doctrinal integral-aperspectivalism, the teacher strictly governs the ethical actions of individual members, as the totality of each person's life is subsumed by the group's norms and goals.

^{xxix} Quoted in Wilber (1983). p. 99.

^{xxx} Wilber offers the following (1983a p. 389):

A positive, authentic religious group will likely:

- (1) *Be trans-rational, not pre-rational....*
- (2) *Anchor legitimacy in a tradition [or traditions]....*

(3) *Have phase specific [teacherly] authority....*

That is, a positive group:

(4): is NOT headed by a perfect master....

(5): is NOT out to save the world....”

And Habermas has this to say (2008 p. 137):

- Religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward other religions and worldviews that they encounter within a universe of discourse hitherto occupied only by their own religion....
- Further more, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the internal logic of secular knowledge and toward the institutionalized monopoly on knowledge of modern scientific experts....
- Finally, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the priority that secular reasons also enjoy in the political arena....”

^{xxxi} The account of Cohen and Gafni that follows is based on my experiences with their respective teachings and teacherly practices. I have been tracking Cohen’s endeavors off-and-on for more than 5 years, including one week long retreat, numerous hours of conversations with some of his highest ranking students, and a read-through of all his published books (e.g., Cohen, 2002). I have been tracking the Integral Spiritual Experience and related endeavors for roughly the same amount of time, again getting views from the inside through conversations with those deeply involved. I have worked closely with Gafni for a year, including a careful read-through of his key text (Gafni, in press). Needless to say, the views I express here do not represent the results of a rigorous and controlled sociological inquiry, but they do reflect a somewhat careful form of participant observation. Also, addressing the controversies that have surrounded these two teachers in particular would take us very far afield, and would likely leave us mired in highly emotional, politicized, and conflicting accounts. So I’m simply not going to get into all that. Thus, all in all, I make no claims to represent these communities and teachers in their full complexity. I claim only to be offering a *suggestive* application of the framework that it is the goal of this paper to introduce.

^{xxxii} Roughly speaking, Cohen fits the model of the 21st Century Guru sketched in note 27.

^{xxxiii} Roughly speaking, Gafni and the Integral Spiritual Experience fit the model of Principled Eclecticisms sketched in note 27.

^{xxxiv} I am currently working on a follow-up paper to this one about the responsibilities of students in the spiritual marketplace.

^{xxxv} Emerson (1836, p. 1).

^{xxxvi} Stein (2010b).

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