

Love in a Time Between Worlds: On the Metamodern “Return” to a Metaphysics of Eros

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Abstract: Modernity is based on a critique and abandonment of premodern forms of metaphysics, while postmodernity has only deepened critiques of metaphysical truth claims further. This has created a novel historical situation in which a planetary society revolves around the absence of a shared metaphysics. The vacuum of meaning at the core of postmodern societies has resulted in a sense of exhaustion and alienation, a state uncomfortable enough to initiate a metamodern “return” to metaphysical speculation. I argue in favor of adopting metamodern metaphysical characterizations of the human based on an understanding of love as a transpersonal universal force akin to gravity. Philosophers have long called this force *Eros* and have placed it at the center of the human experience. Charles Sanders Peirce marks the beginning of a new method for practicing metaphysics, while at the same time offering profound insights into the cosmic dynamics of evolutionary love, or *Eros*. A century later, the ideas and practices of metamodern metaphysics remain in flux and on the margins. I explore how computer technologies and hyper-capitalist dynamics have inspired dark transhumanist speculations such as those of Nick Land. To counter the regressive and dystopian possibilities entailed by a “return” to metaphysics, I propose a form of cosmo-erotic humanism and discuss its implications through an exploration of the newly released book, *A Return to Eros* (Gafni & Kincaid, 2017).

Keywords: Charles Sanders Peirce, *Eros*, Integral Theory, Marc Gafni, metaphysics, metamodernism, Nick Land, political praxis, post-modernity, post-truth culture, sexuality and relationships, Tantra.

Introduction

Metamodern Metaphysics: Or *Eros* in the 21st Century

Men [sic] have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two ‘Heavenly Powers,’ eternal *Eros*, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary [Thanatos].

– Sigmund Freud (1931/1961) *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 112.

The quote above was not in the first edition of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud added this reflection to the conclusion of the 1931 edition as it was becoming clear that Germany was

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sliding towards fascism under Hitler's rule. In making appeals to metaphysics (positing the eternal forces of Eros and Thanatos), Freud put a controversial finishing touch on the theoretical edifice of psychoanalysis. However, psychoanalytic metapsychology had always depended upon forces of nature beyond the human ego; the unconscious (the *id*) was conceived as if it were a force of nature within "me," which was at the same time somehow "not me." *Metapsychology* is a term used by Freud and others to describe the broadest and most reflective work a psychologist can do, which involves not just theorizing about the psyche, but theorizing about the structure of psychological theorizing itself. Freud would follow his metapsychological investigations where they led many other great psychologists (including Jean Piaget and James Mark Baldwin) into the realms of metaphysics.

This route from science to metaphysics is not unique to psychology. Investigations into the structure of theories in all fields of science eventually lead to deep metaphysical and ontological issues (Bhaskar, 1993). However, when psychologists begin to get metaphysical the implication is that humans themselves – the realities of our minds and emotions – are taken up into speculative heights, beyond what can be "proven" in any simple scientific way. Eros in particular has been repeatedly placed at the core of metaphysical characterizations of the human being. In this paper I explore some of the implications of taking a metaphysics of Eros seriously in the context of contemporary cultural and social crises. Today we are again seeing a fight played out between the eternal forces of Eros and Thanatos.

However, first I must demonstrate that it is even possible and appropriate to offer reasonable metaphysical characterizations of the human at all. The discipline of metaphysics is notoriously controversial and metaphysical claims are suspect in modern and postmodern discourse. Where modern scientists often critique the claims of metaphysics as unverifiable and thus untrue, postmodernists critique both science and metaphysics for making truth claims in the first place. Either way, to call an idea or theory "metaphysical" has become another way of saying it is unacceptable. Often this comes with some implication that the theory is a kind of superstition, which means metaphysics is taken not as an attempt to engage the truth but rather as a kind of covert power play or psychological defense mechanism. I argue the opposite: metaphysics is what saves us from a descent into discourses that are merely about power and illusion.

I am not arguing for a return to premodern forms of metaphysics, which were rightly overthrown by the modern revolutions in scientific methods and epistemology. What follows is "post-Kantian" and "post-metaphysical" in the Habermasian sense; it is what Charles Sanders Peirce and Roy Bhaskar call "scientific metaphysics." I agree with those who argue that learning and the development of knowledge eventually lead to a "return" to metaphysics at a higher-level. I think a post-postmodern or "metamodern" revival of metaphysics is part of our historical moment (Freinacht, 2017 pp. 361-376). The term *metamodern* is used simply to describe the structure of what is emerging "after postmodernism;" it points out the new personalities, cultures, and theories that are able to critique and integrate the insights of both the modern and the postmodern. Believe it or not, there are metaphysical systems that survived postmodernism and popped out of the far end of the 1990's with "truth" and "reality" still intact. These include *object-oriented ontology* and *dialectical critical realism*, among others. Metaphysics can be practiced after Kant and Darwin only by theorizing beyond what is thought of as acceptable in postmodernism and late-stage capitalism, as I discuss in the first section below.

It is worth working from Hanzi Freinacht's seminal book on metamodernism as a way to clarify what is meant by metamodern metaphysics. Here I offer a partial and augmented version of Freinacht's characterization of what philosophers must embrace under the emerging conditions of metamodern society (Freinacht, 2017 pp. 364-366):

METAMODERN VIEW OF SCIENCE

- To respect science as an indispensable form of knowing.
- To see that science is always contextual and truth always tentative; that reality always holds deeper truths. All that we think is real will one day melt away as snow in the sun.
- To understand that different sciences and paradigms are simultaneously true; that many of their apparent contradictions are superficial and based on misperceptions or failures of translation or integration.
- To see that there are substantial insights and relevant knowledge in all stages of human and societal development, including tribal life, polytheism, traditional theology, modern industrialism and postmodern critique. In another book, I call this the evolution of “**meta-memes**”.
- To celebrate and embody **non-linearity** in all non-mechanical matters, such as society and culture. Non-linearity, in its simplest definition, means that the output of a system is not proportional to its input.
- To harbor a case sensitive suspicion against mechanical models and linear causation.
- To have “a systems view” of life, to see that things form parts of self-organizing bottom-up systems: from sub-atomic units to atomic particles to molecules to cells to organisms.
- To see that things are alive and self-organizing because they are falling apart, that life is always a whirlwind of destruction: The only way to create and maintain an ordered pattern is to create a corresponding disorder. These are the principles of **autopoiesis**: entropy (that things degrade and fall apart) and “negative entropy” (the falling apart is what makes life possible).
- To accept that all humans and other organisms have a connecting, overarching worldview, a great story or grand narrative (a religion, in what is often interpreted as being the literal sense of the word: something that connects all things) and therefore accept the necessity of a grande histoire, an overarching story about the world. The metamodernist has her own unapologetically held grand narrative, synthesizing her available understanding. But it is held lightly, as one recognizes that it is always partly fictional—a **protosynthesis**.
- To take ontological questions very seriously, i.e. to let questions about “what is really real” guide us in science and politics. This is called the ontological turn.

METAMODERN VIEW OF REALITY

- To see the **fractal** nature of reality and of the development and applicability of ideas, that all understanding consists of reused elements taken from other forms of understanding.
- To be **anti-essentialist**, not believing in “ultimate essences” such as matter, consciousness, goodness, evil, masculinity, femininity or the like – but rather that all these things are contextual and interpretations made from relations and comparisons. Even the today so praised “relationality” is not an essence of the universe.
- To no longer believe in an atomistic, mechanical universe where the ultimate stuff is matter, but rather to view the ultimate nature of reality as a great unknown that we must metaphorically capture in our symbols, words and stories. To accept the view of a world being newly born again and again.
- To see that the world is radically, unyieldingly and completely socially constructed, always relative and context bound.
- To see that the world emerges through complex interactions of its parts and that our intuitive understandings tend to be much too static and mono-causal. This is called **complexity**. It is the fundamental principle of not only meteorology but also of social psychology, where patterns (such as the “self”) emerge through the interactions of interrelated, interdependent **dividuals**.
- To accept the necessity of **developmental hierarchies** – but to be very critical and careful with how they are described and used. Hierarchies are studied empirically, not arbitrarily assumed.
- To see that language and thereby our whole worldviews travel through a much greater space of possible, never-conceptualized worlds; that language is evolving.
- To look at the world holistically, where things such as scientific facts, perspectives, culture and emotions interact (this form of interactivity is called **hypercomplexity**, because it involves not only many interacting units, but interacting perspectives and qualitatively different dimensions of reality, such as subjective vs. objective reality).
- To see that information and management of information is fundamental to all aspects of reality and society: from genes to memes to money and science and political revolutions.
- To accept an informational-Darwinian view of both genes (organisms) and memes (cultural patterns) competing to survive through a process of developmental evolution that involves negative selection (that disfavored genes and memes go extinct, but continue to exist as potentials).
- To see that Darwinian evolution depends equally on mutual cooperation and competition; that competition and cooperation are always intertwined.

METAMODERN VIEW OF REALITY Cont'd

- To see the dynamic interplay of the universal and the particular, where for instance humans in more complex societies become more individualized, which in turn drives the development of more complex societies where people are more interdependent and more universal values are needed to avoid collapse.
- To see that the world runs on **dialectic logic**, where things are always broken, always “stumbling backwards” as it were; that things are always striving for an impossible balance and in that accidental movement create the whole dance that we experience as reality. So the development of reality does have directionality, it’s just that we are always blind to this direction; hence the metaphor of “stumbling backwards”.
- To see that reality is fundamentally open-ended, broken, as it were, even in its mathematical and physical structure, as shown in Gödel’s incompleteness theorem and in some of the core findings of modern physics.
- To recognize that potentials and **potentiality**, rather than facts and actualities, constitute the most fundamental or “more real” reality. What we usually call reality is only “actuality”, one slice of an infinitely larger, hypercomplex pie. Actuality is only a “case of” a deeper reality, called “absolute totality”.
- To explore visions of **panpsychism**, i.e. that consciousness is everywhere in the universe and “as real” as matter and space. But panpsychism should not be confused with animistic visions of all things having “spirits”.

This list of ideas that characterize the new emerging metamodern syntheses and theories point in the direction of a particular kind of metaphysics. I am proposing that it is possible to reconstruct a metamodern metaphysics of Eros, which honors all of the above (and more), making it a viable framework for human self-understanding. Once the ground is cleared for doing a new kind of metaphysics, I then explore a metaphysical characterization of the human that is best described as *cosmo-erotic humanism*. This emerging metamodern metaphysics is the focus of work among a cluster of scholars including Marc Gafni, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Kristina Kincaid, Ken Wilber, Sally Kempton, Daniel Schmachtenberger, myself, and others in and around the Center for Integral Wisdom. In this paper I use the recent book by Gafni and Kincaid, *A Return to Eros* (2017), to scaffold a discussion about *reality, politics, and sex* from the perspective of cosmo-erotic humanism. These three topics (sex, reality, and politics) are implicated in any metaphysical characterization of the human. They are selected here because historically humans have depended upon the normative force of metaphysical ideas to regulate these realms in particular. Untold and innumerable injustices were perpetrated in these realms in the name of premodern metaphysics. Modernity sought to rectify these by turning to science alone, yet as the centuries unfolded the vacuum created by the *absence* of metaphysics continued to expand, and today *the absence of metaphysics is creating new and more dangerous problems*.

As a new metaphysics, cosmo-erotic humanism helps to explain a lot about human behavior, both healthy and pathological. This explanatory power shows that a metaphysics of Eros can be a reasonable extension of investigations in psychotherapeutic and developmental branches of

psychology. Cosmo-erotic humanism also provides grounds for a critique of existing social conditions, especially in those realms where humans place tremendous value and emotional energy (i.e., in sexual relationships and in politics). The normative power of these critiques shows that a metaphysics of Eros can be a reasonable alternative to the absence of modern and postmodern metaphysics, which has now become a support for certain structures of love and politics that are systematically distorted. This brings us to the perennial metaphysical question of how a basic force of good such as Eros can ever become systemically distorted, and then through this distortion morph into Thanatos. Yet in order for this to make sense, it is necessary to explain why metaphysics is a sensible thing to talk about in the first place.

Part One

Practicing Metaphysics in a Time Between Worlds

If before encountering otherness we already know what its relation to us will be, we have obliterated it in advance.... Kant still wants to say something about radical alterity, even if it is only that it has no relevance to us, yet he has deprived himself of the right to all speculation about the nature of what is beyond appearance.... [This]... delimitation of alterity... sets up the modern form of the ontological question: ‘how do we know that matter exists?’ That the very existence of materiality is problematic for enlightenment thought is symptomatic of the colonial trading systems that correspond to it. Alterity cannot be registered, unless it can be inscribed within the system, according to the interconnected axes of exchange value (price)... in other words, as a commodity....

– Nick Land, (1988/2011) “Kant, Capital, and The Prohibition of Incest” (p. 64; 71).

The controversial philosopher, Nick Land, is often associated with the new schools of post-Kantian metaphysics known as *speculative realism* and *object-oriented ontology*. His political philosophy of “Accelerationism” and his writings on the “Dark Enlightenment” have been widely influential and tied into the resurgence of anti-postmodernist right-wing radicalism, as exemplified by the “alt-right” in the United States. I will explore Land’s ideas further below; he is quoted at length to begin this section because his thinking and its impact are signs of the metamodern “return” to metaphysics currently demanded by the exhaustion of postmodernism and related major transformations in economic conditions. Right-wing and authoritarian political thought is resurgent today because of the *absence* of reasonable discourse about metaphysical realities during a time when exactly these realities are being called into question due to the apocalypse of global capitalism and the accompanying planetary transition into the *Anthropocene* (Stein & Gafni, 2015). As I discuss in the sections to come, our current decent into a dysfunctional “post-truth” and “post-love” culture is a case in point. Metaphysics has come home to roost in a supposedly “post-metaphysical” modern democracy. We now have TV news anchors and celebrity personalities who have never read a philosophy book discussing the nature of “truth” and “facts” on Saturday morning programs. The question of what is “real” and what is “fake” may have never been more confused in public discourse. The vacuum created by the feeling of “what is real?” will be filled in one way or another; as I explain below, metaphysics is unavoidable.

I have argued elsewhere (Stein, in press) that the social forms that come after capitalism and after modernity (the social forms that will be globally “sustainable”) *may or may not* be more fair and humane than what we have known during the reign of the capitalist world system (e.g., since

the long sixteenth century). What comes next will depend on our metaphysical characterizations of the human and the universe. The way we answer questions such as, “What is the human?” will determine the next century due to the emerging power of new technologies that render the human malleable in unrepresented ways, which has been made clear by writers such as Yuval Noah Harari (2017). Metaphysics is necessary because we are in a time between worlds.

Metaphysics is a difficult word to define outside its simple origin as the title marking the volume that followed the *Physics* in Aristotle’s canon (in Greek, *meta* = *after / beyond*). In the West, metaphysics has been a distinct branch of academic philosophy ever since Aristotle’s works were translated by the Church. *Ontology* is a related word (based on the Greek, *ontos* = *being*), which I use to refer to the practice of working out the details within a larger metaphysical system. Medieval monastics would conceive some of the most complex and ornate metaphysical systems in history, justifying all kinds of miracles and biblical paradoxes through metaphysical theorizing and ontological speculations – and they would buttress it all with a theory of Intuition.

Premodern metaphysics is often what people think of when they think of metaphysics pejoratively as a kind of magical thinking (e.g., “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?”). Premodern metaphysics also gets a bad reputation from having been used to justify the Inquisition, religious wars, and all manner of theocratic insanity. This is all true, but I am not out to beat the dead horse of premodern metaphysics, which both scientific New Atheists and postmodern progressives continue to enjoy doing. Instead I am going to argue that contemporary cultural trends signal a “return” to metaphysics. I argue that the modern and postmodern *absence* of metaphysics causes its own problems, like those now encountered by the modern capitalist world-system as it reaches its terminal limits to growth. Part of responding to our global crises requires finding a way to live again within a metaphysics that puts the human being in context. The phrase “metaphysics after Kant” is used to talk about the difficulty that professional philosophers have in practicing metaphysics during our current epoch of cultural evolution.

Metaphysics was taken away from the religious authorities by Immanuel Kant during the Enlightenment. At the time, Kant was considered by some to be the most dangerous and revolutionary man on the European continent – more dangerous even than Napoleon. This idea was comical to others because Kant lived on a meager salary in the same small *attic* most of his adult life. He never traveled, supposedly never lost his virginity, supposedly never raised his voice in anger, and every day he took a walk at *exactly* the same time with such regularity that his neighbors set their watches by it (Cassirer, 1981). However, the quip about Kant being dangerous is funny because it is true. Kant’s project was radical (and more dangerous than violent uprisings) to the foundations of religious authority, and in turn to political authority. Kant had thought out a way to overthrow the *ancien régime* of Leibnizian “metaphysics as apologetics,” and in so doing to make separate places for science and faith under one system. Along with other thinkers of his time, Kant would literally destroy the way a whole culture justified its most important beliefs and values.

After Kant, metaphysics was done in a different way. Reality – the *thing-in-itself* – was put out of reach, which meant that theologians could no longer claim to have intuitions into divine ideas but also that science could claim only to “understand” and never to have the total truth. Science and theological metaphysics were put in their respective places by Kant’s “Copernican Turn” away

from the objects of science and theology and towards the knowing subject. His so-called “transcendental subject” was what he thought philosophers should be researching instead of metaphysics, as it is prior to metaphysics. The categories of the subject that structure perception were more important for Kant than the “object” they perceived; he theorized that consciousness constructed the object and the whole of nature, including time and causality. Nature as it really is cannot be known. We can only know nature as it appears to us through the structures of our consciousness. Premodern metaphysics was over, and Kant had ushered in a new era in philosophy during which it would support the activities of the physical sciences while also being freed from the reigns of the church. As modernity progressed metaphysics would be denied and avoided, eventually withering away into the bare bones “flatland” universe implied by the physical sciences (see Bhaskar, 1986).

The practice of metaphysics was in disarray 78 years after Kant, when Darwin brought about the most massive changes to our understanding of the physical universe since Newton. Evolutionary theory would change what it meant to practice philosophy, and philosophers would slowly begin their journey “back” to metaphysics. Peirce was one of the first to follow the implications of evolutionary theory up into the aperspectival complexity on the other side of modernity (what we call postmodernism) and then beyond that into a new metaphysics of humanity and the universe (Brent, 1998). I have documented elsewhere Peirce’s work as a proto-Integral metatheorist (Stein, 2015). Here I trace the development of his thought again (but from a different angle) in order to frame a discussion of what it means to do metaphysics after Kant and Darwin. I then follow a line through Peirce’s semiotics and objective idealism to current trends in metamodern metaphysics, including speculative realism. Granted, there are other ways to frame a discussion of post-metaphysical philosophy besides my story about Peirce. For example, there is a line that runs from Kant through Heidegger to Badiou, and another from Hegel through Marx to Bhaskar (as it is, I arrive at Bhaskar via another route). I frame my account using Peirce because at the core of Peirce’s scientific, post-Kantian metaphysics was the idea of *evolutionary love*, which is an important forerunner to the conception of Eros that is at the core of cosmo-erotic humanism.

Charles Sanders Peirce: Metaphysics after Darwin

Peirce memorized large sections of *The Critique of Pure Reason* when he was thirteen years old and then began his career as a scientist, a nominalist, and a materialist opposed to metaphysics. He would end his career as a polymath, a realist, an objective idealist, and deeply engaged in a new form of philosophy that he called “scientific metaphysics.” Peirce’s early work was focused on the scientific method and especially on producing a convincing theory of inquiry that took evolution into account (Peirce, 1867). This work has been well summarized by Elizabeth Cook (2006), among others (Apel, 1995). At issue was the status of the human brain and perceptual system, which could no longer be reasonably conceived as structured by God-given categories of experience, nor equipped with “divine intuition.” Peirce argued that humans could never truly *know* the world once and for all, we could only endlessly learn about it by finding new ways to test our ideas through discourse and experimentation. He rejected the very idea of the abstract knowing subject of modern epistemology and replaced it with ideas about the *construction* of scientific knowledge by groups of people. Peirce was one of the first theorists of science to use the phrase “community of inquiry” and to engage in philosophy about the *practice* of science. In his

pathbreaking explorations of the implications of modern science and evolutionary theory in particular, Peirce would come to see that the knowing subject is *within* the world, not outside the world looking in like Kant's "transcendental subject." Scientists are imbedded in the world as animals that evolved within the nature, and must arrange and interact with nature in specific ways in order to learn. Learning requires not perception and reflection but action and construction. Kant's transcendental subject was brought down to Earth and into process, social life, and organic form. By thus detranscendentalizing the subject, Peirce would take the first steps "back" to metaphysics (Habermas, 1992).

The idea of *detranscendentalizing the subject* is important but can be misunderstood. Peirce not only put the abstract Kantian subject into social and linguistic context (Hegel had already done that), he also put the subject into an evolved organism that itself was a potential focus of scientific inquiry. The knower (the one who knows, i.e., the subject) is a contingent part of nature and thus also open to scientific research and eventual disenchantment. Kant limited scientific knowledge about the nature of humans themselves to an afterthought in his *Anthropology*; his knowledge was not as advanced as the scientific psychology that Peirce was practicing in the 1870s. Many scholars forget that Peirce was arguably the first experimental psychologist on the North American continent (Brent, 1998). More than anyone up to that point in history, Peirce was directly fixing his scientific gaze upon the scientists themselves, studying various aspects of scientific judgment. What he discovered began to undercut his beliefs in both materialism and nominalism. Peirce would begin to do metaphysics again, in a new way.

In the 1890s, Peirce began a series of metaphysical investigations that ended up having a major impact on the future of philosophy. Alfred North Whitehead would later take directly from Peirce's metaphysics in laying the groundwork for his *Process and Reality*. Whitehead's process philosophy is another major metaphysical system that emerged after Kant and Darwin, which also places *love* near the ontological center of the evolving cosmos. Karl Popper (1966) would credit Peirce with ushering in a new era of thinking about complexity, chaos, and process – all facets of metamodern metaphysics (as detailed above from Freinacht, 2017 pp. 361-366). Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel would see in Peirce the possibility of a post-metaphysical philosophy, including a form of evolutionary realism that allowed for a speculative scientific metaphysics of evolution (Apel, 1994; 1995). Ken Wilber saw in Peirce a theory of *cosmic habits* and pansemiosis, while Gafni and Stein found his notion of evolutionary love prophetic (Gafni, 2012a; Stein, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that by this point in his life Peirce was exiled from the academy; this in part explains his continued obscurity. Peirce was subject to an organized smear campaign involving the core of American academia, which was at the time a small and insular place awash in contradictory Victorian-era ethics (see Brent, 1998). Peirce's divorce and remarriage were all that competing mathematicians and philosophers needed to reframe some of Peirce's personality traits as deeply unethical character flaws. Before long he could not find a job and was stuck writing definitions for James Mark Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. Baldwin had also been kicked out of American academia due to a politized smear campaign (I discuss Baldwin further in Stein, 2015). Were it not for the generosity of his dear friend William James, Peirce would never have completed any of his metaphysical work during this time. The mischaracterizations of Peirce that began in the 1880s have been repeated up to this day, as can be seen in the popular book *The Metaphysical Club* (Menand, 2001), that presents an intellectual

history of the American Pragmatists that downplays Peirce's catalytic role in the movement (while also defaming his character). Peirce's treatment makes some sense in the context of understanding the "the murder of Eros," discussed at some length below.

Living in poverty and obscurity in 1903, Peirce defined metaphysics as a branch of phenomenology (or what he called *phaneroscopy*: "the study of common experience"). This practice was wedded to the special sciences (i.e., physics, biology, psychology, etc.) and was a condition for the possibility of their success. "Its [metaphysics] business is to study the most general features of reality and real objects" (Peirce, 1934 p. 5). He maintained that the immature state of metaphysics was hindering the sciences and aimed explicitly to do his metaphysics in the service of future science. Peirce (1934) argued that metaphysics was too often dismissed due to the belief that it is unscientific because it deals with things that cannot be seen or tested. Yet this is not true:

The things that any science discovers are beyond the reach of direct observation. We cannot see energy, nor the attraction of gravitation, nor the flying molecules of gases, nor the luminiferous ether [ZS: this ether was a postulated medium for the propagation of light in the nineteenth century], nor the forests of the carbonaceous era, nor the explosions in nerve-cells. It is only the premisses [*sic*] of science, not its conclusions, which are directly observed. But metaphysics, even bad metaphysics, really rests on observations, whether consciously or not; and the only reason that this is not universally recognized is that it rests upon kinds of phenomena with which every man's experience is so saturated that he usually pays no particular attention to them. The data of metaphysics are not less open to observation, but immeasurably more so, than the data, say, of the very highly developed science of astronomy, [where] to make any important addition... [costs] many tens of thousands of dollars [ZS: tens of thousands of dollars in 1890; today it's tens of billions of dollars]. (p. 2)

The fact that the Peirce quote above contains an outdated scientific concept is exactly the point. Scientific *practices* precede and outlive scientific *concepts*. The truths of science are not as readily available as some would think (they also tend to come and go) and they are not more readily available than the truths of metaphysics. The difference between metaphysics and science is not about what you can see and what you cannot see; it is about what you are paying attention to when you are seeing. Humans are seeing reality all the time, they just have to recognize it and figure out how to learn from what is real.

What Peirce (1933; 1934) called *phaneroscopy* would today be viewed as a form of scientific phenomenology (note that both words are from the same Greek root *phainómenon*, meaning roughly: "thing appearing to view"). The closest contemporary approach to Peirce's version of phenomenology would be the *enactive paradigm* of Francisco Varela, Eleanor Rosch, and Evan Thompson (1991), who meld Buddhist meditation with cognitive science to yield a new way of thinking about organisms as knowers. This so-called "Santiago School of Cognition" since has already been identified by William Irwin Thompson as containing the seeds of a new metaphysical characterization of the human (Thompson, 1998). But Varela, Rosch, and the Thompsons take things in a different direction than Peirce, who considered *phaneroscopy* the most foundational branch of philosophy, essential for doing science, but not itself a science (strictly speaking).

Peirce (1934) understood that you cannot use science alone to investigate and justify science. Instead you need to do metaphysics (i.e., you need to investigate the very possibility of truth), and the data for this is to be found in the *common experience* of the human organism. Peirce was investigating common experience, but not in the sense of experiences that are frequently had by large numbers of people. Rather the experience is “common” because it is universally available as an aspect of being human. One could argue that Buddhist meditators are investigating common experience in this way. Experienced meditators become aware of things that most people are not aware of, which are nevertheless there all of the time. Peirce was seeking to investigate questions such as: What are the most general features that the universe must have for my experience to exist? And by implication, what must the relationship between the world and mind be like for scientific practices to work? The most basic practice of metaphysics begins with the most basic elements of human experience itself. Peirce would engage in these kinds of investigations in the midst of doing science across nearly a dozen fields. He would also investigate the common experience found in the practices of mathematics and logic and explore the metaphysical implications entailed by the success of mathematics as a human practice (i.e., why is it that our mathematical constructs relate to the world with a great deal of consistency?).

Using this method, Peirce (1933; 1934) was able to discover and justify his system of metaphysical categories, which he called “Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.” Peirce’s early articulations of these categories would inspire Habermas and Wilber to map their own systems of categories in terms of the basic parts of speech found in all languages – I, We, and It – thus marking out three “worlds.” Peircean categories are different from Kantian categories because they are not only properties of the subject; Peircean categories transcend and include both subject and object, co-arising as basic properties of all reality. Peirce placed the Kantian subject firmly in the Darwinian universe and thus did not see consciousness as separate from nature. Kant declared to have found in consciousness a “world constituting power,” declaring that consciousness constructs nature and is thus not a part of nature (and so followed much of modern thought). Peirce said that such a view is only one third of the story. Yes, consciousness constructs nature, yet nature has constructed consciousness over the course of evolutionary timescales that would make Kant dizzy. Moreover, Peirce believed that once consciousness has emerged from nature, it then acts back upon nature and itself to initiate an auto-evolutionary process that unfolds *evolutionary love* at higher and higher levels of complexity. The dialectic between subject and object is an erotic merger that yields emergence, novelty, and meaning. But this is getting ahead of the story. The point here is that Peirce’s categories are post-Kantian and clear the way for doing metaphysics again.

For context, I will add that a handful of contemporary thinkers follow Peirce in arriving at ontological categories through what has come to be called the “rational reconstruction” of common experience. Ken Wilber’s (2006) post-metaphysical justification of the quadrants and 20 tenets, as well as his integral methodological pluralism, have been derived via methods similar to Peirce. Wilber asks: What are the ontological conditions for the possibility of an integration of all existing methods for creating knowledge? (Another way to ask this is: What must the universe be like for all the various branches of valid knowledge to be true?) Habermas (1998) argues for ontologizing the three “worlds” that he derived through the rational reconstruction of the common experience of communication. Habermas asks: What are the ontological conditions for the possibility of communication? (Or: What must the universe be like for human mutual understanding to be real?) Bhaskar’s (1986; 1998) critical realism hinges on an updated version of Kant’s transcendental

argumentative strategies. Bhaskar asks: What are the ontological conditions for the possibility of scientific practice? (Or: What must the universe be like for science itself to be a successful practice?) Finally, to foreshadow my discussion of the book *A Return to Eros* (Gafni & Kincaid, 2017), I will mention that Gafni and Kincaid ask: What are the ontological conditions for the possibility of human love? (Or: What must the universe be like for human love to be real?) All of these approaches to practicing metaphysics after Kant and Darwin share a common method of deriving insights into the basic structures of reality itself through a careful investigation of (and extrapolation from) specific universal features of human experience.

Peirce repeatedly stresses the *necessity* of extrapolating from what is given in experience in order to discover what is real. *A Guess at the Riddle* is the title of the cryptic text at the core of Peirce's metaphysical system. The manuscript remained unpublished, even in the initial *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, and yet it was almost certainly in Whitehead's desk drawer for years (Brent, 1998). The initial *Collected Papers* were edited by Whitehead's best doctoral student at the time, Charles Hartshorne, who would himself go on to build a complex *process theology* based on Whitehead, Peirce, and others. For Peirce, *A Guess at the Riddle* began a decades-long inquiry into the ontological nature of evolution as it unfolds through the three categories. *Speculations* about what is real (i.e., *guessing*) is what scientists like to call "hypothesis generation." This is the source of everything we know "beyond" what is simply given in our experience. Peirce developed a whole branch of logic dedicated to hypothesis generation (Cook, 2006). He believed that while empirical methods are essential to science, the creative imagination of the scientist is the ultimate catalyst in the progress of knowledge about reality. The scientist is by definition doing a kind of metaphysics in these *necessary* moments of speculation that occur during their scientific practice.

Unlike the scientist, the metaphysician resides in the liminal space of speculation and seeks to accumulate and integrate all the speculations at the edges of all the various branches of science. A scientific metaphysics proceeds in advance of all the specific sciences, transcending but including them (while at the same time justifying them). Metaphysical speculations ought not contradict what is given by the best sciences of the day, but as metaphysical ideas they are also not to be limited by these sciences. Peirce saw that the theory of evolution and a host of other theories in biology were pointing towards an underlying and self-organizing force at work in evolution; he saw that among the tendencies and forces of nature is a force that unites, synthesizes, and creates higher-order communion among parts. Peirce's theory of *evolutionary love* is a speculative guess at the riddle presented by the sciences of his day. For Peirce, a metaphysics of Eros held the possibility of reconciling the lived experience of humanity with the revelations of science.

Many things have happened since Peirce first began the practice of doing metaphysics after Kant and Darwin. Arguably the most important and novel emergent since the Gilded Age has been the advent of the Internet. It should be noted in this context that Peirce followed Leibniz in speculating that the very structure of mathematics and logic includes the possibility of building a "logical machine" (Peirce, 1887). Peirce was aided in his work by one of his most talented doctoral students, Christine "Kitty" Ladd-Franklin, who was the first woman to get a PhD in mathematics and logic. She was also a psychologist and was inspired by Peirce's ideas about mathematics and the possibility of building a machine that could think. In her conversations with Peirce (of which there is no record) one imagines that the foundations of logics and mathematics were ontologized

beyond the human organism, and thus beyond the ontology of gender itself. In my imagination this makes Ladd-Franklin the first cyberfeminist. Cyberfeminism is a topic I explore below as part of the metamodern return to metaphysics. Regardless of what Franklin-Ladd thought when she and Peirce explored these ideas together at Johns Hopkins, the time would soon come when computer technologies would begin to change what it means to be a human. Soon, Sadie Plant and Nick Land would become some of the first to begin to do metaphysics in and about cyberspace.

Sadie Plant, Nick Land, and the Cybernetic Cultural Research Unit: Guerrilla Ontology

Metaphysics has become an even more complex practice today following the explosion of unprecedented interconnectivities between people based on new communication technologies. The historical co-emergence of popular (pop-)postmodernism and computer technologies is not a coincidence; modernity's tendencies towards subjectivity and abstraction were sent into overdrive by the proliferation of communication technologies, something I explore in detail later in this paper. It is as if the problems posed by Kant's transcendental subject were deepened to the point of being entirely transformed. Kant's point that *consciousness creates reality* has been driven home by a new fragmentation of subjectivities in which individuals became increasingly engrossed in their own private virtual worlds, seemingly out of touch with each other's realities. More importantly, computers also have made it impossible to deny that consciousness itself is created through the conditions of material reality. Silicon is now part of the evolution of consciousness. Our minds and the categories in terms of which we understand the world are now being *extended* by computing power. The near exponential growth of computer technologies has made all too apparent the *materiality* that is a condition for the possibility of the evolution of consciousness. It is important to understand that today our minds depend upon matter in new and unprecedented ways. Our thoughts and memories are now enmeshed in complex configurations of silicon and other materials that are beyond the limits of our nervous system and skin, at least for now (*cyborgization* is a topic beyond the scope of this paper).

I am extending here the idea of the *extended mind*, which emerged in cognitive science and philosophy around the turn of century (Clark & Chalmers, 1998). Computer technologies made clear a basic truth: the human mind has *always* been extended out into the environment. From cave paintings to calendars made of stone, we build scaffolds around the self that become part of our cognitive being. Interestingly, timekeeping in particular *requires* externalizing subjective time into objective time through the utilization of complex material objects that encode time. We use matter to make the reality of the passage of time available to cognition, action, and self-understanding. At first this was done through the observation of the stars and then through the construction of complex architectural arrangements built to track them. Sundials and water clocks predate ancient history. Clocks as we know them are a relatively recent invention; a watch that anyone can wear is even more novel and recent.

It is worth thinking about this example because time keeping is something unique that sets humans apart in the animal kingdom. While animals are clearly aware of time, they do not, for example, know how old they are. Animals know something like "spring is coming" (absent of propositionally differentiated speech, of course), but animals know nothing like, "this is my 38th spring." The animal's mind is also extended into its environment, but not reflectively or

technologically. I am not trying to draw a stark line between humans and animals (because there isn't one), but I am suggesting that the human mind has evolved in part through its ability to use the world and its material affordances to aid human understanding itself. The minds of all animals are extended into their environments in many ways, a point made by the Santiago School of Cognition's enactive paradigm. But only the human mind reflects upon its own extensions into the world, which allows us to use the environment for cognitive purposes. Our mind's abilities are not only a matter of what is contained within our skin, which is an important insight to remember when we begin to discuss the metaphysics of Eros entailed by cosmo-erotic humanism. For example, the smartphone enables a new form of subjectivity (for better and for worse), and new conditions for the evolution of love and relationship are now available. Specifically, smartphones change our experience of the reality of time, space, and identity, which is to say they have metaphysical implications.

This last statement about the smartphone is inspired by what Sadie Plant has been arguing. Plant is a catalyst for cyberfeminist writings and was the alleged co-writer of a pseudonymous collection of "theory-fiction" fragments attributed to the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (2017). These texts were part of the birth of *speculative realism*. Nick Land (2011) was also a midwife to speculative realism as well as an alleged co-creator of the Ccru (sic). For the Ccru, taking the impact of computers on consciousness as seriously as possible means returning to metaphysics – returning to a form of metaphysical *realism* specifically. Remember that Kant was an idealist – he believed that the mind creates reality. For idealists (and most *nominalists*), matter is less primordial than the mind's categories. Realists, on the other hand, maintain that that a structured reality exists beyond the human mind and that material reality includes emergent structures and processes that transcend and include the human mind. The human mind can therefore know reality (to some extent) through participation in it and as it.

Realism is entailed by computational extensions of human consciousness because ultimately *code itself* becomes identified as undeniably real, structured, and outside the mind. Just as Darwin forced Peirce to put the transcendental subject into a nervous system and into the natural history of an evolving planet, so computers forced a further pulling of the mind "down" into matter. In philosophy this marked a deepening of the "return to the object" (i.e., a return to considering the world beyond the mind as knowable, structured, and real). These trends "after Kant" put humans back in their place, not as a floating transcendental subject, but as embodied (and encoded) in space and time. Nick Land speculates (along with others) that time itself is best explained in terms of a metaphysics that posits each person's total immersion in a computerized world-simulation (like in the movie *The Matrix*). With these speculations Land is seeking a transcendence of modern and postmodern forms of human subjectivity and is willing to take on a complex transpersonal metaphysics to do so. While I think his speculations are deeply confused, I also think they are a sign that basic metaphysical issues are once again being forced onto the table, even if it is just in the movies.

The Ccru uses science fiction as an entryway into metamodern metaphysics, finding a new location for the creation of speculative ontologies extrapolating from scientific advance. The Ccru is practicing a kind of "guerrilla ontology" by using the text itself as a means to alter consciousness and awareness in the moment for the reader. *Guerilla ontology* is a term used by the early metamodernist Robert Anton Wilson to describe his own work (Wilson, 1977/2016). The term

suggests that the practice of metaphysics today can involve stepping outside of the centralized command and control structure of academic philosophy and engaging in all kinds of covert tactics, including theory fiction, anonymity, and revelations of the truths found in first-person experience. The guerilla ontologist forces readers to confront new realities in their own first-person experience by inviting (or jarring) them into uncanny phenomenological experiences. This is a common tactic among metamodern metaphysicians who are seeking to alter the consciousness of their readers in real time as part of justifying ontological arguments.

Following postmodernism's critiques of abstract theorizing, it makes sense that metaphysics has taken a "participatory turn" (Ferrer & Sherman, 2009). Practicing metaphysics now demands more than reading and writing theory in the traditional academic sense. Doing metaphysics means engaging in behaviors traditionally understood as "rituals," as well as in specific practices that allow individuals to see their own experiences objectively. Below I explore how Gafni and Kincaid practice guerrilla ontology in their explorations of human sexuality and love, revealing uncanny mystical experiences in the songs and films of popular culture. As we are exposed to different and larger realities already within our own experience, we are also invited to change our life and the world. The implication of all forms of participatory metaphysics are ultimately political.

It makes sense then that Nick Land's writings on politics have gained as much attention as his metaphysical speculations. Land has been promoting a certain kind of *Accelerationism* that seeks the political means to hasten the coming of the techno-capitalist singularity, and thus to catapult Earth into a transhuman future. Land is driven to these extremes by his ontological considerations about the new realities of planetary-scale computation. The phrase "planetary-scale computation" has been made popular by Benjamin H. Bratton (2015), who has theorized about our historical moment as involving the creation of an Earth-sized computer, which he calls "The Stack." The basic question is: At what point does this planetary computational stack replace reality? At what point in history does code itself become more real and world-creating than even the human subjectivity that writes it? Land's techno-*Logos*-mysticism presents a world in which humans are not in control of their future because laws of computation and "machinic desire" have already transcend but included them (Land, 2011 p. 319); we are being swept along by these laws into realms of human obsolescence that are politically unprecedented. Land's speculative realism eventually turns towards forms of political thought that have long been discredited by modernity and postmodernity. Neoreactionary forms of fascism have been inspired by Land's work because of his unabashed embrace of realities that contextualize human subjectivity and desire in broader geo-historical and ontological dynamics. The metamodern return to metaphysics also marks a return to metaphysically inspired political ideologies as well as their accompanying emotion and violence. The vacuum created by the modern and postmodern absence of metaphysics is now being filled, for better or worse. Land's work is one attempt to fill this void of meaning – it signals the dark possibilities entailed by the metamodern return to metaphysics.

Cosmo-erotic humanism is another attempt to fill the void of meaning left by postmodernism. Cosmo-erotic humanism is a project of reconstructive metaphysics and metatheory that is aimed at fostering cultural evolution at planetary scale, not towards some techno-capitalist singularity, but towards a planetary awakening of humanity through the propagation of innumerable "Unique Self Symphonies." However, unique individuals can only freely join into symbiosis and community in light of shared narratives of *identity, universe, and power* – some kind of

metamodern metaphysics is a prerequisite for planetary cultural coherence and the future of geopolitics (Stein & Gafni, 2015). This is an attempt to embark somewhat in advance of humanity's inevitable and immanent journey in metamodern metaphysics. I now turn to discuss Gafni and Kincaid's (2017) work as a way of looking into what it would mean to adopt the metaphysics of Eros at the core of cosmo-erotic humanism.

Part Two

Exploring a Metamodern Metaphysics of Eros

At the heart of *A Return to Eros* (Gafni & Kincaid, 2017) is a new metaphysical narrative about love and sex. The book seeks to salvage the reality of love in a time when love is being trivialized and forgotten. It argues that love is not merely a human construct. What humans experience as love and sexual desire are but facets of Eros, a construct nearly identical with Peirce's *evolutionary love* – the force that drives reality itself towards greater contact and larger wholes. *A Return to Eros* offers a metaphysically grounded Tantric praxis that is refreshingly different from the contemporary Western neo-Tantras that focus almost exclusively in the realm of sexual techniques. Like the original Tantric schools of thought in Kashmir Shaivism, *A Return to Eros* focuses on the fundamental frameworks of reality that shape human narratives of identity, power, and community which must be derived from a larger Universe Story – a new metaphysics. Only in the light of this broadest context can a coherent narrative about love and sex be read. Thus, Marc Gafni and Kristina Kincaid are not writing about sex and love; they are writing about Eros, which is ontologically prior to sex and love. There was a billion years of Eros before sex. Eros is built into the dynamics of reality itself. The love life of humanity is but an expression of *evolutionary love*, which pulses through all forms of life.

While this idea reminds us of Peirce's essay, Gafni and Kincaid would make Peirce blush as they unpack the obvious implications of his train of thought. Indeed, many evolutionary theorists fall short of the full implications of what it means to hold an evolutionary worldview. Engaging in a participatory metaphysics of Eros involves a realization that evolution is *not* a process happening "out there," merely to be studied from the third-person point of view. Our lives and relationships are the very stuff of evolution. The "self-organizing universe" continues on through us; the core of human interiors and consciousness are nothing but our inheritance of a cosmic *evolutionary love*. This must be the basis of any science or psychology of human behavior and motivation. Reality itself has been shown to be ceaselessly creative and driven always by an erotic advance into novelty, which means that ethics needs to be appropriately reconstructed.

This is the kind of reconstructive metaphysical project that *A Return to Eros* begins to attempt. Gafni and colleagues at the Center for Integral Wisdom (among whom the author of this review counts himself) are gradually evolving an approach to the reconstruction and evolution of culture on a planetary scale. *Cosmo-Erotic Humanism* is how we describe the emergent worldview taking shape. *A Return to Eros* offers an essential element in this worldview, developing the themes of Eros and identity already articulated in Gafni's mainstream and highly popular releases *Soul Prints* (2001) and *The Mystery of Love* (2003). These were followed by Gafni's major academic work, the two volumes of *Radical Kabbalah* (Gafni, 2012), which I have reviewed elsewhere (Stein, 2014). A genre-bending form of mystical hermeneutics, ecstatic scholarship, and participatory metaphysics lie at the core of Gafni's writings and informs all of his thought. *Radical Kabbalah*

was to be the source of Unique Self Theory (Gafni 2012a; 2015), which offers new and powerful frameworks for approaching issues in transpersonal psychology, human development, and identity theory.

Gafni himself has been subject to an ongoing political smear campaign proven to involve power and deception within rabbinical and New Age circles in Israel and the United States (Fuhs, 2017). The content of Gafni's teachings and the attacks against him are related. The embattled context of Gafni's scholarship can be felt in *A Return to Eros*, which is co-authored with Dr. Kristina Kincaid, who has a background in the application of Wilhelm Reich's core energetic therapeutics. In some sense, *A Return to Eros* is a response to the forces in culture that allow for smear campaigns involving the weaponizing of personal stories about sex, so often hidden under the fig leaf of victim advocacy. The book is also a powerful response to the forces in culture that perpetrate sexual violence and perpetuate the legacies of patriarchy and sexism. My particular goal here is use *A Return to Eros* as a way into the possibilities of the broader program of cosmo-erotic humanism. I place Gafni and Kincaid's book squarely in the center of our current cultural upheavals. As the force of reason in the public sphere weakens, the roles of innovative intellectuals, teachers, and writers become precarious. Gafni and Kincaid are working at the nexus of sex, reality, and politics, which is one of the most dangerous places for anyone to undertake innovation.

Sex, Reality, and Politics: Thinking Dangerously

Some years back, Slavoj Žižek, a newly popular Slovenian Neo-Marxist Philosopher and Psychoanalyst, was nicknamed "the most dangerous philosopher in the West," in what appeared to be a stunt arranged by his publicist (Oehmke, 2010). However, the idea of Žižek being dangerous seemed feasible because he was writing at the interface of sexual desire, philosophy (specifically ontology), and politics. This combination is dangerous in many cultural enclaves, even if Žižek is too abstract and obfuscating to really be a threat. Sexuality and desire are the keys to the domains of shadow; the *erotic* is thus taboo in cultures that are shadow-avoidant. Ontology is about what is real, what exists, and what is actually the case. The truth (the *alethic*) can be as taboo as sex in cultures that are reality-avoidant. Politics is about the *ethos* that governs human behavior and cooperation and is often avoided when cultures are unclear about what is in the interest of the common good. Putting all three topics into one book is usually a recipe for something provocative and potentially even dangerous to a wide swath of cultural and scholarly positions. Žižek ultimately argues for critiquing the political-economy of pleasure and related ideologies of (anti-)enjoyment. Conventional norms of behavior, consumption, and entertainment are cast in a critical light and explained as distortions of erotic energy – perversions of the ontological reality of desire itself. In other words, desire can be directed away from what truly satisfies it and forced into channels that exploit and distort our most basic human energies. Žižek the Christian says that what people really desire is love; to drop all their distractions and find the Real that is Love – a radical and "dangerous" sentiment.

Gafni's and Kincaid's book is also "dangerous" in this way, but make no mistake: *A Return to Eros* (Gafni & Kincaid, 2017) is as far from Žižek as you can get in terms of style and content. Where Žižek reads like a hyperactive neo-Hegelian movie critic, Gafni and Kincaid read like slightly buzzed Rumi scholars sharing Passover. *A Return to Eros* is dangerous because it brings together that same set of dangerous themes (sex, reality, and politics), and brings them down to

Earth for the twenty-first century. These themes have been the focus of most dangerous thinking in the modern age, starting with Marx and Freud. Before that it was figures such as Christ and Buddha who told humanity what to make of their desires, reality, and society. Worldviews do many things, but they especially make sense of human desires and their relationship to truth, goodness, and community. As *A Return to Eros* teaches, if you can *clarify desire* and in so doing attune your desire with reality, you will not be trapped in the pseudo-desires that are multiplied by the political economy of enjoyment. This is why the nexus of sex, reality, and politics is the linchpin of culture. Today sex, reality, and politics are incoherent aspects of a post-truth culture where narrative trumps truth (Wilber, 2017). Cultural warfare is spilling from our screens into the boardroom, bedroom, and dining room as the domain of the political is expanding to encompass all that was once personal. Throughout the US people are taking to social media and to the streets in displays of emotion escalating towards violence.

To understand the arguments, frameworks, and practices in *A Return to Eros*, one must understand the major traditions from which it stems: Hebrew wisdom, the mystical traditions of Tantra, modern evolutionary science and systems theory, Reichian praxis, and integral theory. We move towards a path out of the contemporary culture's "emotional plagues" (Reich, 1953) and "mimetic violence" (Girard, 1989). Gafni and Kincaid make clear it that the problems that face us at our current historical juncture stem from profound distortions of Eros – distortions of the basic emotional energies of humanity. Yet there is a possible future in which humanity gains clarity about what is valuable and certainty about the reality of love.

Implicit within the participatory metaphysics of *A Return to Eros* is a framework for cultural diagnostics that is directly relevant to our current cultural "dis-ease." The book pulls together fragments of a new psycho-sexual-spiritual critical theory of self and society. I am writing within the framework of academic critical theory, metaphysics, and metatheory. But *A Return to Eros* is not written or intended to be received in this way; it is not a book of academic critical theory or a formal work of metaphysics. It is a book of inspired and poetic text intending to evolve the very source code of love itself with new possibilities and emergent worldviews. And while it is laced with academic references, it is not written to merely convince the reader, it is written to provoke and transform the reader. As guerrilla ontology targeting the core of emotional life, *A Return to Eros* is about the source codes of erotic emotional structures and how these relate to reality, and in turn to relationships, ethics, and the political. This potent combination of sex, reality, and politics makes for a dangerous book of metamodern metaphysics.

Emotion, Eros, and Evolution

The 1960s generation read dangerous books by Herbert Marcuse (1955) and Norman O. Brown (1959; 1966) and discussed the many ways that liberating our sexuality and rethinking our relationships would remake the face of society. Today in the context of resurgent patriarchy and fundamentalism, as well as the new puritanism of revived anti-sexuality rhetoric, the hopeful thinking of a generation dedicated to "free love" seems like a sentimental memory. As I later explore here (and as Gafni and Kincaid discuss), explanations exist for why cultures engage in shaming, scapegoating, and distorted displays of emotional energy. The misdirection of Eros leads to distortions of cognitive framing and political action (Bhaskar, 1993; Reich, 1969). *The structure of emotion is prior to the structure of thought*. Emotion is thus prior to (and a foundation for) the

domains of the political and epistemological. This has been shown by neuroscience and educational research for decades (Apple, 2001; Damasio, 1994). It is one of the major claims implicit within *A Return to Eros*, where it is shown that errors in thought and ethics can be traced back to failures of relationship, failures of intimacy, and distortions of Eros.

Looking to Eros as the source code of human emotional structures means looking into the roots and dynamics of embodied “bio-psychic” emotional energy. Emotion is traced back to its root as the primary force of Eros that suffuses all reality. For Gafni and Kincaid, this is where metaphysics merges with the limits of psychological theorizing. They maintain that the psychological and biological sciences suggest that a principle expression of cosmic energy itself can be found in human sexuality. This is about the evolutionary significance of sex itself, which has been part of cultural common sense since Freud. As Gafni and Kincaid say repeatedly, “It is all about sex. And it is not about sex at all.” Humanity’s lifeline to cosmic evolution – where our personal energy plugs into the Universe – is through the sexual. But sex is not the source; rather, it points towards the source. There were billions of years of self-organizing and Eros well before sexual reproduction began.

Evolution was primarily *about* sex for millions of years; humanity is in the unique evolutionary position to ask what *sex itself* is about. The only way for humanity to evolve is to clarify the desire of the universe itself, which has been gifted to us, hidden in the secret of our sexual desire. Sexuality leads beyond sex and into Eros, which permeates all forms of creativity and flow-inducing mergers of self, object, and other. This is what Gafni and Kincaid mean when they write that sex is only a sign pointing towards Eros: the sexual models the erotic. *A Return to Eros* expresses one of the core teachings of Hebrew Tantra: that the desire of the universe itself is hidden within the nature of human desire. Human yearning – when it is clarified from the dross of grasping and illusion – is the yearning of evolutionary love itself, awakening in us. Gafni elucidated the great Kabbalistic mystic Luria in *Radical Kabbalah* by focusing on *the clarification of desire* as a mystical practice. Wisdom is seeking to align desire with reality. Our embodiments of Eros (our emotional structures, and by implication our personalities, thoughts, and actions) are not simply ours. As it reaches expression in and through human emotions, Eros is a force that transcends but includes the “skin-encapsulated ego;” humans participate in the erotic energies that constitute the evolving universe as a whole.

Western stereotypes would have us believe that Eros (as expressed in human emotion in general, but especially sexual attraction and love) drives us to error and should be avoided when trying to use reason. There is a moment of truth in this that has been well documented in research on cognitive bias (Gino, 2013). Indeed, it is clear that some forms of emotion can profoundly distort our ability to think clearly and make good decisions. However, a careful look at this research shows that it is not the lack or absence of emotion in general that is important for reason and clarity of decision-making, but rather the *presence* of certain positive emotions. Research on how the brain learns also shows that you need a kind of *passion* to learn, otherwise you forget or simply give up (Immordino-Yang, 2011). It is only when life is rich with emotion, when you are in the flow of Eros, only then are you ever really thinking clearly. Ask a world-class scientist what it is like to really be *doing* science, and they will describe a kind of rapture, using words like beauty, ecstasy, and satisfaction (erotic emotional highs often following from rigorous preparation; no doubt, foreplay is important). The underappreciated implication of this is *not* that we should

repress emotion and get it out of the way, but rather that if we want to be reasonable we should work hard to *cultivate* and *clarify* certain emotions.

The clarification of emotion has long been part of the great Tantric traditions of spiritual practice. *A Return to Eros* demonstrates that the goal of Tantra, so often misunderstood in popular narratives, is *not* more and better sex, but rather more erotic energy to be expanded beyond the sexual. As Gafni has been saying since he wrote *The Mystery of Love* (2003), “the sexual models the erotic, but it does not exhaust it.” In sexual experiences the majority of people can most easily experience the various qualities of Eros. The emotional intensity of sexuality explodes the powder keg known as the system, plugging into billions of years of evolution. Tantra seeks to transform and liberate this energy – which is the basic bio-psychic energy of evolution itself – so that it transcends but includes the domain of sexuality. This is seen as the key to a liberated humanity: clarification of what is hidden in erotic merger, and then expanding this pure erotic energy into the rest of life. Literally a return or turning towards Eros, this is the wellspring from which the actualization of human potential flows.

The many qualities of Eros detailed by Gafni and Kincaid are listed as the “12 faces of Eros.” Each one gets a chapter. Some of these faces are the qualities of flow and self-transcendence, peak experiences, and mystical merger, as were researched in the human potential movement for decades (Murphy, 1992; Wheal, 2017). Other qualities instead challenge the non-dual Eastern orientations of the human potential movement. Just to get a sense (although there is not space to discuss them here), the most essential of the 12 faces of Eros are: *interiority*, or depth of consciousness; *presence*, or the fullness of the moment; *desire*, or yearning; *wholeness*, or radical intimacy; and *uniqueness*. These are the results of Gafni and Kincaid’s important work engaging a *phenomenology of Eros*, which amounts to a metamodern participatory metaphysics of the human understood as a function of cosmic Eros. Their work seeks to reveal the common deep structures of emotion that constitute the domain of the erotic. Is there a common structure to feelings of sexual merger and, for example, the feeling of being “at one with” a landscape that presents a rapturous sunset? Those two emotional structures are similar; both are rooted in Eros, and both are presenting a shade or face of Eros. Human love and sexuality is a *sign* that points beyond itself towards the Eros and Divinity of life itself. If we ask what the universe must be like for human love to be real, we ought not look only at the sign (you voyeur!), but to where it points.

All this echoes Reich (1969) and other theorists who critique the Left for abandoning the “sexual revolution” to those who want to debate gender politics (Thompson, 1981; 1998). The true sexual revolution would be a widespread liberation of Eros beyond the sexual, such that the energies of love, depth, and desire suffuse all aspects of life. This means that understanding the cultural crisis of today requires more than looking at developmental structures of thought and value, as Ken Wilber (2017) does in his analysis of *Trump and a Post-Truth World*. This developmental-structural approach is essential. But fully understanding and being able to take action requires looking further into the source code of emotional structures, and specifically recognizing the ubiquitous culture of what Gafni and Kincaid call *the murder of Eros*.

The Murder of Eros

That the root of human emotions is to be found in cosmic Eros explains, in part, the general sense among (especially conservative) psychologists and sociologists that humanity is sitting on a powder keg known as the system. The sense that human sexuality is an infinite energy that needs to be bottled up tight can be seen throughout the history of ideology. Reich (1953; 1969) spoke of the murder of Christ as a symbol for the perpetual and sometimes brutal domestication of Eros demanded by the ideologies of imperialistic capitalism. Reich was himself basically murdered by the FBI, which investigated and convicted him as a con man and sentenced him to prison, where he died only weeks later. They also burned his books, manuscripts and notes. Yes, this was after WWII when the FBI had a public book burning of Reich's books (Wilson, 1977/2016). Reich's status as a criminal has been reassessed, but the defamation of his character continues at the hands of traditional psychologists and conservative sexual counter-revolutionaries (see Reich's Wikipedia page, for example, where he is portrayed as an insane sexual deviant, an account that includes inaccuracies that his followers have been unable to amend, despite petitioning Wikipedia).

Reich argued that the structures and dynamics of emotional self-regulation demanded for participation in society have historically worked against the free and full range of emotional expression, especially in the domain of sexuality. The impact of this erotic truncation has been a distortion of the "upper-layers" of personality, thought, and action that depend upon this foundation of structured bio-psychic energy. Eros enlivens the body to the degree made possible by the structures of culture, society, and personality. Every society murders Eros in some specific way; the signs of this act can be found in the structure of embodied bio-psychic energies that constitutes the population. The murder of Eros shapes the character of a people. Culturally widespread distortions of personality, thought, and action can be understood not as some "mass or mob psychosis," but rather as a symptom of the countless individuals with emotional lives that share a similar distorted deep structure. The murder of Eros is always disguised. For example, limiting erotic energy to the merely sexual is a kind of erotic truncation, and perhaps the most common in our culture. An apparently liberated hook-up culture in which the mere act of sex is the most intimate thing shared between people distorts Eros in a different way than a traditional culture that would limit all sex to the marriage bed (with the lights off). But note that both truncate the erotic itself into the constraints of genital sexuality.

Of course, for large parts of the world, Eros can not even get out of the gate. Liberating traditional and fundamentalist religious cultures from overt forms of sexual repression is a global ethical imperative, and the only way to get billions of girls a proper education (Nussbaum, 2000; 2006). Patriarchy has long been at the core of our culture's domestication of Eros. Reich (1969) showed definitively the relationship of authoritarian patriarchal families and imperialistic industrialized capitalism, a combination of repression and pseudo-Eros that eventually culminated in fascism (see also Deleuze and Guattari, 1977/2009). Whole populations voted and acted against their own economic and political interests as if blind to the reality of their own situations, preferring instead to live vicariously through identification with the power of the state, a corporation, or in the case of 1930s Germany, a fascist dictator. Using phrases like the "eruption of mass hysteria" or a "mob mentality" may describe what appears to have happened, but they do not explain what actually happened. Reich's explanation (like Adorno's and Habermas') looks to

the structure of the personality of the individual, and especially to the emotional dynamics of the patriarchal and sexually repressed authoritarian family that produced them. This kind of “sex-economic analysis” that combines Marx and Freud was picked up in the 1960s and came to characterize the feminist and progressive Left.

Yet, with that said, achieving sex and gender equality is *necessary but not sufficient* for a sustainable and peaceful society. Patriarchy is only *part* of the problem. In the post-industrial West (in the core states of the capitalist-world system), women are for the first time in history outperforming men in attaining college degrees (NCES, 2018). Much remains to be done, but progress here is notable, especially in the United States. However, we must also note that 45% of all college-educated women in the US voted for Trump, the majority of whom described themselves as “angry” (Wilber, 2017). Economic injustice for women remains and is made more painful by the debts accrued in pursuit of “equal access” to education, as college degree attainment reflects economic class more than gender (*Ibid*). More importantly, even in a society that has shed a great deal of the traditional family, gender roles, and identity structures, whole populations are still voting and acting against their own economic and political interests. The point here is that even with the gains made in the wake of the 1960s gender revolution and the broader civil rights revolution, we are currently facing an even more profoundly distorted deep structure of emotion which is tending in authoritarian and conservative directions (Apple, 2001; 2013). We are still murdering Eros, just in new and more sophisticated ways.

Culture Evolves: From Role Mates to Soul Mates and Beyond

The suppression of the erotic has taken a new form in the market democracies of the Western world, which are striving for gender equality and a new sexual ethics. The loss of happiness in market democracies has been well documented, where it is clear that money, safety, and all the trappings of conventional success do not bring lasting happiness (Lane, 1991; 2000). The capitalist colonization of the emotional dynamics of the family has continued into the twenty-first century, even if some of the overtly patriarchal dominance has faded. In a large and growing number of American households, women are the predominant breadwinners, and men are dependent economically. Couples stay together not because of conformity to traditional roles (at least not only), but rather because they are “in love.” Contemporary couples are not merely “role mates” sanctioned by a traditional culture; they are “soul mates,” standing outside of traditional cultural norms (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). *A Return to Eros* draws attention to the recent evolution from a culture of patriarchal role mate relationships to a culture of matriarchal soul mate relationships. Beyond the soul mate is a more evolved whole mate, a higher level of relationship that Gafni and Kincaid posit, and which I discuss further below. The distinction between role mates, soul mates and whole mates is one of several key cultural distinctions within *A Return to Eros*.

The soul mate liberates us from a cultural narrative that revolves around the role mate. As poetry, music, and devotional literature the world over reveals, the power of the soul mate relationship to heal, grow, and enliven is simply exquisite. Where the role mate fits into conventional cultural norms, economic necessities, and the realities of running a household, the soul mate lifts one out of these mundane trivialities entirely. Finding your soul mate can feel like a lightning bolt of erotic energy that hits you out of nowhere, and it can change the way the rest of

the world looks. Importantly, when Gafni and Kincaid use the word “soul” in this context, it is not in any rigorous theological sense. Here the soul mate is taken as a cultural category, not a metaphysical one. Therefore, some connotations that the word holds for some readers will not be appropriate. The soul mate relationship should be understood as a result of modern cultural evolution, emerging from new economic conditions and changing norms and representations about the meaning of romantic love. This means that the soul mate relationship is susceptible to becoming distorted and co-opted like any other relationship. Even the best innovations in cultural evolution are only appropriate for a certain phase of evolution. Part of the narrative offered in *A Return to Eros* is about overcoming the limitations and distortions that have come to characterize the culture of the soul mate.

For example, there is a widespread idea that one’s romantic partner is what “makes it all worth it.” This is a novel idea related to the emergence of the soul mate relationship during cultural modernity. Taken to its extreme, this idea dictates that the soul mate should be the only source and focus of all of one’s erotic energy. The soul mate is one of the few things culturally validated as being more important – emotionally, erotically, and energetically – than anything else in someone’s life. The soul mate in our culture holds more erotic focus and expectation than it can possibly bear. It must make up for de-eroticized work, de-eroticized consumption habits, and de-eroticized entertainment. Remember this is not about what the culture industry sells as “sex,” where a great deal of our money and attention is spent. The core issue in thinking through sex-economic critiques of existing structures is the quality and availability of erotic emotional experience outside of the sexual. Where in the culture is one able to invest all of one’s energy? Where can one tap the powder keg known as the limbic system and really open the gates of emotion? For many people in our culture, the answer is their current (or hoped for future) soul mate, for whom and with whom self-transcendence, self-sacrifice, merger, and fulfillment are possible. The beauty, truth, and goodness of this form of relationship is what drove a revolution in culture, starting with the Romantic era’s reaction to the beginnings of modernization and continuing through to the “Summer of Love” in 1967. The emergence and cultural propagation of the idea and value of the soul mate relationship constitutes a fascinating study in the evolution of consciousness, which *A Return to Eros* only begins to tell (see: Gafni & Hubbard, forthcoming).

Our culture is focused on the beauty, specialness, and intensity of the soul mate relationship. While this culture of soul mates involves a radical questioning of the role mate, it is still a culture that requires a profound truncation of Eros. The intense value of a soul mate relationship has the power to break the molds put in place by a culture of tradition and convention. But a life of dedication to one’s soul mate remains a truncation of the erotic. This is true even when you have numerous soul mates – even if you have them at the same time. As Gafni and Kincaid are clear to point out, the issue of expanding the erotic beyond the culture of soul mates is not about the issue of monogamy versus polyamory, although this is an important issue. The issue is about the exile of our most potent and foundational emotional energies and experiences entirely into the domain of dyadic personal relationships, and within that domain, entirely into sexual relationships. A potent negative image here is of the bubble of shared narcissism that surrounds soul mates staring into each other eyes, oblivious as the world burns around them.

A Return to Eros posits a new ideal for love and intimacy in an age of fracture, which transcends but includes the culture of soul mates. This vision is a first step towards reworking the emotional

deep structures of our culture. New human potentials only manifest in the context of new forms of relationship. The love stories we tell in our culture today are mostly about soul mates. Can these be retold in the context of a larger love story that transcends but includes the soul mate narrative? Can we place our individual love stories within the larger love story of the universe itself? These are the questions driving *A Return to Eros*. Before the ideal of the “whole mate” can be discussed, a larger story must be told about the evolution of the universe and humanity. Evolution at all levels has proceeded through the emergence of new forms of complexity and intimacy; this has continued through the evolution of human culture, which has also moved “upward” into increasing degrees of complexity and intimacy. We now stand on the verge of a breakthrough in relationships and community on a planetary level (Stein & Gafni, 2015). Part of this evolution is the emergence of a new story about human love and the forms of social life that honor the profound realities of our emotional being, a story that makes clear the relationship between human ethics and the rest of the evolving universe.

Ontology NOW! Getting Back to Reality

The sections in *A Return to Eros* that fall under the heading of the “cosmo-erotic universe” may be the most important. This is where sex and politics merge with the third and most dangerous topic: *reality*. Beyond all the stories and Biblical myths, beyond the analysis of sex, Eros, and relationships, *A Return to Eros* is putting forth a specific conception of reality. The basic claim is that the bio-psychic energies of the human are continuous with those of the universe itself, and thus manifest the same patterns, qualities, and powers. This is a simple truth about the radical interconnectedness of each human with the totality of the cosmos. We are made of stardust, through and through (Bruteau, 1997). These kinds of realities can mean nothing or they can mean everything. To paraphrase Einstein: you can see everything as a miracle, or you can see nothing as a miracle. *A Return to Eros* is about seeing everything as a miracle, especially the potential for human manifestations of “evolutionary love,” a form of emotional life continuous with Divinity itself. Metaphysically speaking, *A Return to Eros* is describing the lived experience of Gafni’s (2012) *acosmic humanism*, which has been expanded into a comprehensive *cosmo-erotic humanism*. This is based on an ontology that locates the identity of human and divine action in the erotic enfoldments and emergence of evolution itself. This ontology suggests an expansion of our capacities and identities beyond the skin-encapsulated ego, while also managing to fit within the assumptions of leading-edge evolutionary theory.

The question of just what counts as leading-edge evolutionary theory brings us to the point of this section. Getting a handle on reality is hard these days. There are no longer just a handful of authoritative academics working at the frontiers of evolutionary theory; there are over a thousand of them. In the past 50 years, the acceleration of academic knowledge production in the departments of biology, biochemistry, and environmental/ecological sciences (all fields dealing with evolution) has taken an almost exponential curve. Areas within the field show consensus on some issues, but whole populations of scientists disagree about foundational axioms, the interpretation of key findings, and the meaning of basic concepts (Capra & Luisi, 2014). Then there are the individuals who serve as pop-science mouthpieces, shouting into the public sphere about how evolution works as if there was scientific consensus, when what they are actually doing is only thinly veiled apologetics for predatory capitalism and abstract possessive individualism. Standing in opposition from pop-science are the think-tanks and industry skunkworks focused on

complexity science and applications of evolutionary game theory and competitive landscape modeling. But who has the *real story* about evolution and the nature of the human? Of course, even after all of the academic debate, what really matters may be the Google rank and Wikipedia page of various evolutionary theories, as this is where the majority of students and non-specialists are forming their ideas. The state of scientific knowledge has fragmented beyond the possibility of any near-term synthesis, while at the same time it is being simplistically funneled through Goolge and Twitter.

This raises a general question about our culture: If you can't find it on Google or fit it into a Tweet, is it true? Serious cultural critics have to ask if it even matters if something is true or not anymore (Wilber, 2017). We live in a post-truth culture where positing the reality of anything is difficult. *A Return to Eros* can only be taken as poetry in this kind of context, yet Gafni and Kincaid are offering truth claims. Today ontological truth claims are unfortunately so mired in caveats that they mostly cease to serve a function in language (Habermas, 2009). In the interest of overcoming the fallacies of the modern mindset, the postmodern mind sought to put an end to "truth," and has now hit the jagged edge of its deconstructive projects, something reflective educators have seen coming for decades (Gardner, 1999).

What fanned the flames of academic deconstructionism into the raging wildfire of our post-truth culture? In part it was the computer technologies built by the cultural elite, which are still being marketed as if they will usher in an age of universal education and democracy, when they have demonstrated they do exactly the opposite. This is not the place to outline the failures of social media and search engines as educational technologies, let alone as technologies of socialization (Stein, in press). But regardless of the platform, the popular appeal of relativism stems from its political power. The weaponization of rumor is now an accepted political strategy. Seeking to short circuit the relations between *power and knowledge* (i.e., seeking to undo the use of knowledge as a tool of oppression wielded by elites), postmodernism decided to do away with knowledge itself (Foucault, 1980). Predictably, the result is that only power remains and discourse devolves into rhetoric and posturing, or worse, name calling and scapegoating.

To take only two examples from the upper echelons of academic culture, Yale University's Keller Easterling is a widely influential critical theorist in the fields of architecture and design. She explicitly suggests lying, rumor, and hoax as political strategies that can aid or hinder the creation of certain infrastructure projects (Easterling, 2014, pp. 215-218). I also cite Hebrew University's best selling historian, Yuval Noah Harari (2017, p. 206), who argues essentially the same thing. Both claim that stories are tools, and therefore the truth of a story has less importance than its political impact. As Easterling (2014, pp. 215-216) says: "Rumor and gossip [are] tools of aggression among the powerless." She argues that they are also available to the powerful and can become "a practical technique of markets and governments." It sounds like she is setting up a critique but she is actually suggesting that everyone play along: "[T]he environmentally sensitive designer might also embellish [their ecological design plans] with a narrative rumor – mixture of fact and fiction or what Hollywood calls 'faction'" (p. 218). Easterling's strategic retreat from narratives based on fact to narratives based on "faction" leaves designers with no choice but to retreat into actual political factions as a kind of retribalization. When the idea of a possible truth that might reconcile differences dissolves, all that is left are power games. The culture has been veering away from strong and commonly held conceptions of reality and truth and growing to

accept the spreading of untruths for the sake of in-group solidarity. The periodic eclipse of reason is part of the evolution of civilizations, usually cascading into an age of fracture and barbarism (Rodgers, 2011; Horkheimer, 1947).

The new post-truth culture is most obviously dangerous when it comes to orientating collective action towards the realities of the physical world. It is simply dangerous to not have a clear sense of the effects of common industrial toxins and food additives, the scope of climate change, or the amount of radiation leaking from the damaged Fukushima nuclear reactor. It is more comfortable to see post-truth culture as a problem contained to things like tabloids and contentious presidential politics. According to this view we can simply set up a Google “fact checker” without ever settling the tricky problem of what constitutes a fact or truth (Wilber, 2017). The issue is much deeper than celebrity gossip and lurid political mudslinging.

The post-truth culture is predicated on the following accelerating trends in the new informational ecosystem:

1. the inability to distinguish non-commercially motivated from commercially motivated information;
2. the related inability to distinguish honest information from intentional misinformation that is spread for strategic advantage;
3. decreased message length, increased message frequency, and inability to track all message sources (i.e., information overload);
4. the absence of shared overarching meta-narrative that could potentially reconcile conflicting information and perspectives;
5. escalating emotional intensity of information (due to factors 1-4);
6. weaponization of language, (i.e., lies, slander, censorship, politicization, due to factor 4).

Micah White (2016), who was one of the key architects of Occupy Wall Street, discusses these trends from the perspective of the interface between politics and social media, where now the *representation* of the political takes precedence over actual politics. David Healy (1996; 2002) and Robert Whitaker (2015) discuss the same phenomenon in the fields of medicine and psychiatry, where the profit motive is systematically distorting research and public information campaigns. The same dynamics have caused a breakdown in discourse surrounding the reform of public schools in the United States, as the politicization of testing and the occurrence of widespread cheating has created disinformation, intense animosity, and a “chamber of echoes” (Ravitch, 2013; Schneider, 2014).

The unstated implication of this research is that political and psychological *realities* are hard to get good information about, especially if you only want to look at a screen to do so, let only if you only want to look at one social media platform (which is the norm, especially for those under 21). Identities as we have known them are disappearing, dissolving in the chaotic noise of the information age (Thompson, 1998). One way to think about *A Return to Eros* is as addressing the self-understandings of the species: are we lovers and creators or fighters and competitors? The book seeks to avert an impending species-wide identity crisis by counteracting the disintegration of the cultural resources that humans have traditionally used to create identities, relationships, and political communities. It reminds a post-truth culture that *reality matters*. Getting back to reality

means embracing a new kind of metaphysics (an integrative evolutionary *realism*), a paradigm that is still being explicated at the leading edge of metatheory (Bhaskar, Esbjörn-Hargens, Hedlund, & Hartwig, 2015).

Realism about the exterior and physical argues for the existence of laws of nature, facts, processes, and tendencies in the universe (Bhaskar, 1993). Realism about *interiors* argues these same points for the life of the mind, demonstrating the existence of laws of nature, facts, processes, and tendencies in the domains of the psychological and cultural (Stein, in press). Taking seriously the ontology of human interiors means looking at the evolution of consciousness as well as the structures and dynamics of emotional energy. Both forms of realism (exterior and interior) are implicated when you want to make sense of the human in an evolutionary context. This is precisely what is so powerful about evolutionary explanations of human actions: they ontologize our humanity, making us feel at home in the universe (Kauffman, 1995). Evolutionary explanations give a deeper, broader, and more coherent sense of the reality of the human experience, which is today too often characterized as if it were merely a social construction. I believe that it is actually impossible to live in a culture and with an identity that reflectively takes itself as an arbitrary and meaningless construction. Humans need to orient around a sense of the world and their place in it that they believe is true. This means looking at the realities that underlie both the natural world and the human lifeworld.

Cosmo-erotic humanism offers a new kind of story about the universe, one that seeks to make good on the promises made by the complexity sciences more than a decade ago (Wilber, 1995; Kauffman, 1995; Capra, 1996). *A Return to Eros* is about the interior dimensions of increases in exterior evolutionary complexity, which are increases in consciousness, creativity, and Eros. These five trajectories of evolution (*complexity, consciousness, creativity, uniqueness, and Eros*) are reflected in the trajectories of individual development (Gafni & Kincaid, 2017 pp. 199-202). The universe evolves towards more complexity, consciousness, creativity, uniqueness, and Eros, and so does each individual within it. Humans can become aware of this reality, and so begin to self-consciously steer themselves into the strong currents of the evolutionary stream. This is an ontological claim, not mere poetry offered into a post-truth culture. This conception of reality is not abstract; it has direct relevance to the ethics and politics of relationships. It is at this point that the ethics of the *whole mate* can be understood.

A Return to Eros gives a vision of relationships that transcend but include the ethics of the soul mate, bringing forward the possibility of intimate love relationships that expand the energy they generate outward; these are unique love stories that open outward and into a universal love story. This is a call to expand the flow of Eros that is now limited to the options of a commoditized culture of soul mates. Where soul mates feed the wedding-baby-vacation-industrial-complex, whole mates understand the evolutionary and world-historical context in which their relationships take place. Love is the exception and escape from a troubled world where soul mates *retreat* into each other's embrace, taking an "us against the world" stance to defend their shelter of love. For whole mates, love instead becomes the power to *engage* and heal a troubled world. Whole mates work together looking with eyes to the horizon, knowing their shared love participates in a universal evolutionary love. Where soul mates feel compelled to join genes through sexuality, whole mates may or may not engage sexually, and instead feel compelled to *join genius* in an erotic embrace beyond the merely sexual (here Gafni and Kincaid are drawing on the work of

futurist Barbara Marx Hubbard). Whole mates are likely to join triadic or ever larger configurations of intimacy and perspectival coordination. The knowledge and experience of whole mates is of love as a force of nature. This vindication of the ontic reality of love (what Bhaskar (2012) would call *the alethic truth of love*) is the greatest message of *A Return to Eros*. Humanity is at home in the universe because we are at home in the reality of love. Love is not merely poetry or romance. Love is Eros, the actual driving force of cosmic evolution itself. This reimagining of relationships is the key to bringing culture back to reality.

Conclusion

Love in the Anthropocene: Life Without Externalities

I have argued that *A Return to Eros* contains fragments of a new psycho-sexual-spiritual critical theory of self and society. This is part of a larger project of *cosmo-erotic humanism*, which is itself part of a broader return to metaphysics that constitutes a metamodern worldview. This paper has only partially pieced some of these themes together. I began by recognizing the unique condition of metamodern metaphysics and arguing that doing metaphysics is now necessary because of essential changes in the human condition. The methods of metaphysical inquiry have changed along with the topics that ought to be the focus of metaphysical speculations. There is no longer any prospect for premodern forms of metaphysics after Kant, Darwin, and planetary-scale computation. Yet the modern and postmodern *absence* of metaphysics has created its own problems by leaving a vacuum where answers to the most important questions used to be found. The metamodern return to metaphysics seeks to fill this vacuum of meaning by providing a new context for human self-understanding – a new Universe Story that includes a new story of self and community. *A Return to Eros* offers part of this new story, focusing especially on our most intimate relationships, on love, and only beginning to outline the implications for politics.

Gafni and Kincaid argue for the primacy of emotional life and for flipping the typical prioritization in Western culture; here they are pointing to the emotional “tail” that wags the cognitive “dog.” The source of emotional life itself can be understood in terms of the cosmic dimensions of the bio-psychic energy contained within human sexuality. Sex is the great secret that evolution has placed within the core of human emotional life. Tantra is about *the clarification and expansion of erotic desire beyond the sexual*. This is about repurposing the powder keg of the system, not defusing it. Cultures have historically sought to defuse the cosmo-erotic nature of humanity. Individuals embody the limited forms of Eros enabled and validated by their cultures. Events in recent political life and public culture have demonstrated widespread distortions of emotional structure, which are manifesting in patterns of behavior long familiar in the history of capitalist civilization. Reich (1969) demonstrated that people will vote and act against their own material and political interest because of basic distortions within their emotional lives, specifically the truncation and misdirection of erotic energy. Gafni and Kincaid take this argument one step further by stressing the Tantric expansions of the erotic beyond the sexual, which allows for a critique that applies across both the Right and the Left of the political spectrum. The overt repression of sexuality has been the traditional conservative root of emotional dysfunction, and while Western cultures have overcome much of this overt repression, the result has been a different kind of erotic truncation. Where sex is not repressed it is hypertrophied; instead of a culture arranged to avoid sex, the culture is arranged to focus directly on sex.

Advertising and entertainment are only the tip of the iceberg; whole economic sectors are now built around a culture of romance in which we are told to prioritize seeking our soul mate. Culture sanctions the soul mate relationship as the highest form of intimacy. However, there are possibilities within the soul mate relationship that allow lovers to get caught up in a logic of *externalities*. Building, maintaining, and protecting our shelters of love can lead us to place ourselves outside the world. Commodification is based on this logic of externalization, where the desire to improve the quality of local short-term experiences blinds us to the long-term and distant consequences. We externalize waste, risk, labor, and the rest of the full impact of our lifestyles. The capitalist world-system has operated according to this logic on a grand scale for nearly 500 years, externalizing the impacts of economic growth by moving waste around the world and its fallout into the future (Wallerstein, 2006). The culture of soul mates, which was brought to fruition by the revolutions of the 1960s, has since been largely co-opted and is now a potentially counter-revolutionary force.

A Return to Eros argues that there are forms of intimacy that transcend but include the ideal of the soul mate. These make possible a new kind of culture and new structures of emotion, thought, and action. It is possible to access a universal evolutionary love (i.e., the *cosmo-erotic qualities of human emotion*) that expand love beyond sexuality and allow the qualities of Eros to suffuse all aspects of life. The soul mate relationship can be transformed into an amplifier of evolutionary love as it evolves into a whole mate relationship. In the process the logic of externalities falls away. The reality of the human situation dawns on us (with huge political consequence): no one individual love story can be played out separately from any others. The experience of Eros lifts the focus of the soul mates beyond themselves and into a total embrace of humanity and the universe. Nothing needs to be bought to prove this love. There is no vacation spot where it might be improved. Evolutionary love expands outward; the love between two soul mates is transformed into an act of theurgist protest, a kind of mystical activism that draws on humanity's capacities to manifest universal (super)natural forces (White, 2016). The image here is of a world historical *revolution of love* (Bhaskar, 2012), made possible by the evolution of new forms of relationship and intimacy.

Of course, any attempts to forge new forms of relationship will be seen as dangerous. The nexus of sex, reality, and politics remains a dangerous place to innovate. Living a life without externalities – a life that extends love to all relationships – requires looking into the social realities of the global commodity chains, political networks, and communication infrastructures we live within. Living a life dedicated to evolutionary love instead of romantic love is an utterly simple act of total subversiveness. Romantic love has the power to free individuals temporarily from the suffering of the world, but it does not have the power to free the world from suffering. Therefore we must evolve through and beyond the culture of soul mates and towards forms of relationships in which we can live as unique incarnations of cosmo-erotic love. Whole mates are amplifiers of evolutionary love. This new form of relationship is predicated on seeking to embody the force of Divine Eros itself in all aspects of our lives, not only with those chosen few souls we take as special. This means you can no longer leave Eros at the door when you go to work, go shopping, engage with social media, or join a protest. It means the end of the substitute gratifications and distorted expressions of erotic energies that drive so much of today's cultural industries. It means that no one or few are taken as special and set apart. Instead, all are taken as unique, and no one is ever placed outside the circle of concern, tolerance, and compassion.

Cosmo-erotic humanism is not offering an indiscriminate love-fest or a self-contradictory relativism that claims to love everyone only to then put on displays of hate. It instead offers a return to reality. Metamodern metaphysics needs find a way to get beyond the limits of post-truth culture, which means finding ways to embrace non-pathological value hierarchies of truth, goodness, and beauty. We should seek ways reverse the tendencies of love to contract inward and shrink in this age of fracture. As things are going now we are deepening the fractures, retreating into a process of multiplying the “others” and partitioning off our safe spaces. We are shrinking love down to a small circle, while lashing out at an ever-expanding circle of the unloved in the world beyond our screens. This logic of keeping love and respect for “us” and saving none for “them” reflects the truncations of Eros that so often burden and distort human personalities. The emotional structures of humanity will need healing if we are to again take up the quest for mutual understanding and put down the quest for mutual destruction.

The pursuit of mutual understanding between people who disagree is the key to anything like a society worth living in. Not, “you have your truth and I have mine,” but rather, “we live under a common truth that we are seeking together.” The collective pursuit of mutual understanding is not about condoning hate and ignorance by equally valuing all voices. Seeking understanding does not mean reaching an agreement. It is a reciprocally *educational* process that must be sincerely engaged by all parties. Some may be too full of hate to be open to learn, but we must love even those who are hateful in order to see into the reality and humanity of their lives. Justice requires seeking ever new ways to counter hate with love. The desire to seek mutual understanding is not the result of cognitive insight. It is an embodied emotional disposition and a presupposition of discourse (Habermas, 1998). This makes it something that is not the result of discourse, because discourse is not even possible if we don’t already agree to seek mutual understanding. This means that the task of restoring any semblance of reason to the public sphere is first and foremost about addressing the structure of emotions, specifically the material and cultural conditions that are generating widespread distortions and truncations of Eros.

I began this paper writing about the eternal battle between Eros and Thanatos. I suggested that our historical moment is one in which this battle is raging out in the open. According to everything I’ve discussed so far, it may seem that Thanatos appears as a frightening glitch in the matrix of Eros. How can those who believe in the ultimate reality of love face down the reality of hate? How can a universe fueled by Eros even make sense in the face of what Thanatos creates? Thanatos creates a torrent of malice, spite, and sadism that slaps the face of anyone offering simplistic notions about the basic goodness of human nature. Thanatos is worshiped by the likes of Nick Land and those who are seeking a reality beyond relativistic and irrational world cultures of post-modernism. We must be aware of the tendencies and evidence in favor of holding humanity in the context of a new “dark” metaphysics, which could form the backdrop for a metamodern politics with profoundly negative consequences.

The current cultural impasse cannot be resolved through the unforced force of reasonable words, which is why many believe that it will be resolved by actual force. What is certain is that only large-scale and significantly forceful actions will suffice to change our course. I believe drastic action is needed that focuses specifically on changing the basic conditions in which the human heart is shaped. Practices that demonstrate the full reality of Eros are profoundly transformative for those who would otherwise hold a simplistic and negative picture of human

nature. A totalized educational revolution is needed, starting with the schools and media and expanding outward to refashion technology and the economy itself in the interests of healthy human development (Stein, in press). *A Return to Eros* provides only some of the frameworks necessary for addressing this task of a total educational revolution in the interest of love. There can be no future in which humans are taught and socialized into the narrow confines of national and economic self-interest. The only future possible is one in which love and justice are the cornerstones of global educational systems. Not systems that teach *about* love and justice while treating children and adults inequitably, but rather educational systems that *demonstrate* love and justice in their total support for the free development of children and families, up to and including basic income guarantees and health care. This will mean that the priority for global futures is *love*, not profit and growth or sustainability. Profit, growth, and sustainability mean nothing if they land us in a world without love. Cosmo-erotic humanism argues for a planetary prioritization of love and for securing the necessary and sufficient conditions for the possibility of love. These are some of the most important implications of what I have been discussing here as a metamodern return to a metaphysics of Eros.

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