

# Unity is Complicated

## The Disparate Nature of Oneness

By

Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof

July 25, 2021

Around 32,000 years ago, some braver, friendlier wolves began hanging around human encampments, probably scavenging for food scraps. Having them around ended up being beneficial for our ancestors because their keener senses of smell and hearing reacted to potential threats and intruders faster than ours can. So, humans likely began intentionally feeding them to keep them around and, in almost no time at all, they became, as the saying goes, man's best friend.

This union between wolves and humans has changed us both. Dogs have come to look quite different than their wild counterparts. They have become smaller, adopted a variety of peculiar markings, and, more importantly, have dramatically changed their behaviors. They remain playful, almost puppy like, their entire lives, have become highly responsive to human emotions, and are willing to obey our commands: "sit," "stay," "fetch," and so forth. Unlike wolves, dogs point with their noses, alerting us to prey, danger, or the cookie jar. Unlike any other animals we know, even other primates, dogs also look at what we're pointing at, rather than merely looking at our extended finger.

In the process, dogs have taken over the heavy lifting when it comes to detecting sounds and smells, while we have compensated for their weaker eyesight, which may be why they are also the only animal that will look into our eyes, perhaps to determine the direction we are looking. Over the millennium, human faces have been growing flatter, with our noses and jaws shrinking, along with our olfactory senses, unlike other apes that still have protruding jaws and noses, more like wolves. But in the process sight has become our dominant sense, stimulating brain development, and our ability to imagine and think abstractly. In this way, living with dogs has made us smarter while ensuring their survival as a species. There are an estimated 77-million dogs in the U.S. alone, compared to only 250-thousand wolves worldwide. Together, by sharing our strengths and compensating for our weaknesses, both species have changed for the better.

This uniting of different things, wolves and humans, in this case, is called *convergence*. When things that converge become more than the sum of their parts, we call it *emergence*. An emergent property is one that didn't exist before convergence, but also cannot be found to exist within the new thing's individual components. In his book, *Life 3.0*, physicist Max Tegmark explains, "A drop of water is wet, but an ice crystal and a cloud of steam aren't, even though they are made of identical water molecules."<sup>1</sup> These differences cannot be predicted simply by looking at the number of individual H<sub>2</sub>O molecules which are not themselves wet, crystalline, or steam. "So solids, liquids and gases," Tegmark says, "are all emergent phenomenon: they are more than the sum of their parts because they have properties above and beyond the properties of their particles."<sup>2</sup>

Some physicists and philosophers believe consciousness is also an emergent property, meaning its source cannot be found in elementary particles that are a conscious species building blocks, yet

consciousness could not exist without them. The ability of the individual to have almost instant access to almost everything known by humanity as a whole is also an emergent power resulting from the convergence of our accumulated knowledge on the Internet. Now, thanks to Wikipedia, each individual with a smart device can access the sum of human understanding without having studied or memorized it.

There are many other amazing emergent powers coming our way thanks to the convergence of different technologies, like machine learning, sensors, materials science, battery storage improvements, ubiquitous gigabit connections, networks, 3D printing, robotics, AI, 5 and now 6G communication networks, and next-generation Wi-Fi. Right now, we have an internet of information, but today an internet of things is also emerging, meaning our different devices and machines are becoming connected, even as each becomes more autonomous. Just as humans have grown smarter by coevolving with wolves, our machines are becoming smarter by coevolving with us. And by coevolving I mean we are converging with our machines. Like all tools, they are extensions of our humanity, yet are providing us with superpowers that don't exist within any of us as individuals.

Imagine being diagnosed and treated without ever going to a doctor, or, as fast as an Internet search, being anywhere with anyone you wish thanks to augmented reality tech, or technology that removes carbon from the atmosphere then, because it is a hundred times stronger than steel, uses it for construction projects. Your autonomous car can deliver you safely to your favorite restaurant, manufactured out of reclaimed carbon, where you can eat a tastier, healthier steak than you've ever had in your life that was grown in a laboratory farm and didn't require the death of an animal. These and other emergent powers like them are on their way thanks to the convergence of technologies.

The unification of everything through convergence giving rise to emergent properties is how evolution happens. It is how the universe and everything in it is becoming more complex, meaning each individual thing takes on more parts by merging with other things. Everything that exists today has existed, in some form, since the beginning of the Universe 13.7 billion years ago. But back then it was a monotonous Universe comprised of only one element, hydrogen. These elements converged to form massive hydrogen clouds that became so heavy they collapsed, creating sufficient enough heat and pressure within their core to fuse two hydrogen particles together, causing a second element to emerge, helium. This process of convergence has continued for eons, leading to an increasingly complicated Universe—a Universe with more parts—and to emergent powers like life and consciousness. Today, instead of just one or two elements, there are 118 known elements on the periodic table.

But it was the convergence of rudimentary elements that formed more complex elements, including heavier elements like iron, magnesium, and silicon that converged to eventually form rocky planets like ours. These elementary compounds then converged to form the first chemicals. As different kinds of chemicals emerged, they converged to form the first simple living cells. As these cells became more complex—going from prokaryotes to eukaryotes by adding more parts,

like small organelles, including DNA containing a nucleus and mitochondria—they converged to form the first multicellular organisms—boneless, brainless globs of eukaryotic algae.

Later, upon the emergence of sexual reproduction, which allowed the convergence of genetic information to quickly occur between individual organisms, more complex animals like sponges, fungi, and coral, emerged. These were sturdier creatures than their nebulous forebears but remained without brains and other organs. During this Cambrian Explosion, however, life diversified quickly compared to all that had previously transpired. During the next 300 million years, arthropods, mollusks, plants, and dinosaurs emerged. You know the rest of the story, at least up to until now.

Today humanity, which has become the dominant species on the planet has been growing exponentially, having encroached upon almost every kind of environment on the planet, no matter how hostile, and, increasingly, is encroaching into outer space with some serious plans to colonize other planets. Despite Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson, a couple of super-rich space barons, making history just this month by becoming the first private citizens to safely rocket into outer space, these advances are not because two individuals have spent billions on research, but because, in our modern times, it has become possible for humans to put our heads together. Our knowledge is converging, just as our species is converging into one planetary species.

Historian, Yuval Harari has said, “Over the millennia, small simple cultures gradually coalesce into bigger and more complex civilizations, so that the world contains fewer and fewer mega-cultures, each of which is bigger and more complex.”<sup>3</sup> Today, we’re seeing the end of the brief Nation-state era, even as our emerging technologies bring us all closer together by helping us transcend the limitations of distance. Twelve thousand years ago there were many thousands of different human communities living on Earth. Two thousand years ago, the number of these “dwarf worlds,” as Harari calls them, had shrunk to just a few hundred. Five-hundred years ago, “90 percent of humans lived in a single mega-world: the world of Afro-Asia.”<sup>4</sup> The other ten percent lived in but four distinct societies: the Mesoamerican, the Andean, the Australian, and the Oceanic worlds. “Today,” he says, “almost all humans share the same geopolitical system ... the same economic system ... the same legal system; and the same scientific system.”<sup>5</sup> . . . From such a vantage point it becomes crystal clear that history is moving relentlessly towards unity.”<sup>6</sup> Today, as our communication technologies converge, we are converging as a unified global community, which, given it is composed of so many different cultures, languages, and histories, is also making human society more complicated.

I’ve gone to such length to discuss the importance of convergence and emergence in the process of unification, because the unification of human society is happening right before our eyes, although, like a lot of things happening right before our eyes—global warming, the decline of democracy, a deadly pandemic—many of us don’t recognize what’s happening, or, perhaps worse, don’t want to recognize it, wasting the bright eyes and minds our canine companions have afforded us. Global community means the end of the Nation-state system, which has been failing us for many years because it has become irrelevant to the global reality our world is in. Yet, so far, nothing has emerged to take its place, leaving an opportunity for despots and tyrants, if not for a tyranny of the masses, to pervert the idea of unity by erecting authoritarian systems built on groupthink.

As the long view of history shows, these systems are doomed to failure because true unity is defined by complexity. A unified society, like everything else, is comprised of diverse individuals from different backgrounds with different skills and many different beliefs and ways of doing things. But as we have periodically witnessed whenever occasional tyrannies rise, life can be difficult for us individualists and freedom fighters. Tyrants, including tyrannies of the masses, always mistake unity for monotony. This is so whether we are speaking of those democratically established idiocracies chosen by uneducated electorates, as on the far right, or those enforced by the misuse of social media to destroy dissenters and detractors, as on the far left. Instead of embracing diversity, they seek conformity. Instead of complexity, they want simplicity.

Such systems cannot last because the entire Universe is continuing its exponential advance toward greater states of complexity, consciousness, and unification. But the Universe is eternal compared to our brief time on Earth. For us, even the briefest of tyrannies can last a lifetime. So, if we don't want to be tyrannized, we must work to promote the kind of diversity that is necessary for the convergence that leads to genuine unity. And this is why the Unitarian way is especially important today: because of our commitment to individual freedom, to the kind of reason that leads to a well-educated electorate, and to tolerating and welcoming the ideas of others, even those we disagree with. Freedom, reason, tolerance: this is our mantra, and it is what is required of us today, and what is necessary for our world.

Nearly a hundred years ago, the French mystic, philosopher, Catholic priest, and accomplished evolutionary scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, spoke of the *omega point*, the moment in time when the Universe becomes conscious. Right now, as far as we know, only individuals are conscious, but then, like the individual cells in our bodies, our individual consciousnesses will converge to give birth to the emergence of a cosmic consciousness that is greater than the sum of its parts. De Chardin called it "the physical convergence of the universe upon itself."<sup>7</sup>

But the analogy of cells in a body breaks down when we consider consciousness doesn't inhabit our cells. It does not result from having trillions of cells in our bodies, each with a little bit of consciousness in them. Consciousness is an emergent property that currently cannot exist without our cells but isn't caused by them. Rather, unlike the unconscious cells in our bodies, we will become cells in the greater consciousness, at least according to de Chardin. Yet we will also be able to maintain our own individuality, including our individual thoughts and ways. "Union differentiates," de Chardin says, "the first result being that it endows a convergent Universe with the power to extend the individual fibers that compose it without being lost in the whole."<sup>8</sup>

And that's the whole secret to genuine unity. Right now, a lot of false prophets are promising to deliver peace, equality, equity, justice, and the like by destroying their ideological opponents. For them, peace, equality, equity, justice, requires everyone to think alike, to act alike, to look alike, and to have alike, which can only lead to a miserably monotonous society.

Jesus is reported to have said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits." [Matthew 7:15-15] The fruits of today's false prophets are recognized in their intolerance of anyone with whom they disagree. They claim to want unity, but they practice division and segregation, just as the Unitarian Universalist Association now incorporates segregation in their meetings, which they disguises as "identity-based caucusing," and sets aside what they call "healing rooms," where whites are not

allowed, and begins their marches by first arranging people from front to the back based upon their supposed places of privilege, with the most privileged sent to the back of the line.

But the real prophets, promote diversity within unity, like Dr. King did with his vision of people of all colors, class, and backgrounds joining hand in hand, arm in arm, in our shared march together toward genuine unity. This is the common humanity ethic that seeks to establish a unified global community that includes people from all over the world, of every religion, and skin tone, and gender, and age, and income, and ideology. They are not afraid to embrace those with whom they differ or disagree. They need not think alike to love alike, or live alike to love alike, or worship alike to love alike, or look alike to love alike. They are converging to create a stronger society.

According to Thich Nhat Hanh, “When we look into the heart of a flower, we see clouds, sunshine, minerals, time, the earth, and everything else in the cosmos in it. Without clouds, there could be no rain, and there would be no flower. Without time, the flower could not bloom.”<sup>9</sup> If all of these things can converge to express themselves in something so beautiful as a flower, can we not find a way to bloom together as a unified humanity? If even the wolves can bring themselves to befriend and live with humanity, can’t we find a way to live with one another? Is a Muslim more different from a Christian than a wolf is from a man? Can a liberal exist without a conservative any better than a rose without clouds or sunshine? Would any of us be here were it not for minerals, time, the earth, and everything else in the cosmos in it? For humanity to become truly greater than the sum of its parts, we must learn to love each other at least as much as our dogs love us, and to fearlessly embrace diversity by looking into the well of chaos and seeing within in it the heart of a flower.

<sup>1</sup> Tegmark, Max, *Life 3.0*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY, 2017, p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2015, loc. 2562

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. loc., 2607.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., loc. 2562.

<sup>7</sup> de Chardin, Teilhard, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, NY, 1964.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Hanh, Thich Nhat, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, Riverhead Books, Berkley Publishing Group, New York, NY, 1995, p. 11.