



A Sociology of Big Pictures: Network Strategy for a 21st Century Worldview

Robb Smith

Executive Summary

We live in a moment of acute and profound change, a new *Transformation Age* witness to world-transforming, historic, paradigmatic shifts all happening at the same time: a geopolitical “Great Release,” a technoeconomic Singularity, an ecological shift into the Anthropocene, a pervasive existential “Meaning Crisis”, and an epistemological shift into “Hyperreality”. New capacities of human consciousness arise with the Transformation Age, with the most advanced human cognition in history emerging and producing a new post-postmodern worldview of integrative, evolutionary neorealism, providing a credible 21st century story of wholeness and spiritual liberation. We believe humanity desperately needs what this integrative worldview can offer in the face of these co-arising seismic shifts in the human condition, which collectively represent a threatening “Metacrisis”, but also an opportunity to prefigure the first global, unity-in-diversity society in human history. Yet the very movements in which the integrative worldview’s consciousness is housed are tiny, fragmented and fringe; we need to recognize that, like all knowledge systems in history, we compete for attention in a world-historic manner. Here I argue for engaging in this attentional competition in a self-reflexive way, with strategies and social practices drawn from the lessons of the sociology of philosophy. I call for leaders from these movements to join an effort to convene an integrative worldview network based on a collaboration protocol that enables pursuit of a parsimonious but socially-collaborative “grand strategy” aimed at signal amplification in order to foster the worldview’s availability and attentional impact. As this worldview coheres into such a strategic ideational network, it will have the opportunity and responsibility to foster the Big Picture knowledge economy that can produce emancipatory knowledge and social practice for the Transformation Age.

The Rise of the Transformation Age

We have entered the Transformation Age, a term I coined in 2012 when it seemed probable to me that the combination of the smartphone (released in 2007) and 3G high-speed data networks would bring us into a post-postindustrial society characterized by radical, rapid and constant change of what previously had been relatively-stable background structures of human life—economic forms, lifestyles and habits, cultural norms, relational expressions, job roles, sexual modes, etc. It was my contention then that the Information Age was coming to an end, as the flow of information would become so fast and totalizing in the functioning of human life that it would begin to disrupt the epistemological processes that hold our cultural and social systems together (Smith, 2012). The Transformation Age would be an era of *perpetually-present transformation* and reshaping of human life.

I know now that others were thinking similarly. Critical realist sociologist Margaret Archer (2017) saw the rise of a “morphogenic society”, spending two decades coming to understand the dawning era as marked by these characteristics:

1. Social change predominates over social stability (i.e., morphogenesis (i.e., change) dominates morphostasis (i.e., stability))
2. Variety begets variety: there emerge positive feedback loops whereby social and cultural systems change each other synergistically in accelerating ways
3. Increasing variety of ideas, jobs, skills, cultural outputs etc. of human life produce a receding “competitive enclosure”, a shift from a competitive logic of scarcity to a systems logic of synergy; this emerging, convivial logic of abundance results in an explosion of “relational goods” in the commons (e.g., open source and creative commons sharing)
4. Constant change and increasing variety overcome social stability such that shared normativity and univocal reality break down, and consequently social integration falls
5. While novelty produces positive effects, it also generates new, and reinforces old, sources of alienation, inequality, suffering and what Roy Bhaskar calls “demi-realities”, a form of false consciousness where people are misled into accepting appearances as the whole truth (Bhaskar, 2002)

While Archer, myself and many others have provided descriptions of a new socially-transformative era¹, remarkably the changes we face go far deeper to paradigmatic disruptions at every level of scale and across all four of Integral Metatheory’s quadrants of knowing-being. It is a time of profound phenomenological, spiritual, techno-economic, geopolitical, cultural and social disruption, and a multi-generational transition of historic magnitude occurs in five interacting, co-arising, and mutually-interpenetrating domains of human life, which I briefly describe below.

¹ Raoul Pal’s “Exponential Age”, Klaus Schwab’s “Fourth Industrial Revolution”, Daniel Pink’s “Conceptual Age”, Bauman’s “liquid modernity”, and others name this as a dawning new age of qualitatively-novel characteristics. Some commentators see a liminal era, a “time between worlds” as a new global society of unprecedented size, complexity, and scope come into being (see Stein, 2017).

First, in the psychological-phenomenological upper-left quadrant (interior of the individual), and extending well into the cultural-semantic lower-left quadrant (the interior of the collective), we are experiencing what Mastropietro and Vervaeke (2024) call a “meaning crisis”, a pervasive existential groundlessness of the sacred value and directionality of human life. For all the fruits of modernity’s Enlightenment, Age of Reason, Industrial Revolution, Romanticism, Information Age, globalization-based material abundance, etc., the 400 year arc of modernity ended with a postmodern exhaustion of no meaningful story at all. At the dawn of the 21st century, anyone with the time and privilege to lift their vision beyond the here and now are left to wonder: what is the point of any of it? Humanity is desperately in need of a new, credible and ultimately soteriological *story of wholeness*.

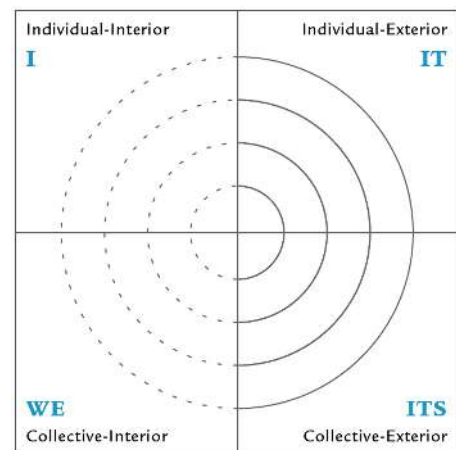


Figure 1. Integral Philosophy’s Four Quadrants

Second, we don’t just face a meaning crisis, we also face a sensemaking one: how do we orient ourselves in a world this complex, this dynamic, this topsy-turvy? Following Jean Baudrillard (1981), I have described this as an epistemological transition from the “Real”—an actual, local, sense-grounded, and bounded knowledge world—to that of the “Hyperreal”—a constructed, non-local, ideational, unbounded semi-fictional world of metaverses and social mediated “realities” (Smith, 2025).

Baudrillard describes the migration of signs—symbols, language, images, social media... all of the symbol systems that mediate our sense of what is happening outside our immediate now—as a process whereby signs evolve from showing us the truth, to disguising the truth, to finally becoming a new faux-truth. So evolved, signs then generate simulacra, environments that recycle fictions until our minds barely ever sink their tendrils into real, cold, wet soil again. When the boundaries between the categories that constitute our sensemaking collapse—what is subject and object?, what is real or constructed?, what is cause and effect?—we’re left adrift in the hyperreal (i.e., meaning “implodes”, according to Baudrillard).

My colleague Bruce Alderman explains that a powerful generator of hyperreality is what he calls “algorithmic undertow”, describing the technologies, systems, and algorithmic processes by which our personalized informational landscapes become “algorithmic tunnels... progressively narrowing pathways that trap individuals and groups in isolated realities” that destroy our meaning-making and sensemaking capacities across all four quadrants of our lived experience (i.e., psychological-existential, cultural-meaningful, behavioral-efficacious, and social-systemic) (Alderman, 2025). Alderman is right to be concerned with the mass-personalized alienation this is producing, and the positive feedback loops in our social, financial, political and psychological incentives that continue to generate them. As just one symptom, studies show partisan polarization has skyrocketed and public trust in shared institutions and facts has eroded: In the United States, for example, only 17% of

Americans in 2019 said they trust the federal government to do what is right, down from 77% in 1964 (Pew Research Center 2019).

Baudrillard himself saw how hyperreality, meaning crisis and a morphogenic age co-arise: “We live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning” (p. 79). High moderns have built society under the belief that more information creates more meaning and more communication. But, he argues, this is a myth, and one we are all guilty of believing in:

We are all complicitous in this myth. It is the alpha and omega of our modernity, without which the credibility of our social organization would collapse. Well, the fact is that it is collapsing, and for this very reason: because where we think that information produces meaning, the opposite occurs. Information devours its own content... Thus information dissolves meaning and dissolves the social, in a sort of nebulous state decimated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy. (pp. 80-81)

Total entropy. Constant morphogenesis, struggling for organizational durability.

Third, when viewing our situation at the planetary scale through the lower-right quadrant (the exterior of the collective), we see devastating ecological crisis: global warming, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, rising CO₂ concentrations, resource overexploitation, deforestation, disruption of biogeochemical cycles (i.e., phosphorous and nitrogen), and other ecological and biospheric degradations that are causing monumental destruction to other species and threaten the continuity of human life (McIntosh, 2008). Many geologists call this the Anthropocene, a new epoch in Earth’s geohistory whose term was chosen to capture the distinction that humans themselves have become a primary geological force on their home planet. Needless to say, this crisis is so deep, pervasive and existential that little can be said briefly to do it justice²; for now I’ll just note that in many ways all of the other crises are just deck chairs to this one’s Titanic.

Fourth, also emanating from the lower, collective quadrants, but with a governance systems focus (rather than ecological), we are living through a once-a-century breakdown—a “great release”³—in the geopolitical order as the United States increasingly rejects the terms of its *very own* post-World

² A U.N. climate report highlighted that atmospheric CO₂ concentrations have surged to the highest level in ~3 million years. The average global CO₂ concentration hit record highs in recent years, signaling a risk of “severe ecological and economic disruptions” if emissions are not curbed. Biologists like Elizabeth Kolbert warn that we are “currently losing species at a rate of 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than the natural background rate”, indicating that a sixth mass extinction is underway. Furthermore, the 2018 IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C warming found that to avoid the worst outcomes, global carbon emissions must “fall by about 45% by 2030 (from 2010 levels)” and reach net zero by 2050. This stark benchmark (a nearly half reduction in under a decade) illustrates the mismatch between current trajectories and needed action.

³ I called this a “great release” of our world system (Smith, 2017) after the breakdown phase of a complex adaptive system. Complex adaptive systems follow a four-phase “adaptive cycle” that includes Growth (exploration), Exploitation (harvesting), Release (breakdown), and Reorganization (reform) phases. In *The Great Release* I applied complexity lenses to Wallerstein, Braudel and Arrighi to argue that an 800-year cycle of imperial financial hegemony could be viewed as a successively-complexifying adaptive cycle, and that the latest, 80-year post-WWII cycle of US hegemony was nearing its breakdown due to the same structure of late-cycle contradictions that brought down the British Empire, and to some degree Dutch United Provinces and Genoese before it. The United States had become *irresilient* and incapable of adapting to a changing world, increasingly using hard power as stand-in for strategic flexibility so that its political-financial elites could continue to extract rents from the post-war order. Starting in 2008, and as of 2016 and especially 2024, the world system has forced the US into terminal crisis that has forced the system to search for higher resilience.

War II security, economic, normative, and alliance architecture (Smith, 2017). The United States has become increasingly irresilient in the face of irresolvable tensions between its domestic productive class, its financial-political elites, and the way the latter leveraged its global financial hegemony to enrich themselves at the cost of the former. Forced political reform from within was inevitable, and with the reactionary uprising across the Western alliance, we've now exited Pax Americana and (even the fig leaf of) international liberalism, and now enter an explicit multipolar, realist imperialism.

For our purposes here, what matters is that this disruption of what might be considered as the world's most (hard-) powerful *human* regulative system (as opposed to soft-power systems like stories of human identity or natural systems like the biosphere) carries with it profound and cascading disruptive effects to the international community, not least of which is subjecting even nations to a kind of hyperreality and morphogenesis where any kind of supranational integration or superordinate normative commitments become unavailable. For now, and perhaps for a while, the world is nearly ungovernable; with a second Trump Administration in full effect, reactionaries will try to hard-power-force the complexity of the world back to forms of an earlier simplicity, but the effort is unlikely to succeed in overpowering the deep generative mechanisms that yield morphogenesis and its attendant epistemic anarchy.

Finally, we see a technological "singularity" brought on by the rapid, decades-consistent velocity of computer processing power leading to human-level Artificial Intelligence (Kurzweil, 2006). Since the release of recent GPT models, AI as a non-human cognitive foundation for human society is no longer science fiction, it is on our doorstep. And judging by the recent pace of improvement of, and proliferation of the competitive landscape around, AI-based models amongst major companies in the United States (i.e., Google, Meta, OpenAI, Amazon) and China, it is perhaps for the first time realistic to explicitly account for how non-human intelligences will influence, obstruct, determine, or accelerate the forces and outcomes of the meaning crisis, hyperreality, climate change and geopolitical governance.

In summary, the Transformation Age arises alongside forces and crises that, taken together, represent what Nick Hedlund, Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and others have come to call a "metacrisis", a complex, interpenetrating and co-arising set of intractable global crises that transcend the boundaries, and therefore practically eviscerate the efficacy, of our existing academic, scientific and practical-political knowledge-generating processes (Bhaskar, et al. 2016). These forces, summarized in Figure 2, interact and amplify each other: the great release gives rise to a reactionary backlash that withdraws the US from a climate Paris Agreement; the meaning crisis gives rise to a sense of political and cultural dispossession amongst the lower and middle classes in industrial heartlands across America and much of Europe; the technological singularity accelerates realist geopolitical competition and capitalist logics that put climate change cooperation out of reach; hyperreality increasingly shatters the capacity for well-informed reason to win the day in the public sphere, and instead communication is reduced to a simple Schmittian war for power; and so on. At the moment, we are dramatically outmatched by the metacritical challenge posed at the onset of the Transformation Age.

Understanding the Transformation Age: An Integral Philosophy Perspective

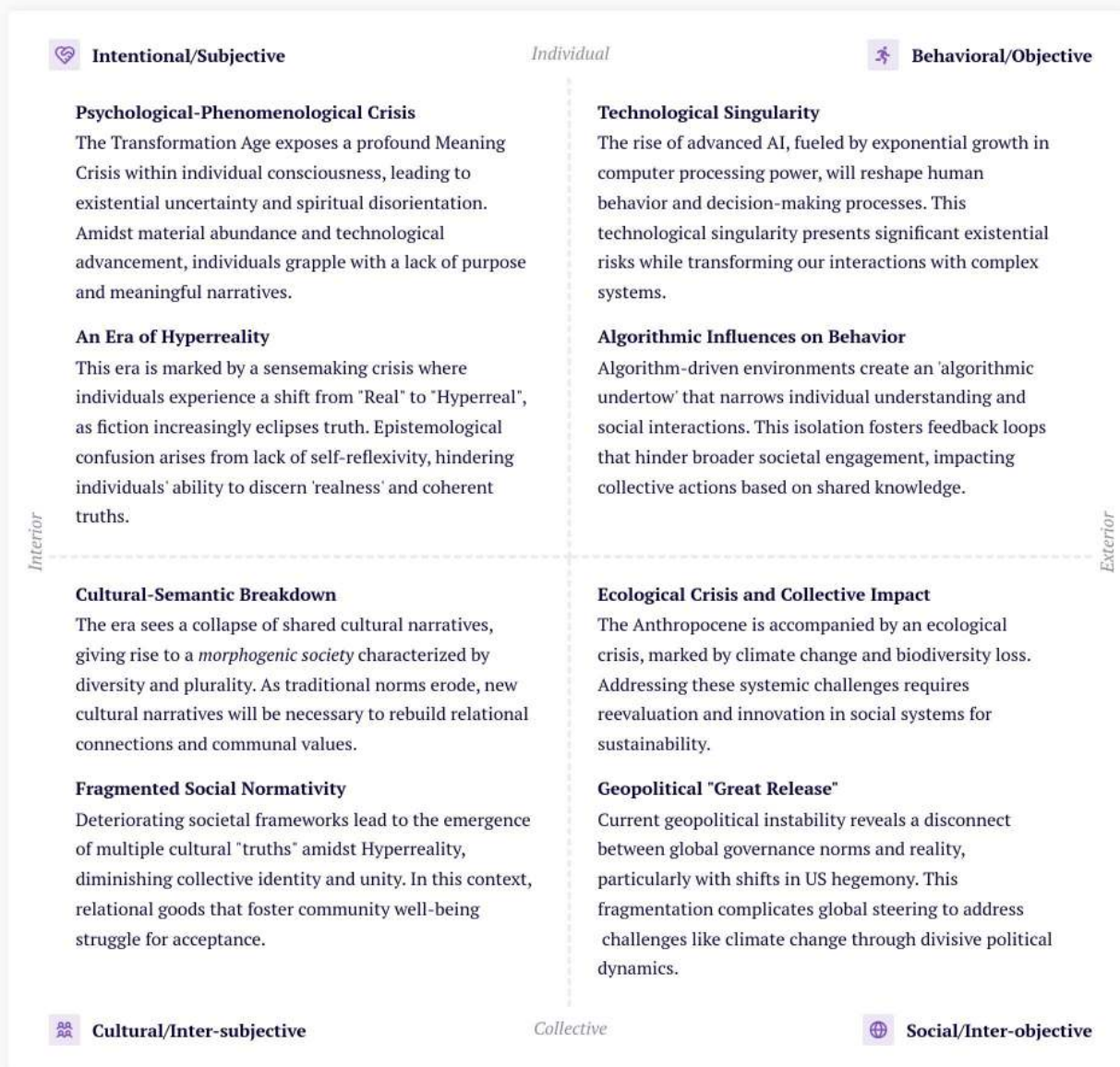


Figure 2. Dimensions of the Metacrisis

Given this backdrop, how might we initiate a mechanism to generate our deepest and most strategic reply to the metacrisis? That is the central concern of this paper: the smallest strategic step that might yield rich and deep strategic waves of unfolding metapragmatic efficacy.

From Micro-Movements to a Worldview Network

The metacrisis and the Transformation Age that mutually-enclose each other are dominant and pervasive, and represent urgent context for my call for integrative metatheory communities around the world—micro-movements—to put aside their *smaller differences* and come together around the

power and ethical imperative of their *larger shared worldview*. At IAM we believe that a new integrative worldview is very clearly in the process of being born, and based on its specific contours and capabilities, it also represents the best foundation for humanity to solve its species-wide steering problems in the 21st century.

We're not alone. Brandon Nørgaard, Nick Hedlund and Claudia Meglin (2024) argue that there are four "worldview families" on the world stage today—Traditional, Modern, Postmodern and our own, Integrative. We can readily see how cultural, political, economic and social interests tend to align in groupings around the first three, which represent major worldviews in terms of attentional and institutional support. Our worldview, which emerges as a fourth contender, remains minor given its emergent and peripheral status, exactly the condition which those authors argue we need to organize to change:

We conclude by arguing that any semblance of anything approaching an adequate integrative response to the metacrisis—which is to say, a metasystematic paradigm shift across all sectors of the sociosphere—would only come through an enhanced mutual understanding, cross-pollination, and strategic coordination among metamodern communities... they are, to be sure, precisely interdependent on each other for actualizing anything approximating an adequate response to the metacrisis that can steer us toward planetary flourishing (Nørgaard, et al. 4).

Worldviews are the most powerful forms of knowledge that exist because they organize our most fundamental assumptions about the world and, at the core, *they tell us who we are*. Paul Hiebert (2008), one of the great Christian anthropologists of the 20th century, calls a worldview "the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives" (478). Alexander Carabi argues that worldviews *take care of something* (Carabi, 2022), reminding us that for an emergent worldview to prevail it has to take care of something better than today's dominant Modern worldview, which is materialist, reductionist, competitive, atomistic and objective. At IAM, we have gotten very clear that while we apply "big pictures to big problems", our core mission is really to change minds in order to change identities so that a new worldview can grow.⁴ But why? Why are we so dedicated to this Integrative worldview—what do we believe that it takes care of?

In short: the Integrative worldview is the first in history to *take care of humanity in the fullness of who we really are*. It is the first to have the benefit of all of the world's accumulated philosophical, scientific, artistic, political and spiritual knowledge; all of our accumulated insight and wisdom; from every continent, culture, and tradition; and across the entire span of human history and pre-history; and with all of that, to create a richly-detailed, scientifically-credible, and spiritually-meaningful story and framework of who we humans really are.

It is an emancipatory worldview, presenting a powerful, comprehensive map of where we've been, a credible blueprint of where we're going, and an inspiring vision of what we can become.

⁴ Of course, the causal arrows are multidimensional and co-arising, with knowledge sharing, identity formation, being-in-relation, worldview clarification and worldview emergence all part of an evolving meshwork of individual and social-level processes of knowing-being-becoming-learning.

It is a liberating worldview that sees—and provides empirical practice to realize—that reality is innately valuable, and that we are not just separate, alienated and appetitive creatures of little significance, but rather that we are intrinsic participants and contributors to a grand unfolding of a cosmos that is becoming more complex, more conscious and more valuable through our very participation.

It is an integrative worldview that weaves the splendor of every difference into a bigger *pattern that connects*, a broader whole that is evolving into more freedom, more fullness and more creative effulgence with each passing breath.

It is a compassionate and ethical worldview that honors the irreducible dignity of life, while committing to ever-ongoing service toward individual liberation, social emancipation and natural stewardship.

It is a sophisticated worldview, providing powerful frameworks, viewpoints, methods and social practices for engaging in the discovery, interpretation and epistemological grounding of every kind of human knowledge.

And it is a critical worldview, centering a normative commitment to, and providing the tools for, serious, deep and unabashed self-reflexive critique of itself and all other systems of thought.

In summary, it is a worldview capable of meeting the perils and the promise of humanity in the 21st century.

Of course, those are just my words, how I would describe the Integrative worldview. Others would no doubt describe it differently, or emphasize different things. But however any of us might describe it, it is because of that promise, and those perils, that I am calling for the leaders of key institutions and networks in the emerging integrative “big picture” space to cohere at the level of core principles—principles that can constitute the core of a *Minimal Integrative Worldview*—and combine forces to compete in the 21st century attentional space via a social-political collaboration. In short, this effort represents an attempt to initiate a collective “Grand Strategy” in order to promulgate the Integrative worldview by the various movements arising from metasystematic (and later) consciousness (called, variously: integral, metamodern, Teal). These movements have been called a “meta-tribe” that convene in networks of a “liminal web”, populated by intellectual movements and/or institutions with names including metamodernism, Enlightenment 2.0, Integral Philosophy, Warm Data, Conscious Evolution, Meta-Sensemaking, Game B, Sensemaking Web, Intellectual Deep Web, The Stoa, Post-Rationalists, Perspectiva, Dark Renaissance, Consilience, Integral Life and dozens of others (Nørgaard, et al. 2024; Lightfoot, 2023).

To close this section, I believe these various movements *do* represent a shared worldview. Exactly what forces to combine and how to do so are set forward as a tentative proposal below. I’m aware that this will not be an easy sell, so from here on I’m going to try to do justice to the history and sociology of big pictures that underlabors on behalf of my argument for a network strategy that can amplify a

common signal in order to compete in a finite global attention space. I outline a tentative “grand strategy”, briefly consider what a coordination protocol might entail, and offer some initial replies to its foreseeable objections. As this is a White Paper and not a book, these entries will be brief, suggestive outlines, but as initial substantiations I hope they justify exploring collective social action.

A Sociology of Big Pictures

The 21st century mind might imagine that structural patterns of the long-term history of knowledge must have changed dramatically over the millennia. If so, we’d be wrong. When viewed in painstaking detail—*this* thinker in medieval Persia, contesting *that* prior thinker in ancient Greece; *this* idea in ancient India, imported and expanded by *that* thinker in ancient China; and so on—and when analyzed and laid out in lines of knowledge evolution over the course of thousands of years all over the globe, the analysis shows that it is a deeply *human* affair, and has followed the same deep structural pattern the entire time. It is noble, rich, often deeply moral, and strewn through with the brilliance of individual genius. And yet, perhaps resisting our imagination that philosophy and big ideas come springing out of the head of the brilliant like Athena from Zeus’s, it is also messy, competitive, political, historically and culturally contingent, and almost prosaic in deference to the same basic needs of material, organizational and political support that any human endeavor has.

Sociologist Randall Collins (1998) has given us this story. In his opus *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Collins gifts us with the patterns of how, *actually*, big picture ideas (i.e., philosophical systems, religious orthodoxies, scientific frameworks, etc.) come to be adopted and influential to the world knowledge canon. The painstaking detail of his research into the networks that form the backbone of the evolution of knowledge tell a story in terms that metatheorists will be very familiar with: lines of development, ecological differentiation, strategic integration, diffusion networks, emergent abstraction, and many other metatheory concepts are all central players. But if the integrative big picture communities today want to give their own worldview its best chance to be selected for in the Transformation Age, *it is a story with which we have to become fluent*. While I encourage you to read this magnificent work yourself, I’ll crystalize the key insights that form the backbone of my argument for a grand strategy for a 21st century big picture network.

Ideas arise from intense interaction in relational networks.

According to Collins, ideas arise because generational, hierarchical “chains” of idea transmission occur within a common network. The lifeblood of these idea networks are relationships built through *face-to-face interactions*⁵. These interactions create *interaction ritual chains*, social rituals of idea exchange, assimilation and symbol sacralization amongst members of an intellectual network. Idea networks are autopoietic in that they reproduce themselves at broader scales, higher emotional registers and more far-reaching levels of cultural capital through two critical functions:

⁵ Collins: “But it is striking, as we look across the whole span of known history, that the pattern of personal connection does not change in any significant degree from the most ancient times to the most recent... I would venture to predict that the importance of personal connections will not decline in the future, no matter what overlay of new communications technology is invented... [digital communication] will not substitute for the focused chains which are the core of intellectual life... [and] general exposure to the ideas of the time is not sufficient for first-rate intellectual performance; what personal context with a leading practitioner does is to focus attention on those aspects of the larger mass of ideas which constitute the analytical leading edge” (Collins pp. 72-73).

1. Networks animate the emotional energy inside of the network's members and the proprietary symbol systems they use⁶, and
2. Networks build cultural capital for the network's participants and for the broader network itself

Rituals bind members into a moral community. They also evolve and animate the symbol systems that become both the transmission vehicle for a worldview and the codes that generate resonant exchange within the network. Like any network, there is a core where participation is intensive, and a periphery where participation and notice is scant.

But this is the punchline: the best ideas do not win, nor do the personalities behind them—the best *idea networks* do. To promulgate our worldview, *big picture institutions have to center the network in our strategic logic, and attend to the personal interaction forums, symbol/language systems, and cultural capital that characterizes flourishing idea networks.*

Ideas are a competitive business.

Darwin (1859) showed how species differentiate to exploit ecological niches, decrease competition and increase reproductive success. Unsurprisingly, idea systems follow the same general patterns of holonic evolution: they differentiate in order to stand out by emphasizing difference with existing ideas, or they integrate existing ideas in order to draft on and leverage their success. Either way, idea systems have to make a claim either that *these ideas are new*, or *these ideas are important*. Collins argues that these lines of opposition are actually the most prized real estate in any ideational space because they provide thinkers with a “market opportunity” for their creative energy: “Intellectual life is driven by oppositions... intellectual fame goes to those who carve out maximally distinctive positions” (Collins, 322). Paradoxically, ideas that are too-holistically-neat solutions go on to die; important ideas that propagate the most are those that create huge and thorny new problems for the next generation to solve. *We should be prepared and comfortable with explicit competition in opposition to other idea systems, and not only be comfortable with but embrace the future problems our claims create.*

I would extend this, too, by arguing that these oppositional lines of differentiation are an opportunity space in which some intellectuals build their Atman Projects, legacy-defining contributions that stand-in for genuine transcendence in an attempt to bypass the problem of death (Wilber, 1980). As integrative metatheories arise from a worldview that provides both mapping of, and credible embodied pathway to, this transcendence, I would also argue it is among the first in history to have both the intellectual tools to have historically-situated self-reflexivity, and also the transcendental praxis to make room for and thus dissolve the drag coefficient that often arises as individual psycho-

⁶ For example, think of the multi-scale, social-holarchical enclosure of interaction ritual chains involved in: a small, theory-specific-network's symposium, enclosed within a broader sub-disciplinary-network's academic journal, enclosed within a broader-still disciplinary-network's academic conference (and all of these within increasingly broad social networks up to networks of competing, global-scale worldviews).

political ambitions divide networks against themselves⁷. This is why I'll argue that we have to *prioritize network-level norms and self-reflexivity practices that help harmonize legitimate polarities among individual, organizational, and network goals.*

Systems reflect and adapt to their sociocultural context.

Philosophies, religious sects and other idea systems do not arise in a vacuum; their development is highly sensitive to and quite reflective of their sociocultural backdrop amidst two types of eras: a conservative, *scholasticizing* mode that reveres and restores honor to past texts while relying on “great truths” of a perennial tradition; and a progressive, *innovative* mode where past traditions and great truths are discarded as obstacles in favor of creative speculation and maximal differentiation from the past. Collins notes:

There are two polar types of creativity: the creativity of fractionation as thinkers maximize their distinctiveness, and the creativity of synthesis as intellectuals make alliances among weakening positions or attempt to reduce a crippling overload as factions exceed the law of small numbers [explained below]. The grand philosophical systems are the high points of the synthesizing dynamic... Synthesizers are necessarily dedicated to a vision of an overarching truth, and display generosity of spirit toward at least wide swaths of the intellectual community. Each contributes partial views of reality, Aristotle emphasizes; so does Plotinus. (131)

Furthermore, the health of the organizational basis of intellectual life—the schools, temples, academies, universities, etc.—as well as the political and material base of support for their work, form a critical determinant guiding community behavior. Weak organizational conditions tend to drive consolidation and collaboration, as we see for 300 years after Athens falls to Rome in 86 B.C.E., which led to the collapse of all long-lasting philosophical schools. The period up to the 3rd century CE is marked by bursts of innovation, but overlaid with a constant skepticism especially characteristic of chaotic intellectual times. With the organizational base in disarray, philosophical schools retrenched to a collaborative syncretism: “Strong positions subdivide, weak positions combine... The philosophical schools in their own right were weak and lacking firm organizational bases, and they tended to huddle together for support” (116-118).

⁷ I don't see the ideas that competition is the lifeblood of attentional success and the need to not divide a network against itself as necessarily contradictory. Indeed, I think that intense competition to generate and solve problems can be a rich source of energy within the network while also increasing the overall network's cultural capital. Said differently, scholars fighting amongst themselves if no one's listening is not a winning strategy: it matters that the network qua worldview actually be competing hard in the attentional landscape, and then within that context it can generate as much (hopefully) constructive intra-network ideational competition as is warranted. If the worldview gets traction to the point where multiple worldview networks arise and start competing with each other, then that would be a good problem to have; to some degree that would be a sign that the grand strategy is working, and it might be approaching a phase where it's going to be supplanted and obviated. Again, the bigger and more valuable the worldview “real estate” becomes to compete over, the more we're winning the meta-game anyway.

While a fuller analysis and understanding of our recent intellectual socioculture is not presented here⁸, *I would argue that given the history of weak organizational support for, and fragmented idea landscapes out of which, syncretistic intellectual “grand systems” like our own tend to grow, we are well-advised to also mimic the historic strategy of collaborative consolidation and strategic realism that characterizes successful efforts.* It goes without saying that we compete with (admittedly via non-preservative sublation) rational-materialist-capitalist Modernism (among others), arguably the most dominant worldview system in human history—we can use all the firepower we can get.

Attention is finite.

Collins repeatedly emphasizes the structural impact of the *limits of an era’s contemporary attention space*, what he calls the “law of small numbers”, which only allows for 3-6 serious intellectual opponents on a global stage at any time. There is simply a finite amount of attention, as manifest in followership, intellectual interest, material support, and institutional patronage available to compete for in any era (constraints which, pre-globalization, are also bounded by geographies). This was as true for the power vacuum of imperial Japan that enabled Saicho to establish the T’ien-t’ai sect of Buddhism as one of two effective national religions in 800 C.E. as it is for today’s idea networks that seek cultural relevance or institutional and political patronage using X (Twitter) or YouTube.

Of course, the domains of attention have complexified as society has. In the past several centuries, the rise of rapid-discovery science and its associated research tooling, as well as the modern research university with its competitive and differentiated disciplinary siloes, have accelerated high-output knowledge discovery. Attention to discovery is both higher and more fragmented than ever.

Now, three more developments impact on the 21st century. First, the positive feedback loops between research, academic funding and commercial interests has led to a massive fragmentation of knowledge, an instrumentalization of discovery, a proliferation of narrow findings, and conformity of research agendas to market interests (not to mention a serious scientific replication crisis). Second, the rise of social media has radically decentralized the traditional institutional channels for knowledge legitimation, turning every human with a smartphone into a potential producer, consumer and redistributor of “knowledge”, which has made the attention space noisier and more anarchic than it has even been in history.⁹ And third, AI creates the possibility of an event horizon in the near future that seems very hard to see beyond in terms of its impact on the way humans develop and socialize knowledge.

⁸ A few points here. First, it is possible to argue that given its trapping of the university system inside of capitalist political economy, the Modern worldview has actually trapped and relegated *itself* to an environment of perpetually narrow and weak intellectual creativity, incapable of the grand systems that could see it vie to solve 21st century steering problems in any manner beyond technical rationality. Second, and perhaps related, the dominance of the Modern worldview has led many oppositions to situate themselves in terms of modernity—postmodernity, liquid modernity, polymodernity, even our own metamodernity (which I semi-resist on these grounds). Finally, the Modern worldview has engendered various modes of realist-skepticism: Cartesian and Humean skepticism; Kantian constructivism; Kuhnian science; Heideggerian hermeneutics; Wittgensteinian linguistics; postmodernism, etc. Through the lens of a sociology of big pictures, that we should see a genuine contender to the Modern worldview emerge in the 21st century that is a grand system of highly-syncretistic neo-Realism should not be a surprise.

⁹ Stein (2017) argues, following Kant and Habermas, that these conditions make the era ripe for a form of “cosmopolitan-comprehensivist” public philosophizing (p. 296).

Summary of Sociology of Philosophy Insights

Here is a brief summary of the strategic suggestions that follow from the foregoing analysis of the sociology of philosophy, ordered differently than above:

1. We should situate ourselves historically by remembering that “grand systems” like ours benefit from combining efforts to overcome the traditionally-weak organizational base and fragmented backgrounds out of which they tend to grow
2. We should center the network, not individual scholars or organizations, per se, in our strategic logic in a parsimonious but socio-politically collaborative way
3. We should invest in personal interaction forums where the emotional energy inside of the network can build and our proprietary symbol systems can be perpetually sacralized
4. We should assemble a network protocol that can build cultural capital for the network’s members and the worldview it represents
5. We should commit to consciously and unapologetically competing for attention in opposition to other worldviews, and to leveraging network surfaces to amplify that result
6. We should be comfortable with and embrace the large unsolved problems our worldview creates
7. We should prioritize network-level norms and self-reflexivity practices that help harmonize legitimate polarities among individual, organizational, and network goals

All of this amounts to a clear strategic problem that, whether we want to or not, leaders of integrative movements will have to consider. What is the value and role of attention in the 21st century? Is there any conceivable route to integrative worldview emergence, and the intentional addressing of global steering challenges via that worldview, that do not necessitate a strategy for capturing more of the attentional space? Even if leaders believe, as we do at IAM, that cognitive elites are the primary target for worldview adoption (and reasonable people can disagree on this, even our internal consensus is tentative), it still demands some coherent view of exactly how, where and why those elites will shift attention from within their current *Umwelt* and encounter the power of an integrative outlook. By definition, to lead is to accept the demand upon us that we not be resigned to that being just a “happenstantial” process. For all these reasons, I argue that *it is incumbent upon us to adopt a strategic and instrumental view of the demand to compete for attention for this worldview, and do so in a way that leverages the non-linear math of a network surface area that is far bigger if we join forces in parsimoniously-symbiotic ways.*

Towards a Grand Strategy

At the Institute of Applied Metatheory, we incubate dozens of Applied Metatheory Initiatives across a wide range of social-evolutionary acupuncture points, what we think of as areas potentially ripe for transformative effect. But at the core of every initiative is really a single strategy that flows through

everything we do: through transformative education, we try to grow minds in order to change identities, and in so doing bring people into a new worldview. We see our core mission as being missionaries of this novel, more integrated, more meaningful, and more credible worldview, one we believe can meet the life conditions of the Transformation Age on its own terms.

And yet, to speak of a “Grand Strategy”, in our world, is laughably off-putting. It smacks of arrogance, simple thinking, unilinear causation, and objective plans that are fundamentally divorced from the consciousness that would know and enact them. I ask that you extend faith that I understand the tricky territory here, and yet also ask you to forgive me for wanting to use this rhetorical device of a Grand Strategy to be clear and concrete of what I argue for: it is a seed crystal, a germination pattern, from which might grow the social conditions necessary for more effective and coordinated integrative worldview emergence. It is not likely a strategy that will survive a decade, and might not even survive a month once network leaders start working with it. But if it’s enough to get the right people in the room to have a serious conversation at the right level of shared sensemaking, then it is exactly the strategy I feel called to leverage today. As I say later in the Objections section, we have to get the right leaders together to co-design a social coordination protocol we can all serve:

We have to convene Paradigmatic+-cognition (i.e., Turquoise+) stakeholder-leaders, people who agree on the core, parsimonious principles for a Minimal Integrative Worldview, in order to gently coalesce an integratively-pluralistic cooperation protocol that can operate on the Teal intellectual objects that constitute the contents of this worldview. In particular, this protocol, its associated network governance, and the relationships that sustain it, would seek to establish an autopoietic container for social coordination in order to propagate a Teal+ worldview and its society-level steering solutions across an unbounded diversity of contexts.

That’s the starting point. It is in that spirit that I propose to invite these leaders to consider joining us to attempt to cohere a network that can animate this worldview. The broad architecture of the Grand Strategy has six components:

1. **Crystallize a Minimal Integrative Worldview.** The Teal+ movements will disagree on a lot, but there is likely also a parsimonious core of what brings them together. This might make all the difference to convivially cohering the network. Philosophical commitments that are candidates for this worldview include, but are not limited to, elements that sum to a *visionary, valuable realism*: stratified ontology (i.e., reality is emergent and layered); developmental perspectivalism (i.e, knowledge is reconstructively relative); cosmo-normativity (i.e., reality is valuable)¹⁰; emancipatory axiology (i.e., commitment to freedom); judgmental rationality (i.e., judgment is possible).
2. **Compete for attention.** Name, and fill, one of the four major worldview slots in the global attention space by mid-century of the Transformation Age (i.e., 2025-2060). Seek to attract 10 million followers and \$50 million in committed support to the network by 2030.
3. **Tell a true, more deeply meaningful story.** Coalesce a compelling, credible and comprehensive *story of wholeness*—a transcendent pathway to real meaning—around the intrinsic sacrality of

¹⁰ Here I draw from David Temple’s excellent framing in *First Principles and First Values*. (Temple is a pseudonym for Marc Gafni, Zak Stein, and Ken Wilber.)

being, and being human, through the panentheistic, nondual, complex integral realism that is emerging.

4. **Build an autopoietic network.** Beyond story and interaction rituals, relationships are the spiritual connective tissue of a network; they are what makes a network *meaningful*. Convene the emerging “Teal+” movements into a broader network that can a) develop more robust in-person interaction rituals across the network, b) develop the sacred symbols that amplify the emotional energy of network participants and missionaries, and c) create auto-generative effects of social reproduction in, across, and via the network.
5. **Embrace huge problems.** Make big promises and generate big problems to energize the solution landscape across the network, while also attracting the resources needed to support network members’ efforts.
6. **Develop proprietary tools.** Develop new tools that embody and advance the network’s knowledge.

Intentionally, I have not said exactly how these are to be done. These details will emerge as the network grows and different people and organizations can bring their unique talents to bear on the strategy. What is important is that we have a directional set of broad commitments of participation and collaboration that enable a diverse set of movements to become a more strategic worldview. What I do believe, knowledge I have gained from being involved with a lot of successful (and unsuccessful) companies through a career of social/entrepreneurship, is that any strategy we adopt has to prove itself with network leaders by solving concrete, serious and painful core problems they repeatedly face. In other words, to put it in very practical terms, the network has to do something really important for all of us that none of us seem to be able to do on our own. If the network solves a real and painful problem, it will be on the right track. It is my intention to spend a fair amount of time and energy talking with leaders to discover what this might be, while also seeking feedback on the core hypothesis that attentional competition and its potential yields (greater idea adoption, more donor support, wider social impact, etc.) is valid as the central meta-strategy. Which brings me to that very issue, because I have not yet filled in a crucial blank.

An Integrative Knowledge Economy

It is one thing to believe that an integrative worldview is novel, valuable, and has world-historic potential. It is quite another to believe that attention is the scarce resource to its adoption, or to it fulfilling its promise. Attention works to aid worldview propagation in two important ways. First, as we’ve seen, attention can act as an attractant of the cultural capital a movement needs to grow. Second, it acts by giving lay people a sense of what is possible and a credible vision for their lives. Attention is innately identity-forming, and in the case of big pictures, it does so by providing a liberating story of how deeply meaningful human life really is. So attention works circularly to draw resources to a movement, and also to disseminate the good news that animates lives with new, meaningful identities. And all of this it can do with existing social and institutional structures¹¹. Nevertheless, I have left out an important set of intermediate forces that do much of the heavy-lifting

¹¹ As just one simple example, YouTube is one such structure that provides open access dissemination to billions, as long as one can win the algorithm battle. That said, with AI and other technologies that are cause and effect of morphogenesis, what attentional channels prevail over the coming years remains to be seen.

of transmitting and executing a worldview's transformative potential, which is the *institutional core* organized by, and through which, a new worldview is propagated.

Based on our experience at IAM, we agree with Stein (2019) that transformative education is the ultimate task ahead. I believe this not only due to intellectual heritage going back to Plato, Aristotle, Confucius and others that holds human cultivation as the maypole of the good life and human society, but during a three-decade career working across government, academia, industry, and the civil sector I've also seen how almost every challenge we have reduces ultimately to human development. Stein invokes the *paideia* (παιδεία) of ancient Greece as a concrete utopian vision of the kind of holistic environment needed to cultivate virtue, intellect, and civic responsibility that the 21st century demands. As mentioned, at the Institute of Applied Metatheory almost every Applied Metatheory Initiative, social action projects ranging from integrative policing, theology, metacrisis analysis, encyclopedia development, and a dozen more, have as their core theory of change a requirement of supporting novel forms of in-context human development.

So in its early stages of social adoption, the work of big picture worldviews will live at the intersection of education and attention. But it's important to understand that there is a systemic relationship among the attention, adoption, innovation, education and institutionalization that occurs as a worldview grows and becomes more systematically-embedded (i.e., it begins to succeed by creating cultural and social structures that form identities and replicate its values and epistemological frames).

This institutionalization entails stabilizing a new "system of knowledge". In the *Evolution of Knowledge*, Jurgen Renn (2020) describes systems of knowledge as:

involving a network of epistemic operations (arguments and inferences, applications to specific problems, hypothesis building, constructions and calculations, experimental practice, etc.) [where] some parts of it may be more closely interwoven than others. Systems of knowledge typically have a tight-knit core of mental models, conceptual frameworks, papers of argumentation, practices, instruments, applications, and results that show a high systematicity and remain stable for a longer time. (83)

It is easy to imagine how the integrative worldview's system of knowledge could grow and mature in its tools, methods and application systematicity. Habermas (1976) elaborates on how this occurs: As society faces problems it cannot (yet) solve, endogenous learning processes begin to generate more complex and capable knowledge that hold the potential to make crisis-inducing problems tractable. But only when new institutional frameworks emerge that can productively channel this cognitive surplus does the social integration begin to exist to solve the steering problems from the newly emergent level of knowing-being-doing.

Nørgaard, Hedlund and Meglin (2024) outline a vision of how this system of knowledge can be fostered by the movement's ecosystem:

We envision moving toward a protopian—and eventually genuinely flourishing, eudaimonistic—society by engaging with these various thinkers and organizations and encouraging this diverse yet integrated ecosystem. Diversity is not just a feature of thriving ecosystems—it is their foundation; it ensures stability, productivity, as well as resilience and even anti-fragility. We acknowledge that there are different and even divergent sensibilities within metamodernism, but there is, nonetheless, coherence within this broad and diverse movement. As such, we are arguing for a notion of metamodernism as a broad ecology of approaches that can thrive by engaging their interrelationships—their relationality and flows of communications—which can facilitate the evolution of the metamodern ecosystem, as new evolutionary mutations and hybrid forms emerge. Imagine various forms of deep engagement between multiple metamodern approaches, roughly modelled on the 5-year critical realism-integral theory symposia series, as articulated in the introduction to the prior volume (Hedlund & Esbjörn-Hargens, 2023). Through such a ‘collaborative metapraxis of big-picture thinking’, including such practices as 1) dialogue and dialectical engagement; 2) learning to speak each other’s metatheoretical languages; 3) hermeneutic and ontological generosity; 4) epistemic reflexivity at individual and ‘team’ levels; 5) the cultivation of philia; and, 6) working together on real projects in mixed teams, new perspectives, principles, and practices can emerge (35).

Taking a slightly different angle on the ecosystem required, Renn (2020) argues that to meet the demands of the 21st century we will have to evolve a new *knowledge economy* that embodies exactly this Big Picture capability through three forms of critical knowledge:

1. **System Knowledge** that is, effectively, whole pattern, Big Picture inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge;
2. **Transformation Knowledge** that deals with how to transform the functioning of our dynamical life-sustaining systems and ourselves; and
3. **Orientation Knowledge** that is the ethical, normative and political meta-self-reflexivity that connects us to purposive ends

These three knowledges represent the *What, How* and *Why* of a 21st century knowledge economy, and are specifically the *metatheoretical, metapractical* and *metaethical* knowledge and embodied praxis that the integrative worldview works with every day. But he’s right to point out that our efforts will not be holistic or mature until they have widespread institutional and practical footing: “But even the combination of these types of knowledge will be useless as long as they are not implemented within a suitable knowledge economy, comprising research, education, public discourse, and political action (Renn, 385)”.

We have a long way to go yet. And yet, as one possible microcosm of this trajectory, at IAM we have conceptualized our social impact process as moving from an evolutionarily-fertile **Idea** > concretely-developmental **Toolkit** > socially-scalable **Program** > paradigm-housing **Institute** in any social impact context. I wouldn’t be surprised if an innovation stance like this came to characterize a broad range of experiments in transformative education and attentional strategy development that the network undertook. Indeed, as “there are no scientific revolutions, properly speaking” (Renn, 86),

change takes time. The revolution is an evolution, attended to and nurtured by a network of loving, deeply-committed people.

Exploring a Social Collaboration Protocol

Ultimately this is a proposal to build some form of minimal but strategic commons. The vision is centered on initiating the conditions that might lead to better propagation of our emergent integrative worldview through a network of idea ecosystems, which are composed of various movements and “meta” communities. My current thesis, based on historical sociology of other grand systems, is that our overarching network steering objective should be to strategically compete in the global attentional space while creating an autopoietic network that self-replicates cultural capital and facilitates social coordination.

At an abstract level, a social collaboration protocol can take many forms: a network constitution, an agreement, an association (industrial, scientific, academic, etc.), a common resource pool, a DAO, a formal protocol (technical or otherwise), etc. Ultimately, it needs to be a social container that joins members in what we value and says how we’ll act together for strategic purpose. In the old days, perhaps we’d do this with a set of handshakes¹². But a protocol is usually a specification of how things flow, how things are decided, and how things can change. The form it takes depends centrally on why it’s being created. If leaders agree that organizing to compete for attention is the first priority, then a protocol might be an experimental coordination agreement for amplifying signal in the network: perhaps it’s as simple as a joint network email list where we now all have ability to communicate with 2 million people instead of 100,000. Perhaps it grows into a joint research fund that we all fund. Perhaps it’s institutional coordination of certain efforts. A lot of this stuff has been worked on in associations, DAOs, and formal task forces, and there are network members who know the tactics better than I do. But I think the success principle is to start small, focus on member interests, solve a real problem for leaders, attend to building trust, and iterate gently and without pressure to scale until the coordination protocol is working well. There’s also ample science to draw upon. For example, Elinor Ostrom has shown that when managing a common resource pool, important variables to its success include the number of decision makers, the minimum number of contributors needed to achieve collective benefit, the time value of their needs, their similarity of interests, and the presence of strong leadership (Ostrom, 1990).

In my experience there are two big mistakes to avoid, both which tend to arise from the technical rationality of the Modern worldview: first, technology is not the hard problem, and will not solve the hard problem; use it wisely and well, but remember that networks ultimately always succeed or not

¹² I still run most of hundreds of organizational matters, partnerships, agreements and the like with a handshake—no contracts, just the wisdom-dense intelligence of honor to make things work. In 30 years, I’ve never been in engaged in a lawsuit.

on relations between people (i.e., trust and normativity)¹³. Second, do not over-engineer a system; complicated engineering never works. In the table below, I outline a set of strategic considerations that a collaborative network protocol might take into account today or over time.

¹³ This is a common error, especially given the rise of Web3 and its attempt to create so-called “trustless networks”. These networks aren’t trustless in anything other than a narrow and technical sense. Even Bitcoin and its solution to the Byzantine Generals Problem is only trustless at a single layer and tiny fraction of the full ontic scope of what makes the network function. There is still pervasive normativity throughout the full network that is Bitcoin itself, from the internet pipelines to the cold storage hardware, from the market exchanges to the sociopolitical environment that allows for the network. There is no human artifact, or network, that is divorced from the normative, semantic lower-left quadrant at multiple layers of being.

| Strategic Dimension | Nature of the Problem | Form & Function of Protocol |
|---|---|---|
| Fragmentation | Integrative worldview movements are dispersed across various institutions and intellectual networks, lacking strategic cohesion. | Acts as a <i>meta-structure</i> for interlinking various intellectual movements, enabling coherence without centralization. |
| Competition for Attention | Integrative worldviews are diluted amidst dominant worldview signals (Traditional, Modern, Postmodern), which have strong attention ecosystems & developmental tailwinds. | Provides a strategic framework for amplifying the worldview's visibility, increasing possibility for competing in the global attentional space. |
| Network Effect Dependencies | A coherent response to the metacrisis requires distributed yet structured collaboration across different movements. | Creates a distributed yet unified ecosystem, where autonomous movements remain interdependent through shared commitments. |
| Scalability & Autonomy | The coordinating mechanism must enable emergent self-organization without enforcing rigid structures. | Adapts to emergent needs through modular governance, allowing for innovation without loss of coherence. |
| Meaningful Identity Formation | Worldviews are not just intellectual frameworks; they must be lived, ritualized, and enacted in a way that provides belonging. | Establishes shared identity practices and meaning-making mechanisms that foster deep community belonging. |
| Shared Epistemic & Ethical Commitments | Need for a Minimal Integrative Worldview that clearly defines its core principles (e.g., stratified ontology, developmental perspectivalism, etc.). | Defines the <i>epistemic and ethical foundation</i> of the movement, serving as a guiding framework for network actors. |
| Attention & Media Strategy | Requires semi-coordinated storytelling, shared narratives, and media synchronization to amplify the worldview in the public domain. | Develops a norm for signal and symbol synchronization strategies, and digital outreach mechanisms to expand influence. |
| Network Infrastructure & Cultural Capital Generation | Development of interaction rituals, symbolic coherence, and structured engagement spaces to reinforce network identity and values. | Creates autopoietic environments (in-person & digital forums) that reinforce community bonds and cultural capital. |
| Governance & Self-Organization Mechanisms | Must balance decentralized autonomy with collective governance principles that prevent fragmentation. | Implements governance structures that are participatory yet structured, allowing adaptive decision-making. |
| Economic & Resource Coordination | A system for pooling knowledge and some resources (financial, attentional, expertise, etc.) that allows the network to sustain long-term efforts. | Develops funding strategies and economic support systems (e.g., resource pools, patronage models, Web3 finance). |
| Long-Term Strategic Vision | Must establish a vision for achieving worldview adoption and institutional integration. | Outlines key milestones for attracting millions of participants and substantial institutional backing. |

Table 1. Strategic Considerations of a Worldview Network Protocol

Anticipated Objections

Let's explore a few of the anticipated objections.

Big pictures run the risk of ideological hegemony and practical abuse.

I earnestly believe I'm among the more sensitive leaders in this field about this risk. In many keynote speeches going back nearly twenty years in this field, I have warned of the dangers of systems of knowledge that combine vertically-oriented maturity models with soteriological stories of wholeness. For the layperson tuning in to these frameworks, in the flow of everyday usages, too often a growth-to-goodness fallacy is imported into their usage, and when combined with a transcendental calling to telos, the result is a *judgmental missionary*. The mature leaders in this network are aware of this risk and are capable of avoiding it by explicitly accounting for the nature and method of both the public signaling as well as the shape of educational structures that the network will likely endeavor to develop. To be sure, over the coming decades the world will be engaging in a massive, mostly-unaware *assimilation of verticality* project as it seeks to counter the flattening of postmodernism, high liberalism, and technological-driven anarchism, which it will do by trying to restore realist growth hierarchies socially, politically and educationally. It is my view that new verticalities can either become oppressive, as arguably are underway with today's reactionary neo-Feudalism, or emancipatory, aided by an integrative worldview that has a richly-differentiated ontology, axiology, and praxis dedicated to emancipatory individual development and social evolution. That said, in a competitive attentional space immersed in hyperreality, there is a legitimate and important debate to be had about how loud and polemical do we become in calling out the partialities of earlier worldviews; I myself have become slightly more radicalized in my belief that this is a no-way-out-but-through situation and we might need to make a clear, ethical and unapologetic call to growth.

The metatheoretical differences are too big for cooperation. The game theory for cooperation doesn't work.

Some of our brightest minds in nodes across this network are experts in game theory, and they (rightly) ask all of humanity to play a different, elevated and non-rivalrous game in order to thrive. But how can any of us possibly ask that of others without modeling it ourselves first? My view on this is simple: the network either prefigures the world we claim big pictures can generate or there's something about our claims we don't seem to (or want to?) take seriously.

But the hurdle is real, and indeed it's among the biggest challenges we face. So here I'll speak to what I believe is the developmental maturity required of network leaders. One of the key insights that Integrative Metatheories (IM) offer is a cognitive-developmental lens to suggest what stages of maturity are needed to perform certain tasks. I'm arguing that this worldview is a matter of coordinating metasystematic ("Teal") objects and apprehensions into further being as a systematic worldview increasingly endogenous to our social and cultural fabric. The worldview we're discussing arises first at a metasystematic level of development, characterized and scaffolded by integrative frameworks that are themselves of Teal complexity.

The process of growing into metasystematic cognition can (and often does) happen without use of any of these formal frameworks, which leaves the individual at what we at IAM call "Light Teal": they make sense of the world in a complex and naturally-integrative way, but they also lack a huge spectrum of the power of full Teal systems of thought and capabilities. On the other hand, when these individuals' development into Teal is scaffolded by a full and robust IM, their development is

accompanied by the most important and full-spectrum distinctions, knowledge, tools and practice that these knowledge systems integrate. By leveraging IMs, which in many cases have taken networks of scholars 50-100 years to fully flesh out, these “Bright Teal” individuals have a far richer cognitive, emotional and spiritual landscape of sensemaking to draw upon. And yet, we find that these individuals are often *subject to* the frameworks that brought them into metasytematic cognition to begin with, often holding a subtle or hidden loyalty and identity-attachment to the system that was the ground source of an incredible blossom of their human capacities. So Bright Teal, regardless of the flavor of IM, still presents the risk of tribal loyalties. Accordingly, the leadership needed to work inside the architectonics of this worldview network need to be able to hold every IM *as object in a non-identified way*, and that usually only happens with at least paradigmatic if not cross-paradigmatic and meta-cross-paradigmatic levels of self-development (i.e., “Turquoise” to “Indigo”).

If this is accurate, this gives us a clearer view of the central work to be done, then: we have to convene Turquoise+ stakeholder-leaders, people who agree on the core principles of a Minimal Integrative Worldview, to gently coalesce an integratively-pluralistic protocol that can operate on Teal objects. In particular, this protocol, its associated network governance, and the relationships that sustain it, would seek to establish an autopoietic container for social coordination in order to propagate a Teal+ worldview and its society-level steering solutions across an unbounded diversity of contexts. There are excellent models, a wide literature and a lot of experience in the community for doing this¹⁴.

You keep saying “we” and “our”, a holism which I don’t accept. Competitive differentiation and autonomy are the better strategy.

In my mind this is the central problem of human action; which is to say, it is the core puzzle of human politics. I’m setting out a proposal to begin solving the core strategic problem of an intellectual movement in the Transformation Age—namely, that the attentional space is so fragmented, so noisy, and so fractured by hyperreality, a dawning singularity and morphogenesis, that we will never concentrate our signal strength enough to promulgate a world-historic worldview at a time when the world desperately needs one. It is true that we aren’t that important and evolution will likely do it in any case. But given that we are alive, we do have agency, and we’ve chosen the path we have, shouldn’t we get out of the car and push? In any case, I’ve said that as a practical matter, getting the philosophical-political holism right will constantly be the foundational strategic task: a level of wholeness and integration where we can agree on what we agree on, so as to amplify the worldview signal in the ways that matter most. Panarchically speaking, the goal of the highest-level, superholonic integration level is to find the binding *purpose* of the network, which emerge from the core principles of the emerging worldview. But, and this is key, a goal has to be to allow for a massively-diverse coalition of competing interests, viewpoints, agendas and kosmic addresses at the level of the member so as to only request communion-over-autonomy in very specific, strategically-channeled ways. Binding purpose, but parsimonious commitments. In simple terms, this is the warp and weft of all political projects, which is any that involve three or more people that seek to have an impact in the world. This is really the design requirement of a coordination protocol.

¹⁴ See, for example, Kalya Young and Day Davis Waterbury’s “Exploring the Remarkable Regenerative Patterns and Practices of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)” for a report on how the governance network that has managed the internet’s emergence for 50 years is organized and runs as a living system using a deliberative governance protocol.

Conclusion

No fancy ending here. Just a sense that this is ours to do. As I read the news headlines every day, the strange feeling that keeps recurring is that none of it is news to me. So much pain, so much damage from narrow worldviews in power, so much chaos. And yet, nothing really novel. For folks in our community, the world system is simply... *readable*. Even as chaotic as the metacrisis and morphogenesis are, they are still bounded and will not defy any of their deep structural coding. The only thing that will change, the only thing that represents any *truly genuine novelty*, is what humans with enough meta-reflexivity to still have total freedom of action will do next. Will the world's most mature leaders marshal themselves, our friends, and our deep well of powers, to organize and see if we can help nudge society in new directions of beauty, goodness and truth? I think we will. If it doesn't appeal to you, I understand; this is not a community of joiners. Besides, there is no simple "out there" anyway, no exact world to save. There is simply the ever-present occasion, and it dances within us even as we play the music to which it moves. If you're on this path, as I am, then this choice has made itself. And if the ground is fertile in the way we think it is, then the tree is already grown. We can already feel it, we can already see it, and we know it's already there.

It just hasn't happened yet.



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About the Author

Robb Smith is a social innovator who coined the Transformation Age and is a leader in integral philosophy and the global integrative metatheory movement. He founded the Institute of Applied Metatheory to help integrative movements experiment with applied social action. He founded Context, the world's first integrative thinking AI to help leaders think integrally naturally and easily. As founder of Integral Life, he does pro-bono coaching of entrepreneurs, executives and thought leaders to help them with leading-edge innovation and applications of Big Picture philosophies. He co-founded Eshylon Scientific to support advanced semiconductor processing, and was founder of Chrysallis, nominated for the 2015 Goldman Sachs Healthcare Startup of the Year. Prior to that, he was a co-founder and partner in Nevada Ventures, the state's first venture capital fund, where he dedicated himself to building Nevada's innovation economy. He is a former director of Alere, a three-time Inc. 500 awardee, which became the largest population health management company in the United States (NYSE: ALR). He was named Nevada's Young Entrepreneur of the Year and is former president of Entrepreneur's Organization. He started the Nevada Ventures Nanoscience Program at the University of Nevada and co-founded Nevada Nano, which is now the most advanced methane sensing detection network in the world. He is a graduate of University of Nevada, the Venture Capital Institute and has held the CMA, CFM and CBA designations. He was a fellow of Desert Research Institute, Aspen Institute and the Nevada Museum of Art. He was named to Nevada Top 20 under 40 lists in 3 different decades and in 2012 he was nominated for the TED Prize.

About the Institute of Applied Metatheory

The Institute of Applied Metatheory is an international applied philosophy network dedicated to the education and application of “big picture” philosophical systems known as integrative metatheories. In conjunction with our nonprofit IAM Foundation, we provide scholars, practitioners and organizations with the resources and support they need to advance integrative metatheory and apply it to promising evolutionary leverage points to promote human flourishing in the 21st century.