

HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE of CIIS and PCC

By Matthew David Segall and Robert McDermott

This essay in two parts (which the authors admittedly took great pleasure in writing) recounts the history and ideals of a graduate program that integrates philosophy, cosmology, and consciousness (PCC) within a private non-profit university, California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), founded in 1968 to research and teach Asian and western spiritual philosophies. The first part of the essay recounts the founding and evolution of CIIS and PCC; the second part situates PCC in its academic and broader cultural contexts while building a case for its significance. McDermott, author of the first half, was president of CIIS when the PCC program was founded by Richard Tarnas; Segall, the author of the second half, completed his doctorate in PCC in 2016 and was appointed to PCC core faculty in 2018. Both CIIS and PCC were founded and continue to be guided by spiritual ideals—particularly by the transformation of the modern materialistic mode of consciousness through the cultivation of a participatory awareness of cosmic history and of humanity’s role in the future of Earth evolution.

I. Evolution of PCC

By Robert McDermott

California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS): Founding and First Twenty-Two Years (1968-1990)

The origin and evolution of both CIIS and PCC are stories worth telling. CIIS was founded by Haridas Chaudhuri and his wife Bina in 1968 in San Francisco, nine months after the Summer of Love. As founder-president of California Institute of Asian Studies (later renamed CIIS), Chaudhuri proved to be a scholar of Indian and Western philosophy, deep spiritual teacher, charismatic lecturer, successful fund-raiser, and able administrator. As is often said, “CIIS was well founded.” The same cannot be said about the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS), the graduate program that had brought Chaudhuri to the San Francisco Bay Area almost two decades earlier. AAAS was founded and funded by Louis Gainsborough, a San Francisco importer who created the school for US-based businesspeople to better understand their Asian counterparts.¹ He recruited to its part-time faculty Frederic Spiegelberg, a professor of Sanskrit at Stanford University, and Alan Watts, a former Episcopal priest and author of influential books on Zen Buddhism. Spiegelberg wrote to Sri Aurobindo requesting that he recommend a faculty member who could teach his philosophy and Integral Yoga. Only months before Sri Aurobindo died in December 1950, he recommended Chaudhuri who had written a dissertation on Aurobindo (Chaudhuri 1951/1973) and was chair of the philosophy department of Krishnagar College, Kolkata. Chaudhuri arrived in San Francisco in 1951; his wife and daughter Rita followed the next year.

¹ Gainsborough and AAAS produced an 80-minute film, *Mahatma Gandhi: 20th Century Prophet* (1953), written by then student Edith Martin. Gainsborough showed the film to President Eisenhower and his White House staff on the evening of February 10, 1953 at the DuPont Theatre in Washington, D. C. The film is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k72BoHvdrcY>

AAAS, a tiny graduate-level school for Asian philosophy and culture, was affiliated with the University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA. Gainsborough proved to be a painful exemplar of the maxim, “No good deed goes unpunished.” By the late 1950s, the San Francisco Renaissance—in Watts’s words “a huge tide of spiritual energy...that swept out of this city...to affect America and the whole world” (Watts 1972, 284)—was well underway. But AAAS was founded just before the culture was ready for it, and from the start it existed at cross purposes with itself. Led by Watts, the entirely part-time faculty rebelled against the founder/funder’s vision of an information service about Asian culture for businesspeople. Instead, Watts and other faculty wished to pursue “the practical transformation of human consciousness, with the actual living out of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist ways of life” (ibid., 286). Gainsborough was soon expelled, and underfunded, the experiment came to an end after five tumultuous years. Spiegelberg returned to Stanford and Watts continued lecturing and publishing influential books. Both men would eventually return as Advisory Board members when the Chaudhuris founded CIAS in 1968. In the meantime, Haridas’ work continued at the Cultural Integration Fellowship (still on Fulton Street at 3rd, across from Golden Gate Park), where he taught meditation and Indian philosophy to dozens of spiritual seekers, including Michael Murphy and Dick Price (co-founders of Esalen Institute), who remained friends of Haridas and Bina. In 1960, Haridas Chaudhuri and Spiegelberg published a collection of thirty essays on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo (1960).

In the 1970’s, what was then called the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS) had fewer than fifty students studying in twenty academic programs. The school began in a large, gracious house on the corner of Dolores and 21st Streets in the Mission District of San Francisco. Rina Sircar and several staff members, including Anne Teich, who later served as assistant to President Robert McDermott and Academic Vice President Judie Wexler, lived in the school building. Rina Sircar, who had been invited to join CIAS by Dr. Chaudhuri, taught meditation and Buddhist Studies and was a faculty member in the Comparative Studies East and West program—one of the still extant programs, along with Integral Counseling Psychology, that was created by Dr. Chaudhuri. In addition to legitimate academic programs taught by competent faculty, CIAS was also at the center of the radical ethos of San Francisco of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including protest against the Vietnam War, psychedelics, the Enneagram, astrology, and meditation.

In 1975, while working at his desk on Dolores Street, Haridas Chaudhuri suffered a fatal heart attack. Michael and Dulce Murphy were downstairs on 21st Street waiting for Haridas and Bina for dinner. The fate of the Institute was in jeopardy but Bina, in her early 50s and mother of three young children, managed to hold the Institute together. In this effort she was assisted by Spiegelberg who came to the Institute one morning a week, and especially by Ralph Metzner who served as academic dean (1976-1989). Metzner, who with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (later, Ram Dass) pioneered the study of psilocybin and LSD at Harvard in the early 1960s, was an effective administrator. He also published more than the entire faculty. In 1978, Metzner submitted an accreditation application to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), but when the chair of the visiting team went to the office of Interim President Spiegelberg (who had been a professor in Germany in the 1930s), Spiegelberg told the chair and his team to leave campus because the Institute was unwilling to be evaluated by a government agency. Fortunately, in 1981, with the support of then President Theodore Vestal, Metzner

composed another application, which was approved. Just prior to the arrival of the WASC visiting team, the board changed the name of the school from “Asian Studies” to “Integral Studies” in accordance with the name of the philosophy and spiritual practice of Sri Aurobindo.

In 1983, under the leadership of President John Broomfield,² CIIS moved from Dolores Street to a former Catholic elementary school in Haight Ashbury (across the street from the one-time home of the Grateful Dead’s Jerry Garcia and friends). In 1988, WASC significantly upgraded its standards for accreditation. The WASC assessment team arrived at CIIS in January 1991, two weeks after Robert McDermott arrived after leaving his position at Baruch College, CUNY, to begin his tenure as full-time president. The WASC report failed the Institute on 8.5 of 9 standards and stated that the school was spared probation status only because of the appointment of a new president and significant new funding (\$5M from Laurance Rockefeller³). For the next thirty years, WASC was a relentless source of pressure—much of it necessary and positive—on behalf of every aspect of the Institute’s growth and improvement.

*Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness (PCC):
Founding and First Seven Years (1994-2000)*

Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness (PCC, as it is known) is the graduate program that its founder, Richard Tarnas, would have wanted to attend. It is also the program that its host university, CIIS, needed as a complement to its Asian and comparative studies founding vision. For twenty years, PCC faculty and more than fifty students and alumni attended an annual five-day retreat at Esalen Institute on the Big Sur coast, three hours south of San Francisco. Each year, on the opening night, Robert McDermott and Richard Tarnas told the history of the PCC program, or what came to be called “The PCC Myth” (needless to say, for the Jungian orientation informing PCC, the “mythical” is not contrary but complementary to the “factual,” conveying truth in its depth dimension). This often included the retelling of a story told by Michael Murphy: in 1987 when he spotted Tarnas and McDermott talking at length in front of the Esalen lodge at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, he recognized the emergence of a karmic friendship. Although there was no thought then of McDermott being president or Tarnas being a professor at CIIS, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, along with, or because of, this friendship, PCC already existed *in utero*.

Tarnas had been program director at Esalen in the late 1970s and early 1980s and was near the completion of his *Passion of the Western Mind* (Tarnas 1991), which when published was lavishly praised by Huston Smith, Joseph Campbell, Stanislav Grof, David Steindl-Rast, and other creators of what many were calling the “New Paradigm.” McDermott was chair of the Philosophy Department at Baruch College, CUNY, which had no affinity with the New Paradigm despite McDermott being editor of books by and on Sri Aurobindo (McDermott 2001) and Rudolf Steiner (McDermott 1984 and 2009). On the occasion of Michael Murphy’s observation, Tarnas and McDermott were participants in “Revisioning Philosophy,” a conference

² For John Broomfield’s account of his years as president of CIIS from 1983-89, see Broomfield 2022, 424-44.

³ For Laurence Rockefeller’s gift to CIIS, see Robert McDermott, “Karmic Autobiography,” <https://www.ciis.edu/PCC/PCC%20Documents/PCC%20PDFs/karmic%20autobio%20robert.pdf>.

funded by Laurance Rockefeller. This extraordinarily consequential conference met for its first two years, 1987 and 1988, at Esalen and the third year, 1989, at St. John's College, Cambridge University.

In 1993, again with funding from Laurance Rockefeller, McDermott appointed Tarnas to a core faculty position. For the first seven years, Tarnas served as PCC chair while offering courses on both the history of Western thought and archetypal cosmology, sometimes co-teaching with Stanislov Grof, the foremost researcher on psychedelic therapy and transpersonal psychology. McDermott and Tarnas soon appointed Brian Thomas Swimme whom they had befriended during the "Revisioning Philosophy" conferences. Swimme had been director of the Center for Science and Spirituality (later called the Center for the Story of the Universe), also funded by Laurance Rockefeller. In 1992, Swimme and Thomas Berry published *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*. Subsequently, with Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, Swimme created the Emmy award-winning film *Journey of the Universe*.⁴ In PCC, Swimme taught courses on evolutionary cosmology and with Kerry Brady cotaught a popular PCC course: *Nature and Eros*—a five-day retreat emphasizing the importance of humanity's connection with Earth and cosmic evolution.

Tarnas and Swimme were soon joined by David Ulansey, Charlene Spretnak, and Sean Kelly. Ulansey, a scholar of comparative religion (Ulansey 1991), taught myth, the evolution of consciousness, and alerted his students to the reality of ecological devastation—frequently repeating, "We don't have five years." Spretnak, a prominent feminist author (Spretnak 1991), published and taught courses on ecofeminist spirituality and Green politics. Kelly taught courses on the history of Western philosophy, Romanticism, transpersonal psychology, and ecology, and published several books (Kelly 1993, 2010, 2021 and Kelly et al 2017). Together, these five—Tarnas, Swimme, Ulansey, Spretnak, and Kelly—collaboratively created M.A. and Ph.D. programs that integrated Western philosophy and esotericism, scientific and archetypal cosmology, and evolution of consciousness—the P, C, and C of the PCC program, each with its special New Paradigm/San Francisco Bay Area inflection. Almost automatically, the center of the curriculum, recommended reading, community ethos, and dissertation titles emphasized *depth* and *transformation* historically considered.

Second Seven Years: 2000-2007

In the year 2000, McDermott retired as president and joined PCC as core faculty. McDermott's representative courses included *Krishna, Buddha, and Christ, Modern Spiritual Masters, Modern Esotericism*, and courses that he co-taught with Tarnas, Swimme, and Kelly. After Kelly succeeded Tarnas as program chair, he created and directed a special emphasis called Integral Ecologies, a set of courses that draws from and contributes to the obvious ecological relevance of the entire PCC experience. Along with Tarnas' and Grof's courses on archetypal cosmology and

⁴ With Mary Evelyn Tucker, Swimme published an accompanying book (2011). In his final few years of teaching, Swimme collaborated with Carolyn Cooke, author and chair of the CIIS fine arts program, bringing his cosmological perspective into dialogue with literature and the arts to develop a new genre they refer to as "autocosmology." In an effort to integrate the story of the storyteller into his earlier narrations of the evolutionary process, Swimme published *Cosmogogenesis: An Unveiling of The Expanding Universe* (2022).

Swimme's courses on evolutionary cosmology, Kelly's Integral Ecologies track emerged as a fourth specialization defining PCC curriculum and influence. In the fall of 1998, PCC faculty, joined by Fritjof Capra and other prominent scholars, presented a series of talks on the significance of the imminent millennial transition. In the following few years, PCC sponsored weekend tributes to two of the program's elder sages: Thomas Berry and Joanna Macy. From its start in the 1990s, PCC also held parties for faculty and students. In their apartment in the Richmond section of San Francisco, Ellen and Robert McDermott hosted upwards of thirty such parties which were attended by the faculty and usually more than sixty students and alumni.

A major source of PCC intellectual vitality and multidisciplinary breadth was provided by adjunct faculty. Each semester at least one, and often two or three, adjunct faculty were appointed to teach courses not adequately covered under the three headings—Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness—and increasingly, a fourth: Integral Ecologies. Here is a list of adjunct professors with their specializations:

Joseph Prabhu: Raimon Panikkar and Gandhi
Robert Thurman: Tibetan Buddhism
Stanslav Grof: psychedelic research and transpersonal psychology
Joanna Macy: deep ecology, systems thinking, engaged Buddhism
Andrew Harvey: Rumi, the divine feminine
William Irwin Thompson: evolution of consciousness
Joan Halifax: Buddhist practice
Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim: religion and ecology
Christopher Bache: psychedelics and transpersonal psychology
Bruce Thompson: ecological economics
Drew Dellinger: the cosmology of Martin Luther King, Jr.
Kerri Welch: modern physics and theories of time, archaeoastronomy
Eric Weiss: Sri Aurobindo, Jean Gebser, Alfred North Whitehead
Aaron Weiss: Tibetan Buddhism, hermeneutics
Sam Mickey: ecocriticism
Linda Sheehan: Earth Law

With Kelly's, and especially Ulansey's, initiatives alongside several students, work on what would become an award-winning documentary film, *Call of Life: Facing the Mass Extinction*, began at this time (released in 2010⁵). Soon after, another award-winning ecologically themed documentary film was produced by three PCC students, *The Future of Energy: Lateral Power to the People*,⁶ exemplifying the program's commitment to producing knowledge that is accessible and relevant to the wider public and the problems affecting contemporary society.

In 2006, Tarnas published his second acclaimed book, *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* (2006). At around this time, Tarnas offered a course on a multidisciplinary approach to comic genius with his friend John Cleese of Monty Python fame. Students who read the course description were heard to ask, "Is this John Cleese, John Cleese?" Joseph Subbiondo, who

⁵ See <http://calloflife.org>

⁶ See <http://www.thefutureofenergy.org>

served as CIIS president from 2000 to 2017, was devoted to the spiritual as well as the intellectual mission of the university and recognized the significant contribution of the PCC program. Similarly, Laurance Rockefeller, who continued to support CIIS financially during McDermott's tenure as president (1990-99), tended to identify CIIS with the PCC mission and faculty.

Third Seven Years: 2007-14

In the third seven-year period, McDermott succeeded Sean Kelly as program chair. The PCC vision continued to gain depth and complexity without losing its core. In 2009, Elizabeth Allison, Ph.D., UC Berkeley, brought specialized knowledge of ecology from scientific, ethical, and religious perspectives. Allison also created and has served as chair of the Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion program, which substantially overlaps with PCC curriculum and faculty. In 2010, Jacob Sherman returned to PCC, where he had earned an MA in 2005 before transferring to Cambridge University for a doctorate (Sherman 2014). Sherman taught for several years in PCC before taking a three-year temporary appointment at Cambridge. A program developed and administered by strong personalities and distinct intellectual commitments can expect some amount of disagreement—which did in fact develop intermittently during the second and third seven-year phases. Charlene Spretnak transferred to the CIIS program in Women's Spirituality and David Ulansey retired.

In the Fall of 2014, the program sponsored a tribute weekend to Stanislav Grof, including presentations by PCC faculty Kelly and Tarnas, along with Chris Bache, Fritjof Capra, Ralph Metzner, Tarnas, Paul Grof (a psychiatrist and Stan's brother), Jack Kornfield (a Buddhist teacher and author), Charles Grob (a psychiatrist and psychedelic researcher), Rick Doblin (founding director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies), William Keepin (a physicist and founding director of Gender Equity and Reconciliation International), Annie and Michael Mithoefer (MDMA psychotherapists), and Jenny Wade (a developmental psychologist). Several of the conference presentations were later included in a Festschrift titled *Psyche Unbound: Essays in Honor of Stanislav Grof* (2022), co-edited by Tarnas and Kelly.⁷ In his welcome to conference guests and attendees, McDermott stated:

If the stories in Stan's book *When the Impossible Happens* are true, and who in this room doesn't believe that they are, the world is really different from the dominant paradigm. *Really different!* The speakers at this conference are here to share their understanding of some of the ways that the world is not the way the dominant paradigm claims it is, but rather is the way Stan has described it.

Fourth Seven Years: 2014-21

In the fourth seven-year period, Sherman returned to PCC as faculty and this time also as department chair. He brought scholarly knowledge of Romanticism, history of Western philosophy and theology, and Christian spirituality. In 2015, McDermott published his major

⁷ Videos of the conference presentations, along with many other PCC events, can be found on the YouTube channel Archetypal View. <https://www.youtube.com/c/ArchetypalView/videos>

work, *Steiner and Kindred Spirits*, including chapters on philosophy, evolution of consciousness, spiritual beings, evil, education, social justice, and ecology. Also joining the faculty during this time was Matthew David Segall, Ph.D., PCC (2016), who brought philosophy of science, German Idealism, and A. N. Whitehead (Segall 2021 and 2023). Equally important, Segall, who had managed the Office of the Provost for several years prior to his appointment in PCC, created online master's and doctoral programs, just in time for the shutdown of in-person teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At present, three-quarters of PCC students live at a distance, with an increasing number in Europe and Asia. In the second half of this essay, Segall will discuss the subtle challenges as well as the promising advantages of PCC online.

Fifth Seven Years: 2021ff

The fifth seven-year phase of PCC history will be marked by its first significant change of faculty—though no change in vision and no drop in quality. After twenty-two years as a PCC faculty member, McDermott retired in June 2022. A national search for a replacement led to the appointment of Jack Bagby, Ph.D. Boston College, who has brought knowledge of Greek philosophy, phenomenology, and evolution of consciousness. Both Tarnas and Swimme, two faculty members from the first year of PCC and the two whose international reputations outside of CIIS are identified with the program, retired in June 2023. The core faculty agree that it is essential that their specialized perspectives be preserved in some form. Segall, along with his commitment to Whitehead and related philosophical perspectives, will advance Swimme's vision of cosmological evolution. A national search for a new faculty member with expertise in archetypal cosmology was announced in 2023 as this chapter was being drafted, leading to the appointment of Dr. Becca Tarnas.⁸

As PCC approaches its 30th year, it is easy to see that each faculty member has contributed to the PCC learning community their own individual perspectives and fund of knowledge. They also brought, and advanced, the sources of inspiration that had contributed to their own original thinking. Approximately thirty powerful thinkers have each influenced more than one PCC faculty member. Some have done so through faculty-student relationships. Here is a list of thinkers followed by core PCC faculty who have drawn on these sources:

Plato	Sherman, R. Tarnas, McDermott, Kelly, Segall, Bagby
Aristotle	Bagby, McDermott, R. Tarnas, Sherman
New Testament	Sherman, R. Tarnas, McDermott, Kelly, Bagby
Augustine	Sherman, R. Tarnas, McDermott, Kelly, Swimme, Bagby
Thomas Aquinas	Sherman, R. Tarnas, McDermott
Dante	Swimme, Sherman, McDermott, B. Tarnas
Goethe	Sherman, McDermott, Segall, Swimme
Hegel	Kelly, R. Tarnas, Sherman, Segall, Bagby
Coleridge	Sherman, Kelly, Segall
Schelling	Segall, Kelly, Sherman, Bagby
R. W. Emerson	Sherman, McDermott, Segall
William James	McDermott, Kelly, R. Tarnas, Segall, Bagby, Sherman

⁸ B. Tarnas' dissertation, "The Back of Beyond: The Red Books of C.G. Jung and J.R.R. Tolkien," was supervised by Dr. Elizabeth Allison. B. Tarnas is also the author of *Journey to the Imaginal Realm: A Reader's Guide to J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings* (Seattle, WA: Revelore Press, 2019).

Friedrich Nietzsche	R. Tarnas, Kelly, Sherman
Henri Bergson	Bagby, McDermott, Segall, Sherman
Alfred North Whitehead	Segall, Swimme, Bagby, R. Tarnas, Sherman
Rudolf Steiner	McDermott, R. Tarnas, Kelly, Sherman, Segall
Sri Aurobindo	McDermott, Kelly, Segall, Bagby
C. G. Jung	R. Tarnas, Kelly, McDermott, Segall, Sherman, B. Tarnas
Teilhard de Chardin	Swimme, Sherman, McDermott, Kelly, Segall
J. R. R. Tolkien	B. Tarnas, Kelly, Segall, R. Tarnas, Sherman
Owen Barfield	Sherman, McDermott, R. Tarnas, B. Tarnas, Segall
Thomas Berry	Swimme, McDermott, Allison, Kelly, Sherman
David Bohm	Swimme, Kelly, Segall
Edgar Morin	Kelly, Tarnas
Thomas Kuhn	R. Tarnas, Segall, Sherman
James Hillman	R. Tarnas, B. Tarnas, Swimme, Sherman, Segall
Robert Bellah	R. Tarnas, Swimme, Sherman, Segall
Martin Luther King, Jr.	McDermott, R. Tarnas, Sherman
Joanna Macy	Kelly, Swimme, Allison, R. Tarnas, B. Tarnas, Sherman
Stanislav Grof	R. Tarnas, B. Tarnas, Kelly, Segall, Sherman
Charles Taylor	Tarnas, Sherman, Segall
Carolyn Merchant	Allison, Swimme, Kelly, McDermott
Mary Evelyn Tucker	Swimme, McDermott, Allison, Kelly
Catherine Keller	Kelly, Swimme, R. Tarnas, Allison, Segall

II. PCC's Maturation and Significance By Matthew David Segall

At the time of PCC's founding in 1994, the United States was emerging victorious from the Cold War and appeared to be well on its way to "building a bridge to the 21st century," as then President Bill Clinton put it. Gallup's annual environmental survey recorded that in the early 1990s roughly three-quarters of adults in the US identified as environmentalists.⁹ In the final year of the decade, this same polling agency reported that 71 percent of American were satisfied with the way the country was going.¹⁰ In September, within a week of PCC's first course offerings and only a few miles south of CIIS at Stanford University's School of Law, the president of the Czech Republic Václav Havel delivered an acceptance speech after receiving the Ralston Prize for his contributions to international relations. He began by praising "a book by a Czech-American psychotherapist"—*The Holotropic Mind* by Stanislav Grof (1990)—for the compelling evidence it presents of a shared archetypal ground or "spiritual dimension that connects all cultures and in fact all humanity." Havel goes on to emphasize the importance of such a transcendental orientation for inspiring democratic values, as without such a ground, the democratic ideal is all too easily mistaken for a technocratic quick fix, "something that can be exported like cars or television sets." He continues:

⁹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/348227/one-four-americans-say-environmentalists.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1669/general-mood-country.aspx>

Planetary democracy does not yet exist, but our global civilization is already preparing a place for it: It is the very Earth we inhabit, linked with Heaven above us. Only in this setting can the mutuality and the commonality of the human race be newly created, with reverence and gratitude for that which transcends each of us, and all of us together. The authority of a world democratic order simply cannot be built on anything else but the revitalized authority of the universe. (Havel 1994)

Like Havel's hopes for a truly human civilization, PCC's founding vision of philosophical education in service to a flourishing planetary community reflected the optimism of the time. Also like Havel, the program's warnings about the inevitable trajectory of industrial growth society unmoored from any deeper spiritual sources were ahead of the curve and went largely unheeded by the broader culture. Whitehead was even more prescient, warning nearly a century ago of "the aloofness of the university from practical life" and calling upon institutions of higher learning to assume the important new function of civilizing the business world (Price 1954, 61). Unfortunately, business has turned the tables on American universities, largely remolding them to serve as perpetual training facilities for corporations. This corporate takeover of universities has had a deleterious effect on civic life. As of December 2024, the US population's satisfaction with the direction of the country is down to 19 percent; as of 2021, those identifying as environmentalists is down to 41 percent (including only 24 percent of Republicans).¹¹ As Whitehead stated, "There can be no successful democratic society till general education conveys a philosophic outlook," by which he meant the disciplined capacity to survey possibilities in search of an inspiring vision of the future. The lack of philosophic vision leads at best to decadence and boredom, and at worst to the lapse of society into riot (Whitehead 1933, 98-99).

Despite the "pluralist revolt" (Cahoone 2021) at the American Philosophical Association more than 40 years ago, many philosophy departments in the US remain narrowly analytic, training students to think under the presumption of what Putnam called "self-refuting scientism" (1995, 75).¹² These departments tend to limit the philosophical education of their students to conceptual specializations and logical techniques with little reverence for history or relevance to human life, much less any application to our increasingly precarious planetary circumstances. The apparently self-contented irrelevance of the dominant philosophical perspective was on display at the World Philosophy Congress in 1998 when an eminent panel including Willard Van Orman Quine, Peter Strawson, and Donald Davidson was asked "What have we learned from philosophy in the 20th century?" (Boxer 1998). Quine answered first: "Pass."¹³ Strawson went next by quibbling about

¹¹ According to Gallup. See historical polling data linked in footnotes 8 and 9 above.

¹² Putnam is referring to that type of scientific fundamentalism that would deny the inevitable role played by *value judgments* in determining which scientific explanations are coherent and which are outrageous (1995, 16). Further, all scientific statements presuppose extra-scientific *contextual interpretation* (ibid., 71), and the *goal-oriented activity* of rationality. Thus, for example, materialist explanations of consciousness as nothing but the playing out of electrochemical algorithms in the brain are self-refuting (ibid., 73).

¹³ It is worth noting that Quine enrolled at Harvard in the late 1920s principally to study with Whitehead, as he hoped to gain insight into the logical methods used in the composition of *Principia Mathematica*. Quine was unaware that Whitehead had moved on from a narrow focus on logical analysis to questions of cosmological and civilizational importance. "What he said," Quine reported in his autobiography, "had little evident bearing on problems that I recognized...My notes were crowded with doodles" (1985, 83).

the meaning of the word “we.” Davidson then dodged the question to discuss the merits of email and jet travel. Finally the Iranian philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr offered a more substantial response, if not to the question posed than at least to the trivialities just offered by his colleagues. He chided American philosophy departments for ignoring Eastern traditions which, while not short on logical precision, almost always engaged in such analyses as part of a “spiritual quest for truth and meaning.”

PCC has always included Asian and Indigenous perspectives as well as the depth dimensions and esoteric heterodoxies of Western philosophy and spirituality. The faculty are in agreement with the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who, while acknowledging that in our secular age “a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility,” nevertheless urged that philosophy be kept alive as a quest for moral and metaphysical sources enriched rather than contaminated by personal resonance and aesthetic modes of expression (Taylor 1989, 51, 512).¹⁴ Unlike the analytic school, PCC steeps students in “the ideas that have shaped our world view,” as the subtitle of Tarnas’ *Passion* states. What is offered is not simply a traditional history of ideas but an invitation to participate in an ongoing evolution of consciousness. The program’s participatory orientation is inspired by the likes of anthroposophist Owen Barfield, for whom consciousness is not “some so-called ‘inner’ world, divided off, by a skin or a skull, from a so-called ‘outer’ world.” That is, consciousness “is not a tiny bit of the world stuck on the rest of it.” Rather, consciousness is “the inside of the whole world.” Thus, in studying the evolution of consciousness, “we are trying to study the world itself from its inner aspect” (Barfield 1979, 18).

The implications of such an orientation are likely incomprehensible if not outright contemptible to the analytic mindset. Continental philosophy programs in the US are more likely to be sympathetic to PCC, especially those in close dialogue with religious studies. While rightly critical of dominant power structures, postmodernist approaches to philosophy without proximity to religious studies tend to be suspicious of the sort of constructive inheritance or reimagination of moral and intellectual sources that is so important to PCC. Like the Romantic and Idealist, transcendentalist, pragmatist, and process traditions from which it draws inspiration, PCC seeks to overcome narrow specialization, scientism, and cynicism while remaining rigorous, scientifically informed, open to the influx of creative imagination, and committed to pluralistic social engagement.

Inspired by Whitehead’s view of universities as “homes of adventure” (Whitehead 1928) for the cultivation of both rigor and imagination, and by Thomas Berry’s vision of education as “a continuation, at the human level, of the self-education process of Earth itself” (Berry 2015, 89), from its origins PCC has been an experiment in transformative education seeking to revitalize the ancient spirit of philosophy as a way of life in love with wisdom. The PCC curriculum aims to ground and direct philosophy’s speculative adventures in service to the practical needs not only of human beings but of the broader community of life to which our species belongs. Described as “philosophy in a time of emergency,” the curriculum aims to cultivate the conditions necessary for the reimagination of the human species as a mutually enhancing member of the Earth community. Drawing also upon world religions and new paradigm sciences, the program strives to bring forth a transdisciplinary orientation capable of understanding the historical causes of

¹⁴ Tarnas and Sherman co-taught a seminar on Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* in the Spring 2020 semester.

planetary devastation, including the underlying sources of alienation, consumerism, militarism, patriarchy, racism, and economic injustice. In addition to cultivating a critical perspective on cultural and intellectual history, PCC invites students to take seriously the continuity between the evolutionary energies of cosmogenesis and the creativity churning in the depths of their own psyches, empowering them to imagine radically new pathways forward for our civilization. Criticism of inherited sources and contemporary institutions is thus complemented by retrieval of valuable but often marginalized insights from the past as well as ameliorative constructive thought seeking more flourishing futures.

As Eli Kramer noted in his intercultural study of historical and contemporary philosophical communities, from its founding PCC has emphasized the transformative import of learning “in dialectical adherence to the beloved community” (Kramer 2021, 216). The ideal of beloved community originated in the absolute pragmatism of Josiah Royce and was later concretely applied by Martin Luther King, Jr (Jensen 2016). The program’s dialectical adherence this model of community is realized in several ways. It entails continually striving to hold the tension between the ideal of the arc of the moral universe and the reality of the world’s ongoing injustices. It also involves balancing the academic requirements of graduate level evaluation alongside hospitality toward those normally excluded from such educational contexts. Further, it invites students to feel at home in and loyal to an ideal-driven community while simultaneously remaining open to *parrhesia* (“frank criticism”), acknowledging that sometimes the adherent of philosophical community may need to break away from her community in order to remain loyal to it (Kramer 2021, 158).

As was mentioned in the first half of this essay, beginning in 1997 PCC faculty, students, and alumni gathered at the Esalen Institute on the coast of Big Sur for an annual five-day retreat. In addition to extraordinary natural beauty and hot spring tubs, Esalen provided an opportunity for students, alumni, and faculty to present research, converse over meals, and deepen commitments to the PCC mission and community. Spirited discussions often continued late into the evening and early morning hours. On cloudless nights the Big Sur sky is dark enough for conversations to be bathed in the soft glow of the Milky Way galaxy arching overhead. These retreats functioned as a kind of initiatory experience for many community members who would be welcomed into the lineage of thought linking Esalen and CIIS through faculty and alumni storytelling. Friendships and fellowships were established that often long outlasted graduation.

The last PCC Esalen retreats were held in October 2019 and, in honor of the retirements of McDermott, Swimme, and Tarnas, in March 2024. In February 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic brought academic communities to a standstill, requiring all in-person activities, including retreats, class meetings, and regular social gatherings to be canceled indefinitely. Unsurprisingly these cancellations initially had a diluting effect on the vibrant community life of the program. At the same time, thanks to the recently launched online degrees, the total number of applications and enrolled students increased substantially during the pandemic, with over 100 students at the time of writing. Several years later, due to the San Francisco Bay Area’s painfully high cost of living many students are still reluctant or unable to return to residential courses. Increasing costs will also likely prevent regular retreats at Esalen. Faculty are hopeful that the residential programs and Bay Area community will eventually be rekindled, but the benefits of an increasingly international student community are also compelling.

When PCC was founded in 1994, personal computers and Internet connectivity were just beginning to become commercially accessible. At that time, only 1 percent of the world's telecommunications data was flowing through a relatively meager infrastructure. Less than a decade into the new millennium, that number jumped to 97 percent (Hilbert and López 2011). Today, the Internet is the lifeblood of the global economy. In effect, the pandemic unwittingly functioned as a global experiment in online education, massively accelerating a shift already underway, and with profoundly mixed results. Unlike primary and secondary school students, adult learners fair better with online education, but with so much knowledge already freely available with a few keystrokes and clicks, the value of expensive university degrees, especially in non-STEM fields, has increasingly come into question. While the intrinsic value of cultivating wisdom in a cohort of one's peers under the guidance of expert faculty obviously outweighs the consumption of unorganized information of perhaps suspect provenance, there can be little doubt that the economic prognosis for many universities looks grim. While academic philosophy departments are increasingly threatened with closure, it could be argued that the Internet is supporting something of a boom in informal networks of learning, as increasing numbers of those with doctorates in philosophy unable to secure faculty positions are turning instead to ply their wares in online forums.¹⁵ This trend could be understood to be resurrecting an electronically mediated version of the itinerant lecturer in the vein of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who made his living on the American lyceum circuit as our young nation's universities were just beginning to shape knowledge into professionalized disciplines.¹⁶ On the other hand, rather than the Internet facilitating the emergence of a "global village" (McLuhan 1964) this new trend may also represent a further balkanization of knowledge, as idiosyncratic and autodidactic digital tribes proliferate with little opportunity or motivation for convergence on a shared view of the educational enterprise.

Like higher education in the humanities generally, PCC is trying to gain a foothold in this new, fast-changing digital context. It has the advantages of an already established and growing online program as well as an explicit aim to overcome the science/humanities split that would seem to limit the relevance of most contemporary philosophy curricula. Further, PCC's founding mission to cultivate the planetary consciousness necessary to meet the challenges facing our species has been enhanced by an influx of international online students, whose diverse perspectives further broaden an already pluralistic outlook. Still, challenges remain. Video conferencing helps simulate the face-to-face dialogical ethos that has been central to the residential program, but there is no replacement for the whole person learning that comes with community immersion. As Swimme would often remind students in his courses on evolutionary cosmology, while an individual hydrogen atom is already a seething energy event held together by constant communicative action among its protonic and electronic constituents, in isolation such atoms might remain unchanged for billions of years (Swimme and Berry 1992, 32). The creation of stars required a synergy which could not be accomplished without large clouds of hydrogen atoms gravitationally condensing into spiraling galaxies: "This dynamic of a power evoking

¹⁵ See, for example, the Halkyon Guild (<https://www.halkyonguild.org>), and numerous YouTube channels including The Stoa, Philosophy Tube, Philosophy Overdose, and Forum for Philosophy.

¹⁶ The American lyceum movement consisted of a series of voluntary local associations focused on adult education, at its height during the 19th century. In 1830s, there were approximately 3,000 such associations in the northeastern and midwestern United States.

beings with new modes of power happened both in the birth of the primordial atoms and in the birth of the galaxies [and stars] and is a fundamental theme throughout fifteen billion years of cosmic development” (ibid., 34). The primordial cosmic dynamic that brought forth stars and galaxies from atoms reverberates even at the human scale. Individuals follow the elemental lure drawing them into transformative learning communities, there discovering new modes of power unimaginable in their prior isolation.

In a traditional university setting, consideration of such anthropocosmic continuities is typically prevented by the disciplinary separation between the natural sciences and the humanities. Legitimate fears of anthropomorphic wishful thinking inhibit most academics from taking such analogies seriously. They assume that elemental bonding responsible for the formation of stars cannot be anything like our experience of human association. At the same time, the “mechanomorphic language” that pervades classical science is not treated as metaphorical but reified into objective fact. PCC’s curriculum seeks to unveil the inconsistency of this bifurcated mode of thought, allowing us to reimagine the scientific world view in a way that invites our conscious participation in the cosmic dynamics that are continuous with human evolution. That the Milky Way galaxy was originally composed of hydrogen atoms tells us something important, “but unless we also reflect on the fact that the Milky Way in its later modes of being is capable of thinking and feeling and creating, we are failing to confront the galaxy as it is” (ibid., 38). PCC thus seeks to recontextualize education as a reciprocal process, as something the universe is doing to us and in us as well as something that we are doing to the universe. As Dr. Chaudhuri expressed it:

The more we understand the essential structure of the universe as a whole, the more we gain insight into the structure of [humanity]. The obverse is also true. The more we understand the essential structure of [the human], the more we gain insight into the unfathomable mystery of Being. (Chaudhuri 1977, 85).

In addition to PCC’s efforts to re-enchant cosmology (which includes the new paradigm natural sciences informing Swimme’s work in evolutionary cosmology as well as the depth psychological and esoteric traditions informing Grof’s and Tarnas’s work in archetypal cosmology), the program also affirms the continued relevance of the world’s spiritual traditions. PCC heeds Chaudhuri’s call not to reject but rather to reconstruct the world religions in light of consciousness evolution and the radically pluralistic context of the present age (Chaudhuri 1966, ix-x). As Chaudhuri emphasized, while the contemporary world has no use for other-worldly supernaturalism, dogmatism, or sectarianism, it would be a tragically hubristic mistake to imagine that secular materialism has any replacement for the spiritual intuitions providing “the fountain-spring of [our] sense of higher values,” including “truth, beauty, love, social justice, economic equality, political liberty, and international peace” (ibid., 15-21). Modern attempts to uproot religion usually only succeed in producing new pseudo-religions such as nationalism, capitalism, and transhumanism. PCC thus encourages inter-religious and inter-spiritual dialogues and embodies a Jamesian sense of “Something More.” It places great emphasis upon the transformative world-restoring and soul-enriching potential of religious experience, spiritual exercise, and contemplative practice.

For the past several years, the potency of the PCC program's integral vision has sustained a vibrant online community of students across several continents. The future of the residential program, and of higher education more broadly, remains uncertain. It is undeniable that demand is growing for a new form of education to reverse the intellectual alienation resulting from the professionalization of the knowledge industry and to restore a more organic vision of philosophy's role in the formation of civic and cultural life (Kramer 2021, 100ff). Whitehead counseled our civilization to "banish the idea of a mythical, far-off end of education" (Whitehead 1929, 19). This vision is exemplified by the age diversity of PCC's students, with some enrolling in their early twenties shortly after completing undergraduate degrees, others stepping away from successful professional careers to re-kindle the youthful idealism they had been forced to put in cold storage, and still others returning to school in retirement seeking philosophical enrichment in the final phase of life.

It would be difficult to replicate the unique confluence of ideas and personalities that have shaped the PCC program. But a few lessons can be generalized. The first would be to hold fast to the ancient calling of philosophy and to the original mission of university education. *Universitas* means "whole" in Latin. PCC has been nurtured by its institutional home within CIIS, an *integral* university, which given the original meaning of the latter term, functions as a pleonasm. Recovering this original mission means resisting the influence of neoliberal models of governance, which pressure institutions of higher learning to justify their educational activities as a means to the end of growing national economies and improving employment outcomes. Philosophical education must be protected and promoted as an end-in-itself, as a mode of self-formation and communal enrichment at the guiding center of human life and civilization. At the same time, philosophy must be of pragmatic relevance to the adventure of civilization. Curricula should draw from the lessons of world history and seek application to the perils facing our species in the present. The point is not simply to instrumentalize philosophical reflection in service of contemporary cultural needs, but to consider in what ways the etiology of today's social ills may be transfigured in light of a more contemplative, integrative, and historically contextualized approach. Finally, philosophical education should strive for transdisciplinarity. In a knowledge ecology increasingly fragmented into various scientific specializations, disciplinary silos, and ideological ghettos, students of philosophy should be encouraged to play the role of intellectual interloper, trespassing across prematurely fixed boundaries to carve out pathways for more integral forms of scholarship and knowledge creation. Absent such philosophical daring, universities will struggle to contribute to deepening the relationship between human consciousness and the cosmos which birthed it.

The future of life on Earth depends at least in part upon the revitalization of humanity's educational processes. The human mind is not simply a knife to be sharpened, a wax tablet to be stamped, an aviary to be tamed, or a cabinet to be furnished with ideas, as various philosophers have imagined. Nor are we meant to be cogs in an economic machine. Instead, PCC seeks to rejuvenate a scientifically enriched but nonetheless ancient insight that the human being is a thinking, feeling, and willing *microcosm*. Each individual is a complex unity of body, mind, and spirit¹⁷—a creative personality seeking its unique *integral* expression of universal life. Life, like

¹⁷ In recent years, some CIIS administrators, faculty, and students substitute this trio for knowledge-action-love, the three terms that constitute the CIIS mission based on the *Bhagavad Gita* and Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

education, remains perpetually incomplete, growing by its inheritance of the past and its anticipation of the future, but only ever fully appreciated in the present. Whitehead reminds us that “the present contains all that there is. It is holy ground...[holding] within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity” (Whitehead 1929, 14). The depth implicit in each present moment far exceeds what the rush of normal routine allows us to perceive. The relaxed field essential to sustaining contemplative life in the present, which should be at the generative core of all education, is threatened by both shallow understandings of history and grand technocratic delusions about the future. Humanity is sorely in need of educational renewal, to which effort the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program continues to contribute in its small way by revitalizing the wisdom traditions of the past, integrating the new paradigm sciences and pluralistic humanities of the present, and reaching toward the integral consciousness of the future.

III. List of PCC Dissertation Titles (2002-2020)

2002. Eric Weiss, *The Doctrine of the Subtle Worlds: Sri Aurobindo's Cosmology, Modern Science, and the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead*

2003. Sharon Charlotte Ritchlin, *The Return of the Sage: The Meeting of Twenty-First Century Cosmology with the Way of Heaven and Earth in the I Ching*

2005. Sean Esbjorn-Hargens, *Integral Ecology: A Post-Metaphysical Approach to Environmental Phenomena*

2007. Luan Fauteck Makes Marks, *Natures of the Sacred: On Native American Sacred Lands and Places*

2008. Rodney E. O'Neal, *Seasons of Agony and Grace: An Archetypal History of New England Puritanism*

2009. Keiron Le Grice, *Foundations of an Archetypal Cosmology: A Theoretical Synthesis of Jungian Depth Psychology and the New Paradigm Sciences*

2009. John Taylor, *The Hidden Spark of Hasidism in Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue*

2010. David Nicol, *Subtle Activism: The Inner Dimension of Social Transformation*

2010. Kerri Welch, *A Fractal Topology of Time: Implications for Consciousness and Cosmology*

2011. Elizabeth Meacham E. *Emerson, Macy, and the Evolution of Participatory Epistemology*

2012. Jacob E. Van Vleet, *Technique and Freedom: Jacques Ellul's Philosophy of Technology and Dialectical Theology*

2014. Timothy Desmond, *Psyche=Singularity: A Comparison of Carl Jung's Transpersonal Psychology and Leonard Susskind's Holographic String Theory*

2014. Blair Robert Carter, *Alchemical Permaculture: Polishing the Mirror between Land and Steward*

2014. Marc Slavin, *The Role of Metaphor in Imaginal Psychology*

2014. Hiroko Shiota, *Cosmogogenesis, Shinto, Tantra: Embodying the New Universe Story*

2016. Matthew David Segall. *Cosmotheanthropic Imagination in the Post-Kantian Process Philosophy of Schelling and Whitehead*.

2016. John Tillyer, Jr. *Intellectual Intuition*.

2017. Elizabeth Ann McAnally, *Contributions to an Integral Water Ethic: Cultivating Love and Compassion for Water*

2019. Nicholas S. Mather, *Greening America's Virtues*

2020. Laura Michetti, *Divining Ecology: The Sami Shaman Drum*

2020. Max Leyf Treinen, *The Redemption of Thinking: A Study in Truth, Knowledge, and the Evolution of Consciousness with Special Reference to Goethe, Barfield, and Steiner*

2020. Travis Michael DiRuzza, *Acting a Part in the Ecstatic Love of the Divine: Participation, Energeia, and Person in Maximus the Confessor, Richard Kearney, and the Theological Turn in Continental Philosophy*

2020. Mark Handley Andrus, *Repairing the Beloved Community: The Friendship of Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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