

SUNY series in Integral Theory

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DANCING WITH SOPHIA

INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY ON THE VERGE

Edited by

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Foreword

The Global-Historical Movement of Integral Thinking

BRIAN SCHROEDER

In a world perhaps more divisive and on edge than ever before, fraught with tensions and perils that just a couple of generations ago seemed practically unimaginable, what is called for is nothing less than a radically different way of thinking interrelationships. Rather than building fences of all types to shield oneself from the perceived threat of the other, withdrawing into reactive conservatism and xenophobic nationalism, the dangers we face—whether perceived or actual—must be met head-on lest retreat and fear take over as the dominant way of being in the world.

What binds us together is the shared place that we occupy in the world. This precarious life, as Judith Butler refers to it, is rife with uncertainty, suspicion, and fear. We exist in a historically unprecedented scenario: We are points in an evershifting intersection of “lines of flight,” to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s term, of multiple flows of information, forces, images, and representations that purport to communicate truth and meaning while simultaneously blurring exactly what that is. This goes beyond the age-old problem of competing interpretations; this is something new and different. We are witnessing the actualization of Orwellian doublespeak, of so-called alternative facts competing for equal footing on the field of what is demonstrably or evidentially true—or at least actual, if we can no longer rely on that vaunted word *truth*.

Modern Japan's first original philosopher, Nishida Kitarō, developed a "logic of place." This logic signifies the relation between two terms that are always determined in relation to a third term, namely, the place (場所 *basho*) wherein the relation occurs. In a nutshell, what Nishida attempted to do was give us a concept of the universal or the common. A remarkable figure in many respects, Nishida was thoroughly familiar with Western philosophy and employed its language, yet he always thought in relation to his culturally native Buddhism. So profound and influential was his thinking that it is today simply referred to as *Nishida tetsugaku*, which gave rise to the Kyoto School, the first genuinely world comparative philosophy. The universal place that Nishida invites us to enter is the Buddhist standpoint of *emptiness*, not the standard Western concept of being. For Nishida, emptiness, or what he preferred to call absolute nothingness (絶対無 *zettai mu*), affords us a place that is not restricted by preconceived ideas of boundary, limit, or truth. Instead, absolute nothingness, in its radical silence about such ideas, opens both thinking and relationships in an everflowing dialogical space that responds to difference and otherness—which, depending on one's perspective, are either the cornerstones or the stumbling blocks of community—in such a way as to make space for the silence that listens to the other rather than the silence that closes off communication.

The philosophy of one such as Nishida serves both as a model and an inspiration for precisely the type of thinking that occurs in Michael Schwartz and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens's rich and provocative coedited volume *Dancing with Sophia: Integral Philosophy on the Verge*. The project of integral theory is an effort to realize a new place for philosophy. Rethinking interrelationships is predicated on rethinking the place and the scope of thinking *per se*. Although the initial association of integral theory is with the work of Ken Wilber, the desire for a holistic theory extends back millennia. The Buddha's conception of codependent origination, Laozi's understanding of *dao* (道), Heraclitus's dynamic conception of the unity of φύσις and λόγος, the wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Adi Shankara's *advaita vedānta*—these are but a few early moments in the history of ideas that prefigure integral theory, even if the contemporary scope of the term is much broader. The spirit of integral theory also emerged in the nineteenth century, beginning with the romantic era and in thinkers such as F.W.J. Schelling, G.W.F. Hegel, and even Friedrich Nietzsche, despite his great emphasis on the individual. In the twentieth century one can look to Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Justus Buchler, but also to Martin Heidegger and

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the already mentioned contributions of the Kyoto School, for integral tendencies and to the more recent thinking of Peter Sloterdijk, Deleuze, and Guattari. This is just to name a very few of the wide range of thinkers (and here only from the discipline of philosophy) who have helped to inform, if not shape, both the reception and place of integral theory.

To be sure, integral theory is a controversial standpoint among many academics today, as the editors of this volume, Schwartz and Esbjörn-Hargens, point out in their informative introduction. In part that controversy stems from integral theory being a genuinely comparative approach to thinking, which is, unfortunately, still all too often ignored or disregarded in the professional academic world. But despite the political orientation of some very large and influential players on the world stage, globalism is an indisputable fact and its scope extends beyond the mostly economic mask it has adopted until now, affecting societies and cultures across the planet in multivalent ways.

The essays contained in *Dancing with Sophia* gather the perspectives of a number of significant thinkers on a truly dazzling array of issues and themes. If a perceived weakness of integral theory is that it attempts to be, as Wilber writes, a theory of everything, this is also its strength. The impulse toward the metatheoretical is not a delusional desire to adopt a panoptical or divine perspective; rather, it is the inclination to reorient thinking past the narrow lenses of a predominantly egocentric stance that still tends to see the world in terms of a classical epistemological distinction between subject and object, thus perpetuating and reinforcing all the traditional valuative dualisms that emerge from such a perspective.

Integral theory is a bold and provocative endeavor. It challenges one to think past the norm, to sail beyond the horizon and risk encountering the Scylla and Charybdis of what is academically acceptable—or at least familiar—and what is possible, in ways that only are now beginning to dawn on both thinking and dwelling. If it is nothing else, integral theory is the movement beyond the purely intellectual into the lived experience. This is its "meta-" dimension properly understood. Zen master Hakuin Ekaku, in his famous *Zazen Wasan* (*Song in Praise of Zazen*), grasped the spirit of integral philosophy as reflected in the beautiful title of the present volume: "With form that is no-form, going and coming, we are never astray; with thought that is no-thought, even singing and dancing are the voice of the Dharma. How boundless and free is the sky of Samadhi! How bright

the full moon of wisdom!"¹ May the reader of this unique collection put aside all preconceptions and join this splendid dance with Sophia, moving wondrously toward the verge of . . .

—Rochester, NY

Notes

1. "Hakuin Zenji's 'Song of Zazen,'" in Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 113; translation modified slightly.

Introduction

Integral Philosophy on the Verge

MICHAEL SCHWARTZ AND SEAN ESBJÖRN-HARGENS

The title of this volume, *Dancing with Sophia*, conjures the spirit of twentieth-century Russian philosopher, poet, and mystic Vladimir Solovyov, who wrote his first book, *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* in 1874 when he was twenty-four-years old. It was published three years later in 1877. Solovyov (2000) was perhaps the first modern writer to use the phrase *integral philosophy* (p. 57), advancing a philosophically informed integral way of knowing and knowledge-formation that "must be free of any exclusiveness or one-sidedness" (p. 71) in "answer[ing] to all the requirements of the human spirit" (p. 109). Solovyov was deeply inspired by visions he had of Sophia over the course of his life.¹ We ourselves are inspired by his fearless call for rigorous and critical inclusiveness—especially germane today for any philosophy to address the complexity of our planetary moment and its globalizing processes—and perhaps even more so by his bold invocation of Sophia as the guiding light of philosophy: Wisdom to retake her rightful seat as a core regulative principle of philosophy itself.

The subtitle, "Integral Philosophy on the Verge," echoes and honors contemporary American Continental philosopher John Sallis's *The Verge of Philosophy* (Sallis, 2008) and in its articulation of philosophy as always already at the limit, on the verge, never finished, always already underway and emergent (as in the twisting free of its metaphysical inheritance)—here adapted to the situation of contemporary integral theory on the verge of