

# Evolution, Involution, and Revolution

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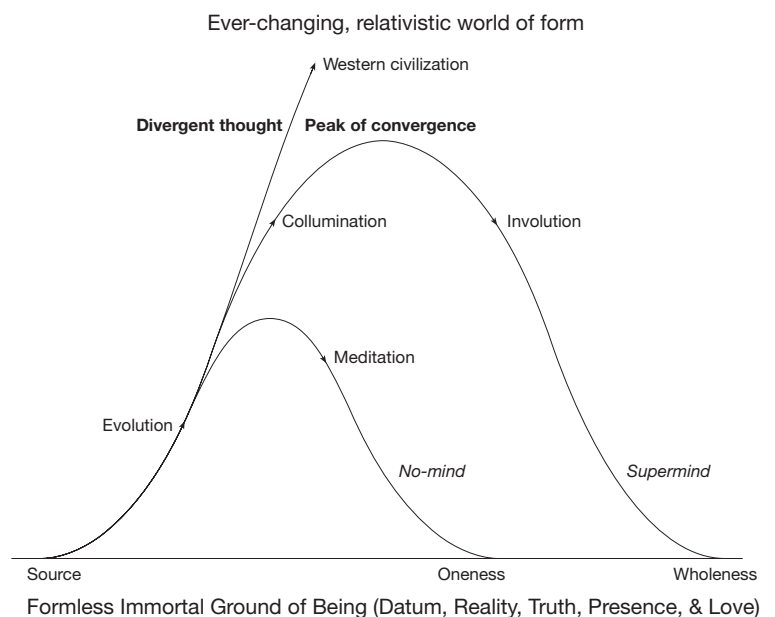
One of the great difficulties we have in talking about evolution is that there is little agreement about what the word means, never mind how we might explain evolutionary effects. For instance, in the January-March 2007 issue of the *What is Enlightenment?* magazine, now called *EnlightenNext*, the editors identified at least twelve schools of evolutionary thought ranging from the scientific and religious extremes of the Neo-Darwinists and Intelligent Designers, to the Integralists in the middle, attempting to unify science and spirit.

The reason for all this confusion lies in evolution itself, which we can see from this definition of evolution that Ken Wilber, an integralist, gave in the article: “Evolution *goes beyond* what went before, but because it must *embrace* what went before, then its very nature is to transcend and include, and thus it has an inherent directionality, a secret impulse, towards increasing depth, increasing intrinsic value, increasing consciousness.”

What this means is that the leading edge of evolution at any point of time cannot see what is to come, going beyond and including what has so far evolved. For instance, single-cell organisms reproducing asexually could not imagine sexual reproduction, which began only one billion years ago, two and a half billion years after the first self-reproducing forms of life appeared on Earth. Much the same can be said for each significant turning point in both biological and noological evolution. It is only when evolution becomes fully conscious of itself at its glorious culmination, which Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called the Omega point, that we can see the all-inclusive Big Picture in Wholeness, beyond all previous stages of evolution. It is from this all-seeing vantage point, on the summit of the mountain of all knowledge, that I am humbly writing this short essay.

So what is evolution? Well, the Latin root of the word is *evolvere* ‘to unroll’, from *ex-* ‘out of’ and *volvere* ‘to roll’. So if something is unrolling in evolutionary processes, what is this something, whatever it is, rolling out from? Well, in my experience, all evolutionary processes, including human learning, begin in Formlessness, out of which emerge forms, whether these be physical or nonphysical. We can thus call the reverse process, the return to Formlessness, involution.

This outward and inward movement is the essence of my own ontogeny, depicted in the larger bell-curve in this diagram. It is the unifying Middle Way between traditional mystical and scientific ontogenetic paths through life. On the one hand, mental evolution has been more divergent than convergent during the past several thousand years, as we can see from religious demarcations, academic specialization, and the division of labour in the workplace. So most people in Western civilization, in particular, suffer from fragmented minds, following a developmental path that is taking them further and further away from Reality with every day that passes.



The traditional antidote to people’s separation from the Truth is illustrated by the smaller bell-curve in this diagram, which we could describe as the shortcut to God if the word *god* had not

become so loaded with emotional and conceptual muddlement as to become virtually useless as a means of communication. Rather, we can say that spiritual seekers following this path can return Home to Oneness, free of all thoughts, celebrated in a ‘No-mind’ festival in central Sweden every summer. Of course, this is not a black or white situation. However, the many millions of people living in the grey zone between these two extremes are generally in a state of utter confusion, quite unable to make coherent sense of all their experiences, from the mystical to the mundane.

Part of this confusion arises from the words *evolution* and *involution* themselves, which I am using in a somewhat different way from the integralists, such as Aurobindo Ghose and Ken Wilber. For Aurobindo, “the word *evolution* carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous involution,” as he said in *The Supramental Manifestation*. This is not true in my experience, for at the Alpha/Omega point of evolution/involution, there is no time, no before and after. Alpha and Omega co-exist in the Eternal Now.

Moreover, Ken relates evolution to the great chain of being, which he also calls the nest of being: the movement “from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit”. He then says in *Eye to Eye*, “If the movement from the lower to the higher [matter to spirit] is evolution, then the reverse, the movement from the higher to the lower, is involution.” Again, this is not really true in my experience. Nevertheless, the result of this evolutionary/involutionary process is what Aurobindo calls Supermind, in which there is no paralysing division, because knowledge is not self-divided. As he said in *The Life Divine*, “The Supermind is the Vast; it starts from unity, not division, it is primarily comprehensive, differentiation is only its secondary act.”

So how can our fragmented, split minds be healed, become translucent, enabling the radiant light of Consciousness to come streaming through? Well, not by starting where we are today. We can only reach the Omega point by starting afresh at the very beginning, at the Alpha point, at the Origin of the Universe. This is essentially a revolutionary process, from the Latin *revolvere* ‘to roll backwards’, which takes place when new species or civilizations emerge, when phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny, rather than the other way round, which is normal.

In *The Ghost in the Machine*, Arthur Koestler gave an explanation of this process with the words *gerontomorphosis*, the ‘shaping or forming of the old’, and *pædomorphosis*, ‘the shaping or forming of the young’. During gerontomorphosis, evolution progresses from immediately preceding forms and structures, as in phylogeny. However, as Koestler puts it, “gerontomorphosis cannot lead to radical changes and new departures; it can only carry an already specialized evolutionary line one more step further in the same direction—as a rule into a dead end of the maze.”

During pædomorphosis, on the other hand, evolution retraces its steps to an earlier point and makes a fresh start in a quite new direction. Pædomorphosis is thus a rejuvenating, renascent process; it leads to new vitality, new energies, and new possibilities. And generally, this process does not begin on the scale of the species; it begins at the individual level.

These principles of pædomorphosis and gerontomorphosis apply equally in the noosphere. What Thomas S. Kuhn called ‘normal science’ in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is a good example of gerontomorphosis at work at any one time, and scientific revolutions sometimes display pædomorphic characteristics. For instance, Copernicus’ heliocentric theory of the solar system effectively returned to Aristarchus’ heliocentric view developed before the Ptolemaic view became conventional thinking.

This is essentially what is happening today, for Western civilization has reached the dead end of the maze. As Eckhart Tolle says in *A New Earth*, we are a species that has lost its way. A new species is emerging, which we can call *Homo divinus*, to denote that we all live in union with the Divine at every moment of our lives, with two subspecies, *Homo divinus divinus* and *Homo divinus universalis* following the small and large bell curves in the diagram on the previous page, respectively. Our health, well-being, and even survival as a biological species is thus dependent on us awakening to Total Revolution, with the vitality to go beyond our narrow specialist perspectives as generalists, who Plato called ‘philosophers’ in *The Republic*: ‘lovers of wisdom’.