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## **SYSTEMS THINKING AND UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE: THE CREATION OF A NOOSPHERE IN TODAY'S ERA OF GLOBALIZATION**

### ***ABSTRACT***

This paper summarizes Ervin Laszlo's worldview in *The Systems View of the World: A Holistic Vision for Our Time*.<sup>1</sup> Laszlo claims that current discoveries in the sciences have led to a different model of the physical world, human nature, and human culture. Instead of the models formulated during the Enlightenment, according Systems thinkers "systems interact with systems and collaboratively form suprasystems" (Laszlo E. 1996, 60). This view has led to a reexamination of: 1) each academic discipline; 2) the relationship between disciplines; 3) the nature of theory and its relation to practice; 4) the relationship between religion and the sciences; 5) of the nature of the social sciences and our ability to develop a universal, normative ethic; 6) the relation between reasoning, emotion and imagination. The evolution of the reflective self-consciousness unique to *homo sapiens* has led to the formation of cultures. Cultures must be understood as suprasystems that emerged from natural systems and are dependent upon them. Given this universal natural foundation, systems thinkers are recognizing the common patterns between nature and culture and between different cultures. The examination of systems has also shown us that the suprasystems of culture create a level of complexity and reality over and above the natural world and can even destroy themselves and their own natural foundation

From the perspective of the ISUD, this view means it is possible, natural, and necessary for academics to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other, showing how the ways they have been trained to examine "reality," or "truth," can be integrated. Further, professional academics should be able to talk to non-academics, to people in leadership roles, and to all human actors. Since it is a fact that individuals are parts of many larger wholes, the ISUD can nurture the process of the development of reflective self-consciousness in the formation of an international culture, an emerging suprasystem.

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<sup>1</sup> Laszlo, E. 1996. *The Systems View of the World: A Holistic Vision for Our Time*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Laszlo calls this sphere of spiritual interaction, with its physical foundation, a noosphere, his word for a “meeting of the minds.” Given our collective destruction of natural systems, it is imperative that human beings develop some version of a Systems view of reality. ISUD should work to foster this development, even though the professional training of individuals will call the process by other names, based on the labels of the past.

**Keywords:** Systems thinking; noosphere; holistic; reflective self-consciousness; subjectivity; normative values; evolution; humanism; macrodetermination; religion; spiritual.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with a model of reality called “Systems Thinking” as described by Ervin Laszlo in his book, *The Systems View of the World*.<sup>2</sup> Laszlo claims that recent developments in many of the sciences and social sciences have led to the development of a new paradigm for our understanding of nature, human nature, and human culture. Laszlo presents a vision of the kind of meeting of the minds, or creation of a “noosphere” that follows from this new view. Systems thinking opens new avenues for dialogue between ways of thinking that have been cut off from each other for centuries, particularly the split between religious dialogue, philosophy, the sciences and the social sciences. Laszlo claims that these disciplines are simply parts of a whole, the system of human culture, which is itself a system within the broader system of the natural world and the universe from which our earth, with its various living and non-living systems, formed. Our culture has developed in a way that expects academics to focus on small aspects of reality and to use our brains in specific and limited ways to gain “knowledge” a small part within the whole. But the nature of these entities is fundamentally related to the connections between them. Studying them separately gives us a distorted view of reality. Using the different intellectual powers in our brains in this way—training some capacities to a high level while ignoring the other ways our brains take in and learn about reality—is not natural; it distorts the goal we all seek: truth.

The emerging model of reality coming out of many of the sciences requires intellectuals to reexamine their views of human nature and human culture. Further, the new model leads inevitably to a model for ethics, the well-lived life. Laszlo’s view is a good starting point for opening up intellectual dialogue between professional philosophers and academics from many different disciplines as well as with non-academics who focus their intellectual powers on practical and particular choices rather than theoretical models. In the context of the International Society for Universal Dialogue, the Systems view provides an argu-

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

ment for encouraging the organization to invite papers from people of all academic disciplines and all walks of life. Interdisciplinary dialogue is not only possible; it will lead to greater insight, a better grasp of the truth, than the models Western culture has been based on since the Scientific Revolution and the Western Enlightenment.

### **LASZLO'S DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE OF REALITY AND THE KIND OF THINKING NECESSARY TO GRASP IT**

Laszlo begins with a definition of worldview: "Worldviews are constellations of concepts, perceptions, values, and practices that are shared by a community and direct the activities of its members." (Laszlo, 1996, 13) Further, he claims,

"the avant-garde branches of the contemporary sciences are veritable fountainheads for the creation of a non-atomistic and non-mechanistic vision that can fill the need for practical guidance in our time. The new systems view can provide the clues, the metaphors, the orientations, and even the detailed models for solving critical problems on this precious but increasingly crowded and exploited planet." (Laszlo, 1996, 13)

A complete worldview goes beyond the sciences to provide a model for the good life,

"If a worldview is coherent and embracing, it can also provide a pathway for carrying people through the succeeding epochs of their lives, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood and into old age . . . We cannot expect to satisfy all the requirements attaching to a worldview in reference to science alone, without also drawing on the insights of religion and the values of humanism." (Laszlo, 1996, 13)

Laszlo argues that the model of reality coming from the Systems sciences is leading to a reexamination and reaffirmation of religious and humanistic traditions.

Laszlo is very critical of the Enlightenment worldview, its view of nature, its method for how to gain knowledge of nature, and the way that method was applied to the study of human nature.

"Following the rise of modern science, investigators tended to dissect general questions concerning human nature into specific problems to be handled by specialized research. The classical scientific method led to a vast number of highly accomplished theories concerning man's behavior, dispositions, and even his subconscious. But it also led to the fragmentation of our understanding of human beings. In the midst of all the complex special theories, we have gained little real insight into human nature itself." (Laszlo, 1996, 60)

Systems thinking rejects specialization and focuses on studying the relationships between all aspects of reality. "Opposed to atomism and behaviorism, the systems view links the human being again with the world (s)he lives in, for he or she is seen as emerging in that world and reflecting its general characteristics." (Laszlo, 1996, 60) This wholistic approach leads back to a reexamination of the worldview of ancient scientists, "The philosopher-scientists of antiquity viewed the human phenomenon within a cosmic context and held that to understand humans one must understand their world." (Laszlo, 1996, 60) Systems thinking also leads back to a reexamination of ancient mythological traditions, "In early cultures rational, emotive, imaginative, and mystical elements were interwoven in syncretic unity. Myth is part science, part art, part religion." (Laszlo, 1996, 76) Laszlo describes the split between the power of reasoning in the sciences and the powers of imagination and emotion in mythology and religion,

"The great split that led to the medieval distinction between moral and natural sciences, and later to the malaise of the 'two cultures,' was foreshadowed in the rivalry of Greek philosophers and dramatists. The global unity of previous cultures was gone, and never entirely recovered." (Laszlo, 1996, 76)

Laszlo claims that Systems thinking requires a reexamination of all the ways of thinking about the world and using the powers of the human brain that have been handed down to us from ancient times, taking the cultural legacy we have been given and adapting it to form a culture that corresponds to human nature as it should be understood on the Systems view of reality.

### **HUMAN NATURE: FROM BIOLOGICAL NATURE TO CONSCIOUSNESS**

Laszlo uses the language of systems thinking to describe human nature. First, he rejects the paradigm of the past, "the human being is not a *sui generis* phenomenon that can be studied without regard to other things" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Laszlo begins with the basics: a human being is, "a natural entity, and an inhabitant of several interrelated worlds. By origin (s)he is a biological organism. By work and play (s)he is a social role carrier. And by conscious personality (s)he is a Janus-faced link integrating and coordinating the biological and the social worlds" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Certainly Enlightenment thinkers would agree that human beings are both natural and cultural creatures, but the Systems view presents a new model for, and way of describing, what it means to be both. First, human beings are very complex systems, along with everything else, "The human individual is a part of a majestic cathedral of great complexity of detail, yet of sweeping simplicity and order in overall design" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Second, Systems thinking has a very different model for how nature and culture fit together, "All parts express the character of the whole, yet all parts are not the same. This is the systems concept of nature, and it is a precondition of coming to know ourselves" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Third, the development of the world as

we know it on earth is the result of a long evolutionary process that follows certain patterns. Nature is self-constructive: developing from less complex wholes to more complex wholes, from subsystems to natural wholes, to suprasystems, such as human culture. On this view,

“The human being is one module in the multilevel structure that arose on earth as a result of nature’s penchant for building up in one place what it takes down in others. On multiple levels, each with its own variant of the general systems-characteristics which reflect the nature of the self-constructive segment of the world, systems interact with systems and collaboratively form suprasystems.” (Laszlo, 1996, 60)

Laszlo calls this interaction between systems a “holarchy” and the relation of each individual part of the whole its “interface” with the system. Human beings, then, are “in the final analysis, a coordinating interface system in the multilevel holarchy of nature.” (Laszlo, 1996, 60)

On the Systems view, consciousness has emerged because nature operates by continually moving and changing toward higher and higher levels of complexity. This process led from non-living to living beings and from living species with fewer capacities to the emergence of consciousness, then to higher and higher levels of consciousness. As the systems become more complex, the behavior of the system as a whole becomes very different from the behavior of each part or smaller parts. Animals differ in their levels of complexity and consciousness, “The difference between a swarm of bees and a dog is one of degree, not of kind. The dog is a more integrated system than a swarm of bees, therefore it is more convenient in more respects to speak of the dog acting than his body cells doing so.” (Laszlo, 1996, 68)

Human consciousness is even more complex and creates a system even more removed from the sum of its parts: “Think how awkward it would be to describe a concert goer’s reaction to Beethoven as the reaction of the cells in his nervous system, not to mention of the subcellular tissues and bodies constituting his nerve cells.” (Laszlo, 1996, 68)

Further, human beings interact in groups and establish institutions, which also become wholes, “it is more convenient to speak of a student body being riotous or bright or lazy than each individual student and of a nation being upset rather than each of its citizens.” (Laszlo, 1996, 68) A study body can be “bright,” for example, without every individual being bright.

#### **HUMAN NATURE: FROM CONSCIOUSNESS TO REFLECTIVE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE**

All natural wholes possess what Laszlo calls “subjectivity [...] the ability of a system to register internal and external forces affecting its existence in the form of sensations, however primitive they may be [...] subjectivity is universal in

nature's realms of organized complexity". (Laszlo, 1996, 69) However, human beings are the creatures that possess "reflective consciousness, the ability of a system to be *aware* of its subjectivity". (Laszlo, 1996, 69) This level of awareness requires a complex nervous system, "There are good reasons to correlate self-awareness with certain varieties of highly integrated nervous functions, performed only by the most evolved nervous systems." (Laszlo, 1996, 69) Given the existence of a complex nervous system, the physical foundation for reflective consciousness, there are two ways to determine if this capacity is being used: (whether an organism) "has developed a language and other symbolic modes of expression and communication, and whether it can transcend the limits of the here-and-now by making plans not directly triggered by actual stimuli." (Laszlo, 1996, 70) For Laszlo, evidence shows that, "Man alone passes this test." (Laszlo, 1996, 70) Science has determined that "In human beings, the cerebral cortex is the part of the brain that engages in the activity of monitoring the performance of other systems and setting it right when needed". (Laszlo, 1996, 71)

Because of the evolution of the cerebral cortex, our ancestors, "exploded the limits of genetically programmed behavior" because "They learned to learn from experience. By reflecting on the events of a hunt, for example, they could abstract its relevant elements and compare them with other occasions. They could select the most successful pattern of behavior and adopt it." (Laszlo, 1996, 72) As societies became more and more complex, "the brunt of the responsibility for survival rested on abstract mental processes, that is, on intelligence." (Laszlo, 1996, 72)

One major factor in the growth of complexity among human beings has been the development of language,

"Human language, in using denotative symbols rather than expressive signs, became an effective instrument for communicating meaning. It enabled our ancestors not only to survive, but to dominate their world. Existence became social existence, within the context of a common set of meanings, communicated by means of a common language. Culture was born, and elaborate forms of social organization created. We became a sociocultural animal." (Laszlo, 1996, 73)

Human reflective self-consciousness emerged from nature, but is also unique. It functions as a system in an entirely different way than less complex natural systems. Further, human culture evolved from the original uniting of small groups of human beings in order to survive, but has developed into an entirely different kind of holistic system,

"Culture is more than a tool of human survival—it is a qualitatively higher phenomenon. Thinking rationally and feeling with clarity and intensity, coupled perhaps with faith and a conscious morality, is qualitatively different

from behaviors to assure one's survival and the continuity of the species. Culture and survival functions must not be confused." (Laszlo, 1996, 73)

### **HUMAN NATURE: FROM CULTURE TO REFLECTION ON THE CULTURES WE HAVE CREATED**

Because culture is a unique whole, disconnected from the need to survive, the cultures human beings have created include an element of choice and can be changed to follow the ideas generated from the cerebral cortex. We can look at patterns from the past, anticipate the future, and plan ahead. We now act in a way that promotes what we think of as the best possible future for future generations,

"Our evolutionary history determined that we become a cultural creature, but did not determine what *kind* of culture we would have. Hence our problem today is not whether to have a culture; it is what kind of a culture to have. And this requires some serious thought." (Laszlo, 1996, 75)

Unlike anytime in the past, as far as we know, "The kind of culture we inherited from our fathers and grandfathers is beginning to challenge our ability to survive on this planet. If we do nothing more than blindly accept it [...] we may not have the grandchildren to hand it down to." (Laszlo, 1996, 75)

Given the situation we are in, we choose to change our behavior by creating a system of values, one aspect of a culture. The Systems view provides us with a way of understanding the connection between science and values,

"Objective value norms can be deduced directly from the contemporary systemic world picture [...] Values are goals which behavior strives to realize. Any activity which is oriented toward the accomplishment of some end is value-oriented activity [...] Nothing that pursues an end is value free." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

Both non-human creatures as well as human beings pursue ends and hence have values.

The Enlightenment view claimed that the material world has no inherent value. On the Systems view, "there is nothing in all the realms of natural systems which would be value-free when looked at from the vantage point of the systems themselves." (Laszlo, 1996, 80) The view of nature during the Enlightenment claimed that values are created by human beings. They are based on the particular material conditions and historical circumstances of a group of people, so they are completely different. Laszlo says: "There is nothing in the sphere of culture which would exempt us from the realm of values—no facts floating around, ready to be grasped without valuations and expectations." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

Everything that evolves, including cultures, do so within the context of a system. Cultures depend on natural systems. Enlightenment thinkers encouraged the exploitation of natural resources for human well-being and the development of more and more complex cultural systems. However, the suprasystems of human culture were always ultimately dependent upon the natural systems from which they emerged.

The study of culture in the social sciences during the Enlightenment period sought to be "value-neutral." Academic disciplines studied a culture apart from its natural foundations. Today, social scientists who have adopted the Systems view are reexamining this approach. In their studies of the suprasystems of culture, they include the interface of a given cultural system with its natural foundations, even as human beings create a culture that is an independent suprasystem,

"Contemporary cultural anthropologists are specifying a number of fundamental universal values shared by people everywhere. The same basic values of survival, mutual collaboration, the raising of children, the worship of transcendent entities, and avoidance of suffering, injustice, and pain, are manifested by all cultures, albeit often in radically different ways. The surface forms differ, but the depth structures are analogous." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

The formation of cultures has led to many, many variations, because "there is no imperative attached to the cultural specification of [our] values. These we can choose according to our insights." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

However, there is a natural foundation that does not change, "[we] remain within the limits of general natural-systems values. Finding and respecting these limits is precisely the problem facing us today." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

Laszlo distinguishes between descriptive values, those behaviors we recognize by observing how people live and asking them why, and normative values, those values that we can figure out as best, through studying the nature of reality and its interlocking systems,

"Normative values (or value norms) are things we discover by examining human characteristics and pointing to those values which could lead people to fulfillment. Hence normative values are not described but *postulated*; they are creations of the inquiring intellect (but not arbitrary)." (Laszlo, 1996, 81)

To understand values and ultimately to determine any normative values, systems theorists first have to look at the roles individuals play within a culture. They recognize and describe individuals as parts of much greater wholes,

"Roles are not made for given individuals, but for kinds of individuals classed according to qualification. When the roles are filled, the particular personality of each new tenant is reflected in his interrelations with others, and it produces corresponding shifts within the organizational structure.

There is flexibility within the system, as part adjusts to part.” (Laszlo, 1996, 85)

Each system, of any kind, includes aspects that change and aspects that do not change,

“There is a high degree of internal plasticity within any natural system. The system as a whole is determinate, but the relationship of the parts is not. This is not the mechanistic casual determinism of classical scientists, but the flexible, dynamic ‘macrodetermination’ of contemporary systems biologists, psychologist, and social scientists.” (Laszlo, 1996, 85)

On the Systems view, the ultimate value is simply the cultivation of all of the powers of the human soul in as many people as possible. The best societies are complex systems that function well, meaning with relatively little internal conflict, with a high level of coordination between societies and with a cooperative relationship with all the other natural and microsystems,

“Our humanistic goal is to enhance individual fulfillment in an increasingly deterministic multilevel society composed of greatly differentiated individuals [...] Like all complex natural systems, human institutions and societies function best when they are spontaneous expressions of the freely chosen activities of their interrelated members. Such a society is the norm against which we must measure existing forms of social structure.” (Laszlo, 1996, 87)

Again, Laszlo is critical of the Enlightenment worldview because it was focused on nature and human nature from a physical point of view. This was false. In spite of the efforts of many leaders and intellectuals, a materialistic way of understanding nature eventually led to the excess value of physical well-being over the cultivation of all the human capabilities: “The Western world offers the values of affluence as the panacea for all social ills. As norms, these values are now superannuated. In their place we must propose positive, humanistic value norms” (Laszlo, 1996, 88).

Laszlo’s model for humanism is universal, even though the underlying universal foundations have been ignored and denied, “Humanistic norms are not arbitrary: they are encoded in every natural system. But they can be overlaid by diverse cultural value objectives and hence, in times of urgency, they need to be consciously rediscovered.” (Laszlo, 1996, 88)

If we recover these universal, natural values,

“If they are found and adopted, we will again exercise our powers of adaptive innovation in maintaining ourselves and our culture within the thresholds of compatibility with the dynamic and balanced multilevel holarchy that is the biosphere-cum-humanity: the Gaia system of planet Earth.” (Laszlo, 1996, 88)

### CREATING A NEW MODEL OF HUMANISM: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NOOSPHERE

Given Laszlo's view of reality, the best way of describing the ultimate normative value for human culture is

“the actualization of potentials inherent in all of us [...] Self-fulfillment, as contemporary humanistic thinkers and psychologists acknowledge, is the end of human purposeful behavior [...] It is the pattern of what *can* be, traced in actuality. Individual fulfillment can be a human value. And it can be specified and analyzed in the systems perspective.” (Laszlo, 1996, 82)

Laszlo points out that the Greeks had the same overall view, “What are intrinsic human norms? The Greeks had an answer: they said that the end of the good life is happiness. Happiness, Aristotle specified, is the fulfillment of that which is specifically human in us.” (Laszlo, 1996, 82)<sup>3</sup> Besides the Greeks, Laszlo calls for the reintegration of all the world's religions into a set of normative values on the Systems model of reality and he explains why,

“Science addresses reason and intellect. Humanity, however, is both a rational and spiritual species; the human being has an intellective as well as an affective faculty. Consequently if the norms of contemporary humanism are not only to be discovered but also effectively brought to bear on the thinking and behavior of contemporary people, the rational discoveries of science need to be complemented by affective, time-honored tasks of religion, as ‘religio’—the binding and integrating of people within meaningful communities—takes on a fresh aspect.” (Laszlo, 1996, 88)

Integrating science with religion requires that the world's religions find their common foundation. Laszlo briefly suggests how it could be done,

“Religions would not need to sacrifice, or even compromise, their cherished tenets to make a unique contribution to this shift. They would only need to draw on their own humanism and ecumenism to encourage creative thinking in regard to the elaboration and extension of their traditional insights. There is, obviously, a significant humanistic and ecumenical component in every great religion. Judaism sees humans as God's partners in the ongoing work of creation and calls on the people of Israel to be ‘a light to the nations.’ At the heart of the Christian teaching is love for a universal God reflected in love for one's fellows and service to one's neighbor. Islam, too, has a universal and ecumenical aspect: Tawhid, the religious witness ‘there is no god but Allah,’ is an affirmation of unity as Allah means divine presence and revelation for all people. Hinduism perceives the essential oneness of man-

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<sup>3</sup> I have written extensively about Ancient Greek culture as a whole and its relevance in relation to systems thinking today. But that is not the point of this paper.

kind within the oneness of the universe, and Buddhism has as its central tenet the interrelatedness of all things in 'dependent co-origination.' In the Chinese spiritual traditions harmony is a supreme principle of nature and society; in Confucianism harmony applies to human relationships in ethical terms, while in Taoism it is an almost esthetic concept defining the relationship between man and nature. And the Baha'I faith, the newest of the world religions, sees the whole of mankind as an organic unit in process of evolution toward peace and unity—a condition that it proclaims both desirable and inevitable. The great religions could draw on such ecumenical and humanistic elements to nurture a creative elaboration of their fundamental doctrines, supporting and promoting the shift to the new holistic consciousness." (Laszlo, 1996, 89)

Laszlo explains how the nature of physical reality and its evolution fits with the evolution of human nature and human culture. Physical evolution has a spiritual component and the realm of the spiritual has a physical aspect because human beings are biological as well as spiritual beings. Laszlo suggests that we should begin with what we now know about the physical universe and its history as a natural foundation for the common theme of unity, oneness and cooperation in the world's religious traditions. The physical world can be understood spiritually,

The key unifying concept could be the spiritual assessment of the universe's progressive self-creation. The vast sweep of system-building processes from Big Bang to the emergence of life, mind, and consciousness could be recognized, and indeed celebrated by the religions. The recognition of the evolutionary self-creation of humanity, and of the larger reality of the cosmos, need not be confined to the empirical sciences. The process is all-embracing, and has a spiritual in addition to a physical dimension. We bear, after all, within our own body the impress of every transformation through which the universe has ever passed (Laszlo, 1996, 89).

In the process of learning about the nature of reality, one holistic system emerging out of another, we also literally physically develop and stimulate our brains in a way that leads to higher and higher levels of reflective self-consciousness. We use language to develop communication networks based on both the spoken and written word, leading to a more complete and complex body of recorded knowledge that is passed down to the next generation. This cultural legacy provides the occasion to develop an even more complex and accurate model of reality and a more complete and universal grasp of underlying normative values. The intellectual search for truth has a physical component in the brain and a non-physical, spiritual component. The emerging systems are made up of connections in the world, in our brains, in our words and in our minds, as we reflect upon how the systems relate to each other and to ourselves as learners. Systems theory recognizes all these connections,

“Not only our bodies, also our minds are immanent to this process. The forces that brought forth the quarks and the photons in the early moment of the radiance-filled cosmos, that condensed galaxies and stars in expanding space-time, and that created the complex molecules and systems on a life-bearing planet—these forces inform our brain and thus infuse our mind. They could come to self-recognition in each thinking and feeling human being.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90)

Human beings have always sought knowledge and many other ways to develop their potential. These purposes have always created values, “Values define cultural man’s need for rationality, meaningfulness in emotional experience, richness of imagination, and depth of faith.” (Laszlo, 1996, 76) In the past, these values have been considered unique to each individual, or to each integrated culture. Today, using Systems theory, our understanding of all aspects of reality and all inherent human capacities should lead from mere descriptions of different values to a comprehensive worldview that integrates human rationality, emotions, imagination, and faith. This integration leads to the formative of a system of normative values. This system would describe how all the evolved systems work together best.

Religions today should embrace the self-conscious awareness of this view as normative, not just descriptive, “By recognizing and celebrating the world’s evolutionary self-creation, religions could promote this process of recognition in each individual.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90) The particular intellectual capacity for recognizing this whole Laszlo calls “noos,” following the Greek view. The formation of a sphere of human culture where we recognize the integration of all aspects of reality is what Laszlo calls a “noosphere” of human interaction. On Laszlo’s view, the world’s religions could and should, “celebrate the evolution of the noosphere on Earth as the next, and especially significant, phase in the world’s evolutionary self-creation [...] the self-creating universe is our larger self—our primary sacred community.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90) The spiritual is not separated from the physical. The sacred is not separated from the profane. What is known through reason is not separated from what is known from the inspiration to seek a higher level of complexity beyond what one observes.

### **CONCLUSION: THE CREATION OF A NOOSPHERE IS NOT RELATIVE BUT NORMATIVE**

Given the fact that the Enlightenment worldview has now led humanity to the brink of self-destruction, it is imperative that human beings develop a noosphere as Laszlo understands it. The purposes related to recognizing the fact that all of reality is a series of interconnected systems and the necessary consequences of this for the kind of culture we must develop in order to avoid self-destruction is a normative way of constructing values, not merely descriptive. It

should be a guide for how we ought to behave, not a description of one way of actualizing our potentials that is no better or worse than many others.

Laszlo points out that in the past the world's great religions also emerged as a way of addressing a crisis in the cultures from which they emerged,

“Religious renewal always came in the wake of civilizational crises. It was in the disastrous moments of the history of Israel that the prophets of Judea made their appearance; Christianity established itself in the chaos left by the moral weakening of the citizens of a declining Roman Empire; the Buddha appeared in a period of spiritual and social confusion in India; Mohammed proclaimed his mission in an epoch of disorder in Arabia; and Baha'ullah wrote in confinement imposed by a moribund Ottoman Empire.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90)

The ecological crisis we face today is perhaps the most serious humanity has faced, which is why the resources of the world's religions need to be harnessed to address this crisis,

“Today, at a time when humankind is in the throes of the greatest and deepest transformation it has ever known, there is an epochal need for a creative extension of the traditional fundamentals of the great religions, to complete and complement the rational worldview that is already emerging within the new sciences. With an alliance between science and religion, the shift to a systemic and holistic worldview would be reinforced. Both through reason and through feeling, contemporary people could be brought into closer harmony with each other, and with their environment.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90–91)

### SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE ISUD

This paper was submitted as part of series of essays on *Universal Dialogue* because the Systems view shows the possibility and the great need for universal dialogue in the Era of Globalization taking place today. The Enlightenment era has led to our ability to exploit nature for human well-being so that we have created a global cultural system that is more complex than it ever has been. It is growing at a rapid rate. Unfortunately, it is still dedicated to connecting people with each other and with nature in a way that values the exploitation of nature and the material prosperity of individuals who focus on their own desires with the expectation that everyone else will benefit from the rational calculation of one's own well-being. This model has been exposed as a false view of nature, of human nature, and of a flourishing culture. The complex systems are breaking down and will eventually self-destruct.

In the development of a Systems-based, normative model of culture, the world needs dialogue between academics who have specialized in all the traditional, Enlightenment-model, disciplines. Academics need to talk to each other

and find the ways to bring together what they were educated to assume was separated. They need to rethink their academic training in order to understand reality and the place of their disciplines within the reality of interconnected wholes. Academics need to encourage non-academics, people focused on practical affairs, to become engaged in the dialogue. Artists, public intellectuals, leaders in all sectors of society, and people without academic training or political power, should all learn how to communicate with each other in the formation of a self-conscious level of cultural interaction that follows the Systems model. People need to behave, individually and at all levels of interpersonal interaction, in ways that preserve the natural environment, thereby self-consciously creating a culture that is integrated with nature, leading to well-functioning whole. The ISUD's name, "International Society for Universal Dialogue," gives it a public "image" of an organization that will, indeed, promote the normative values of the Systems view, apart from what particular philosophical, theological, artistic, or leadership training labels that those in the society give to themselves based on their own training and experience. The Systems view shows why such universal dialogue is possible, based on the nature of reality, why it is crucial today, and why people often disagree on the labels given to the actual activity of developing a noosphere.

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