



Spirituality and Integral Thought in Higher Education

Alexander Astin in Conversation with Jonathan Reams

Alexander (Sandy) Astin is the Allan M. Cartter Professor of Higher Education Emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is also Founding Director of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. He has served as Director of Research for both the American Council on Education and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. He is also the Founding Director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, an ongoing study of some 12 million students, 250,000 faculty and staff, and 1,800 higher education institutions.

Dr. Astin has authored 20 books and more than 300 other publications on higher education, and has received awards for outstanding research from more than a dozen national associations and professional societies. A 1990 study in the Journal of Higher Education identified Dr. Astin as the most frequently cited author in the field of higher education.

In 2002 I heard Dr. Astin speak at a Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) conference. In the space of 20 minutes, he introduced the work of Ken Wilber and gave a comprehensive yet succinct overview of Integral Theory that wove seamlessly into the main thread of his talk. Reflecting on this experience, I felt that Dr. Astin would be able to provide a perspective on higher education that would illuminate the trajectory of existing trends in an integral direction.

JR: I would like to begin by thanking you for taking this time to reflect on your experience and share perspectives on some of the trends and forces that are moving higher education toward an integral approach. Your extensive history in researching higher education, especially around issues of spirituality will hopefully shed some new light in these areas. Could you begin with a brief overview of your research within HERI?

SA: Well, for the last 40 years I have been studying the development of college students during the undergraduate years and in some cases post-college

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44





1 years. These are large scale national studies involving usually several hundred
2 institutions and anywhere from 10,000 to 25,000 students at a time. We collect
3 longitudinal data so we can study student growth and development, and one of
4 the things that we have been doing for years is to try to cover the entire spectrum
5 of student development qualities. We have a little four-cell matrix that we have
6 been using, not entirely unlike Wilber's 2 x 2 matrix (although it was developed
7 many years before he started publishing). One of the dimensions of student
8 development outcomes has to do with the inner (Left-Hand quadrants) or what
9 we call psychological measures as opposed to the outer (Right-Hand quadrants)
10 or sociological measures.

11 For instance, the range of student developmental qualities we assess includes
12 values. Now it is interesting that when we first started doing this people said, "Well,
13 what do student values have to do with higher education?" We plowed ahead with
14 our studies anyway, insisting that if you interpret the stated goals of liberal educa-
15 tion broadly it covers a pretty wide range of human qualities. It isn't just simply
16 the 3Rs or something like that, which higher education is focusing on.

17 But I don't think that too many scholars have paid much attention to
18 what we claim we are doing. If you take seriously the claims and more formal
19 descriptions of liberal education, which are embraced by almost all the colleges
20 and universities in the U.S. and less so in Europe (it depends on the country),
21 we are much more integral in what we are trying to do than perhaps the average
22 layperson is inclined to believe. We are not just preparing people to fill slots in the
23 labor force, which is what a lot of laypeople believe. We are educating the whole
24 person. I think it's too bad we haven't had more public discussion of this because
25 our sense about it is: Even if you don't care about the development of student
26 values, the fact is that the experience of higher education is having an impact in
27 some way or another on students' values. From this it behooves us to take a look
28 at what kind of impact the experience is having.

29 **JR:** Not to mention issues like how these values impact the conditions for
30 learning.

31 **SA:** Exactly. We don't presume to know all the relevant conditions for learning
32 and so part of this search is open-ended. We are looking at anything that might
33 plausibly make a difference in students' lives. A lot of that doesn't have much to
34 do with the classroom, particularly in the residential experience, which is kind
35 of the prototypical model for American undergraduate education. So basically
36 what we are searching for is a deeper understanding of how and why students
37 develop along all these different dimensions. I guess this is what Wilber would
38 call lines—What experiences and environments are associated with different kinds
39 of developmental patterns?

40 **JR:** So having done this kind of research longitudinally and with large groups
41 of students at many institutions, what do you see as relevant to learning?
42
43
44





SA: If you try to bring the different kinds of findings together and make a kind of holistic sense out of it, I think it is helpful to look more at the independent variables—that is, the experiential aspects. That helps you to understand the lines of development and how they are affected. The overarching conclusion from all this work is almost absurdly simply: The more the student invests in the process, in the form of time as well as psychological and physical energy, the more favorable the developmental outcome. What the students get out of the experience is directly proportional to what they invest in it. I am not a fan of Milton Friedman by any means, but he entitled one of his little books *There is no Such Thing as a Free Lunch* and I think that pretty much summarizes the overall overarching conclusion that you could draw from our work. What happens developmentally is directly proportional to what the student is willing to invest in that process itself. What that means is that our job as educators would seem to be to find creative and ingenious ways of encouraging the students to become engaged in the process.

JR: I can see this having real implications pedagogically. In my own experience, giving students tasks that bring the learning into a relevant situation for them has been quite successful. Certainly the area of service learning has been quite popular in higher education in recent years because it does bring that sort of relevance and motivation more to the foreground for students.

SA: Yes, it is a very powerful experience. I would say of all of the specific kinds of experiences, service learning is at the top of the list in terms of its potency. And we have only begun to exploit its possibilities. It is still something that most students don't experience in college, although it's growing.

JR: I went to a Jesuit university for my graduate work and when I was teaching there they had a lot of service learning, so all my students went through that experience. It was exciting because they were able to see the things we were talking about in the class happening out in the world. It also helped them see the value of engaging the learning that was available to them in the classroom. What I wonder about though is how this looks from a model of education primarily being a didactic transmission of intellectual knowledge? That view might say, "What's going out and volunteering in the community have to do with higher education?"

SA: The folks who have written in this field, and we've done a fair amount of work ourselves on service learning, have been able to articulate the relevance of all this pretty well. When I am speaking to a group of faculty members, particularly if they are hard scientists, I like to use the analogy of the lab experience. Anybody who teaches science or any student who studies it will tell you that the lab experience can be the most important part of their formal scientific training. So in a sense the service learning portion of the course is like a lab experience where you get a chance to test the theoretical material in the real world. It is interesting that some of the most interesting service learning courses are in the





1 sciences, and I think that's in part because the sciences have taken for granted
2 the lab experience. Also the fine arts—we could learn a whole lot in academia if
3 we would pick the brains of our friends in the fine arts, because I think they in
4 some way have explored the more active behavioral components of their subject
5 matter and it's not just strictly Upper-Left quadrant stuff.

6 **JR:** I know one of the things I have been interested in and reading about
7 lately is the distinction between intellectual theory knowledge and tacit knowledge
8 of people working professionally within a field who know how to do things, but
9 don't always know how to describe how they know how to do them.

10 **SA:** Yes, putting it into words is the trick. I remember when I wrote a book
11 on assessment a number of years ago I really got intrigued with this very issue,
12 and so I had a whole chapter devoted to the piano lesson as a metaphor for this
13 kind of behaviorally oriented pedagogy, looking at what actually takes place in a
14 well-delivered piano lesson between the student and the teacher. All the notion of
15 feedback and behavioral performance, then more feedback, and so on.

16 We had this movement that began back in the sixties of so-called experiential
17 education and it has always remained on the margins. Those folks had a lot of great
18 ideas but the mainstream departments in the universities are basically completely
19 unaware of this whole movement. It took the service learning folks, who had the
20 wisdom to realize that you had to do this out of a formal academic class, and in
21 that way you can bring the experiential part of this into the pedagogy in a way
22 that the ordinary faculty members can see the point. I think one of the things that
23 limited the experiential education folks is the terminology that they used and the
24 pitches that they tried to make. They struck academics as being very vocational
25 and, of course, that is the kiss of death. Nobody has tried to sell service learning
26 on the basis of its vocational value.

27 **JR:** So they learned that lesson. I know you have also done some recent
28 work on spirituality in higher education. What can you say about that?

29 **SA:** Well, that has turned out to be very exciting and the reason why is
30 that for years we flirted with that area, with that line of development if you will,
31 but didn't really take a serious look at it. I think we were perhaps intimidated by
32 the prevailing mentality in academia that says that religion and that sort of thing
33 should be off limits in a secular institution—leave it to the department of religious
34 studies or to the sectarian institutions.

35 What prompted us to get involved in this were some personal experiences that
36 we had back in the late nineties when we went to some retreats sponsored by the
37 Fetzer Institute in Michigan. I was a little dubious about these retreats, but after a
38 few hours at the first one we attended I became convinced there really was something
39 to this whole spirituality issue as far as higher education was concerned. It had to
40 do with the inauthenticity of so much of what we do in academia. I mean, there
41 is so much posturing and posing and lack of authenticity in the way we conduct
42 ourselves and we encourage the same thing in our students. The most obvious case

43
44





is: If the student doesn't understand the material in the class, we encourage them to make us think they understand, even when they don't, and that of course is what the exam process is all about. Or even in a sense Socratic teaching in many ways. It isn't that you really want the student to understand as much as you want the student to give you the right answer and so it becomes kind of a little contest.

So authenticity struck me as something that really needed to be looked at, as well as wholeness, so that your life as an academic or as a student is integrated. I mean this is where the term *integral* comes in—where your most deeply felt values are being acknowledged and honored and in a process where you are able to make meaning out of what you are doing. The meaning-making part of this really began to emerge as a key thing. So as we begin to talk about wholeness, authenticity, fragmentation, inauthenticity, and meaning—well, we are talking about the spiritual life. So let's call it what it is. We still debate the terminology we use, and I always say if I have 30 seconds or a minute to explain what we are doing to somebody I will use the term spirituality. If not, I might talk about meaning and purpose depending on who the audience is.

In any case, these retreats got us thinking that we ought to look at this. We got a small grant from Fetzer to study meaning, purpose, and spirituality in the lives of college faculty. This was a qualitative study where we interviewed faculty from diverse institutions and wrote a little monograph about it. We found that this is a huge issue for faculty members. The fact that they lead fragmented lives causes them a lot of discomfort. We were also surprised that quite a number of our faculty members could relate to the notion of spirituality. Sometimes they would say, "Well what do you mean by spirituality," and then we would have to finesse it and use terms like "how do you make meaning out of your life?" and "how do you see your purpose as a faculty member and a parent and a spouse and a member of the community—do you lead an integrated life or are these parts of your life fragmented?" Get them there and they will take off and tell you a lot. We were very surprised and pleased that the faculty, given a safe interview space to talk about these things, were quite eloquent and were able talk about their spiritual life and how they made meaning out of the events of the day and this sort of thing.

So this convinced us that we were onto something and we held some sessions at national conferences, which were very well attended. People came and got very engaged talking about these issues in their institutions—college presidents, faculty, students affairs folks all would come to the sessions. So just then, serendipitously the Templeton folks approached us. They had known some of our faculty work in spirituality and asked if we would be interested in doing a study with students. So we negotiated with them and we were able to get them to support a longitudinal study. That's how we got involved in this.

Religion really turns out to be just one mode of expression of spirituality and for some students it's the primary mode, but for many it is not. So we are looking at religion as one manifestation of the spiritual person.





1 **JR:** What kind of distinctions did you find between notions of religion and
2 spirituality for faculty and for students?

3 **SA:** A lot of this has to do with whether or not the person is an active
4 practitioner of some religious faith. Obviously, if they are then often the religion
5 provides the framework with which they try to guide their lives and make meaning
6 out of their experiences. But the number of people who do this religiously, so to
7 speak, is a minority. I think it is 30 percent of the students who say they try to
8 pattern their life according to their religious beliefs, even though 80 percent of the
9 students say they believe in God and 70 percent of the faculty say they perceive
10 themselves as spiritual beings. But those who pattern their lives on the basis of
11 their religious faith are in a minority. It depends on how you frame the religious
12 question as to what conclusion you draw in terms of its importance in the life of
13 a student or the faculty member.

14 **JR:** So how far along is the study with the students that Templeton is sup-
15 porting?

16 **SA:** We're just collected our longitudinal data and are deeply into the analysis
17 now. We have found some fascinating things. First, a little background. One of
18 the questions we had six years ago when we started this project was whether it is
19 even possible with self-administered questionnaires to get the kind of material we
20 were after as far as developmental lines are concerned. So we did a pilot study
21 initially with about 3,700 students in 46 institutions just to see if the project was
22 feasible. Could we actually measure important aspects of the students' spiritual
23 and religious lives? In designing this pilot survey we spent a long time getting a
24 sense about this as being multi-dimensional lines. They are probably related to
25 each other, but they are worthy of our looking at them independently.

26 The preparatory work was very extensive: literature searching, brain storming,
27 and so forth. We came up with about 175 questions that constituted the core of
28 this pilot survey. We were very pleased that the students took it very seriously. We
29 had all kinds of checks applied to see if they were actually giving us consistent
30 responses, and they took it very seriously. It was interesting that the believers and
31 the non-believers were equally likely to respond to the survey. We were afraid that
32 non-believers were not willing to get involved in it. (When I say non-believers I
33 mean people who say they have no religion).

34 Then we began the analyses and we were able to find some very interesting
35 patterns. We developed three sets of measures out of this: one set having to do
36 with their religiousness, another set with their spirituality, and a final set having
37 to do with what we call related qualities. As you might guess, the religious and
38 spiritual measures tend to be positively associated, but not that strongly. That partly
39 has to do with the semantics of what we were dealing with where many people
40 tend to equate the term *spiritual* with the term *religious*—this forces a positive
41 association between the two sets of measures. But what we found when we finally
42 began the longitudinal study (we surveyed entering freshmen three years ago and
43 then followed them up this past spring), we found that religiousness, particularly
44





the behavioral measures of religiousness such as attendance of religious services, showed a decline during the undergraduate years; whereas most of our measures of spirituality and related qualities showed significant growth during this same period of time. That was quite fascinating: Even though the two sets of measures were positively associated, they were changing in different directions during the undergraduate years.

Some of our associated measures are quite interesting and in some ways they capture many of the qualities of what people normally consider to be spiritual beings. One is called Equanimity, another measure we call Ethic of Caring, and then we have one we call Ecumenical Worldview. This last one very much captures the beginning of the critical third stage in the great chain from the personal to the transpersonal, or the ego to the transcendent level. That's a very key developmental transition and the Ecumenical Worldview we think captures that quite well.

We have actually developed a new measure that we are just playing around with which combines the Ethic of Caring and the Ecumenical Worldview. We call it Global Awareness and it is an interesting measure we are playing with. That kind of language is probably more accessible to the typical academic than the caring and ecumenism.

JR: But it sounds like through this research project you are being able to bring some rigor to those terms and what they mean for the students, rather than them just being kind of vague New Age or fluffy concepts.

SA: Exactly. That's also part of the realization that we've developed in presenting some of these early findings to people. In particular academics, who see me as a kind of a number crunching, hard-headed researcher, are more open to research on this particular subject matter.

JR: This brings us back to the notion of "How do you see these elements of spirituality, service learning and the other kinds of things you talked about—the conditions to support learning that are beyond the theoretical/intellectual—how do you see those contributing to an integral perspective within higher education?"

SA: The best way to answer that is to look back at the particular kinds of educational experiences that seem to facilitate the growth of these spiritual qualities. The panoply of experiences is quite interesting. This is very early stuff and is subject to some revision, but I think the pattern is forming now as we dig into the data in more depth. Here is a sampling of some of the kinds of experiences we have identified so far that seem to facilitate the development of these qualities: service learning being probably at the top of the list, then interdisciplinary studies, study abroad, foreign language study, participation in group organizations, participation in team athletics, group projects in class.

JR: All the things that would normally be considered to be peripheral to the real education.

SA: Right.

JR: That gives a pretty clear picture of the wide spectrum of things that are supportive of this development, but are not normally focused on.





1 **SA:** No, and that's why I think the banking model of teaching and learn-
2 ing—you withdraw the information from the head of the professor and deposit
3 it in the head of the student—I just don't think it holds any water any more. I
4 don't think this is how learning and development take place. What's interesting is
5 that many of these items that I just listed also facilitate the development of more
6 traditional cognitive learning. If you want to look at this thing very holistically and
7 say, "Well what kinds of qualities do we want to promote in our young people
8 as they prepare to go out into the world of work and family and community?"
9 then you would really hope that you could promote this ecumenical world view,
10 caring, charitable involvement, and other such measures. So, why not consider
11 redesigning our educational experiences to provide more of this kind of stimulus
12 and engagement for students on behalf of our long term concerns as they might
13 apply to the human race? The more of these kinds of qualities that we are able
14 to foster, well—we might lose the third world war as a result—but on the other
15 hand we might avoid starting a third world war.

16 **JR:** This is interesting for me because I have just begun teaching at a university
17 in Norway and I redesigned the main course they hired me for and just started
18 delivering it this semester. The students were shocked at first by the pedagogical
19 strategies I employ and the way I have them engaging in different kinds of learn-
20 ing. They say they are terrified because I am really asking them to participate and
21 engage, (they have a concrete learning project out in the world involved in the
22 course). But they also say they are very excited and enthused. There seems to be
23 an openness, and they are able to recognize the value of these kinds of pedagogical
24 strategies; they are just not used to them.

25 **SA:** Yes, it is going to take some transition in the beliefs and the mindsets
26 of some of the students and the faculty. Another item from our findings, which
27 kind of personifies these experiences, is interactions with people of different racial
28 and ethnic background during the undergraduate years.

29 **JR:** One of the things we are looking at in this book and have for ourselves,
30 is a sense that there are a number of trends like those you have been studying
31 and researching. We see people promoting service learning, or various kinds of
32 holistic and integral education. I think of the Jesuit school I went to and their
33 motto of head, heart, and hands—that was how they would say to people, this is
34 what we are about—not just intellectual pursuits but your heart and your hands
35 are concerned too. So do you feel that these things are bubbling up as precursors
36 to a more explicitly integral perspective in higher education, that if they all came
37 together and were really incorporated they would actually take it to that level?

38 **SA:** I believe so, because, in a way, seeing education as not lecture and
39 discussion, but in terms of this wide range of experiences, is much more integral,
40 just in terms of the range of experiences we are talking about. If you were to
41 think of pedagogy in these terms, what full range of experiences can we provide
42 for students to bring out this whole person and foster the development of these
43
44





across the board qualities? This, rather than what's some clever tactic can you use during a lecture to get students to learn a particular item of material. It's a very different approach to pedagogy.

JR: It sounds like what you are describing is in pretty stark contrast to faculty using such clever strategies for getting students to learn particular things. It is asking them to rethink assumptions about what learning is, who students are, and what education is about.

SA: I think that is well said.

JR: I think that part of the goal we have for this book is to lay out a number of these views, because there hasn't been an academic book that tries to pull these perspectives together and offer faculty and/or administrators a comprehensive overview of how these things are coming together. They are out there and people are trying to apply them in specific kinds of ways in small pockets, and there are larger forces and trends at work too. If there can be some conscious attention to moving that work forward, hopefully, good things will happen.

SA: Yes, I totally agree.

JR: Here's another question then relating to the integral world. How has your understanding of these issues in higher education been influenced by what you read of Wilber's work and his AQAL model?

SA: I think, in a way, the influence on us personally and in this research has been less profound than the influence on those students who we've exposed to the AQAL approach. Because, in a sense, the way we had designed our matrix for outcome measures way back in the sixties was motivated by the same concern: How do we create a holistic framework for looking at student development where we cover the waterfront. I think the one area where Wilber's quadrants have helped is the bottom quadrants, what Wilber calls society and culture. Culture is hidden in much the same way that one's private thoughts are hidden. One of the big challenges, it seems to me, in higher education is to begin to surface this hidden culture and address it in some way. I see that culture as representing a huge obstacle to significant change. We completed a large project a few years ago on what we called institutional transformation and found the Wilber framework very helpful particularly in identifying and pinpointing this Lower-Left aspect of higher education, which remains largely hidden from view and unexamined. I think that's the worst part of it, that it is unexamined.

In fact, I was inspired to write an editorial for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* a few years ago about this very issue. It was on the importance of "being smart" in academia and how that value distorts our lives. Working all these years in this field I have become convinced that one of our hidden shared values, which to me is what culture is, is how important it is to be smart and to appear smart. So smartness has a very high valence. So that explains some of the crazy stuff we do in academia like valuing the intelligence of the student at the point of entry much more than at the exit point. Why do we put so much emphasis on how





1 smart the student is at the point of entry? Because it reflects on us to have smart
2 students wanting to come to our university. Every culture in the world that has
3 a university system does this, Japan being perhaps the most extreme and China
4 now has really gone overboard on its recruitment of smart students. This is why
5 faculty meetings become so unpleasant for most people because the faculty meeting
6 is a theater where some faculty like to display their smartness and critical thinking
7 skills and so forth, and this is what the essay was about.

8 But what I was really talking about was how this very profoundly important
9 part of our belief system never surfaces, never gets talked about, and yet it affects
10 everything we do. So if we are going to change academia we have to reach a
11 point where we are able to identify and talk about our culture, our shared beliefs.
12 Some of them we're willing to talk about such as academic freedom—that's part
13 of our culture too—but some of these other deeper beliefs I think are potential
14 obstacles to any kinds of reforms we might want to make. Because if we just take
15 the "being smart" part of our culture, if you or I propose we want to change our
16 pedagogy in some significant way, the fear that we might not look as smart is
17 going to get in the way.

18 **JR:** That's why I very much appreciated the title of Parker Palmers book *The*
19 *Courage to Teach*. When I taught honors students in their freshman colloquium,
20 one of the things that I began telling them as we started the class was that because
21 they were honors students they were at a distinct disadvantage in this class, because
22 they were smart at the educational system the way it was designed and this class
23 wasn't about that kind of being smart. It's very clear that it's not safe to say you
24 don't know—there is a great fear of being vulnerable or losing your credibility or
25 whatever it is that's tied up in that smartness.

26 **SA:** Yes, exactly. So that's been very helpful to be able to pinpoint in my
27 own thinking what the difficulty is. I think this distinction between the individual
28 and the community in Wilber's framework is very keen one. I think my stand on
29 the Lower Left is that it's the shared beliefs and assumptions of a community. We
30 tend to think of culture as costumes and art work and dances and stuff like that
31 and that's really not what I see as the essence of culture.

32 **JR:** Those are the displays of culture, the artifacts of culture.

33 **SA:** Exactly.

34 **JR:** That was good, because what you just named, the whole culture of
35 smartness, answered the next question I had, which was around obstacles or limita-
36 tions for trying to move an integral perspective forward in higher education. This
37 culture of smartness is like an elephant in the room no one is willing to speak
38 about. I am wondering if you see other things, as well, which are real challenges
39 in trying to move an integral perspective more into the public discourse in higher
40 education?

41 **SA:** I think it's attending far too much to the Lower Right in our reform
42 attempts. I think in a sense that is the flip side of what we have just been dis-
43

44





cussing. Whereas, the common thought is that the key lies in changing programs and practices and not to change both lower quadrants. So we say, “OK we will implement a new program to fix things.” Well you know if the culture doesn’t change . . .

JR: Then we will restructure again and that will fix it!

SA: Right. So we think in terms of structures. Because what happens then is the system will, by fiat or getting a big donor or whatever device, change a structure or add a new structure, but then the culture will drag it down. So, in a sense, that discourages us from thinking that we can really implement significant change. Then we hesitate, after that experience, to try it again. In a crazy kind of way focusing on the changes in structures makes us more reluctant to try to change structures in the future because the attempt often doesn’t succeed.

JR: If we are thinking in terms of quadrants, do you see a great resistance to conversations around epistemological development, thinking about Kegan’s work in terms of the need for people in higher education to actually have that kind of development going on in the Upper Left.

SA: The Upper-Left, Lower-Left connection is so critical. I really believe if you’re a student just entering graduate training, let’s say to prepare for a career in academia, that Upper Left is much more of a tabula rasa and by the time the graduate school brainwashing is done then you have absorbed a lot of the Lower Left and taken it on yourself. It becomes very difficult then to institute change because the new graduate student wants to learn the culture, wants to know: How am I supposed to believe, how am I supposed to act? So that has a very powerful influence. So to try to move into an institution of people trained in that way and say, “Let’s change some of this stuff” is really tough. So I think the influence of the Lower Left on the Upper Left is so profound.

JR: An experience I have in relation to that is WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) creating a new handbook of accreditation standards in 2001. In those standards there was an attempt to set out a structure that would push institutions to move from Kegan’s third-order consciousness of just reacting to a checklist, to a more fourth-order self-authoring. It says here are some principals, or standards, now tell us how you address them. Do you see that kind of attempt to change the discourse and the thinking in higher education institutions having had an impact or success in some way?

SA: I think we go back to Parker Palmer’s term *courage*. I think that what we need is the courage to begin to think differently, to examine one’s beliefs, to question or critically look at the culture; and I think that courage is the key thing. Where do we get that? In other words how do you sanction the individual examining and questioning the culture and examining and questioning his or her own beliefs?

I wrote a kind of maverick book¹ that came out in 2007 about all of this in a sense. It’s an Upper-Left book almost exclusively; but it’s got a bunch of





1 exercises in it for how do you get in touch with your beliefs, reflect on them,
2 and understand the connection between you beliefs and your emotions. Because,
3 at least in writing that book, it began to become really clear that our emotional
4 life and particularly our debilitating and negative emotions all emerge from our
5 belief systems. That our beliefs operate, if you take a computer metaphor, like
6 the software of our minds; and they are the means by which we make meaning
7 out of our experience and the way we spin our experience. So if you really want
8 to change people, you want them to be able to change themselves. They have to
9 get in touch with their beliefs and have to get in touch with the emotions that
10 emerge from those beliefs, mainly emotions like fear, guilt, anger, and so forth.
11 As well, to understand the conditions that activate those beliefs and lead to those
12 emotions, because fear is a huge part of our inability to change.

13 **JR:** I notice that WASC has been using the term *reflection* a lot and what
14 you are talking about, to be able to reflect on beliefs is being actively promoted
15 within higher education in California and probably elsewhere as well. The chal-
16 lenge appears to be that doing this kind of reflection seems to be dependent on
17 a certain level of cognitive development to be able to take a perspective on your
18 internal state, and that this is not necessarily accessible to everybody.

19 **SA:** No, and again, if you want to talk about integral education, shouldn't the
20 capacity to reflect on one's own beliefs and life be something that we actively try
21 to cultivate during the undergraduate years? If you want to look at it in terms of
22 skill development, what better skill could you have? A sort of meta-cognition, but
23 more than meta-cognition. That's part of it but it's also just simply awareness.

24 **JR:** Yes, and it's a lifelong skill that is transferable into any aspect of our
25 lives.

26 **SA:** They talk about things that are relevant to the goals of the liberal edu-
27 cation. You know liberal education is based on a lot of inductive logic. We want
28 people to think inductively and to develop that capacity. By the way, reflection
29 was another item in our laundry list of experiences that facilitate the development
30 of these spiritual qualities.

31 **JR:** How would you envision taking this conversation about integral within
32 higher education to the next level?

33 **SA:** Initially, what comes to mind in response to that question is the impor-
34 tance of demystifying integral. It seems to me that one of the ways of doing that
35 is to team up with an existing organization, or an existing community, which is
36 plugged into mainstream higher education, but which is also open to reform efforts.
37 Immediately I think of the American Association of Colleges and Universities,
38 which is maybe the only national organization which I think is actively pursuing
39 reform efforts and at the same time has credibility within the higher education
40 community. Getting some kind of a formal working relationship established with
41 that organization could be helpful, because what they claim to represent is the role
42 of higher education in liberally educating its students. So they are committed to

43
44





the notion of liberal learning, which if you take it literally, as I have already said, 1
 can be read as holistic and integral. So in connecting with an organization that 2
 is already plugged into higher education in a substantial way but which is open 3
 to ideas of this kind would be great. They are doing a project there on moral 4
 development, for example, and they have a number of projects going that I think 5
 are compatible with an integral approach. That would be my immediate sense 6
 about it because it is sort of like the problem we have with spirituality; if you just 7
 start there OK, we are talking about integral education or an integral approach to 8
 educating undergraduates or whatever, and you know the eyes will glaze over. 9

JR: There is a whole lot of translation work to be done. 10

SA: Exactly, and you and I have a very different take on that language but 11
 that is something that has developed enough over a period of years thinking about 12
 these things. But certainly the stuff that Wilber has done trying to get programs 13
 going, I am not sure that is the way to do it because those programs will be mar- 14
 ginalized and academia is expert at marginalizing anything it doesn't understand. 15

JR: True. I do know that John F. Kennedy University did get WASC accredi- 16
 tation for an Integral Theory program. So there has been that one step at least. 17

SA: A multi-pronged approach probably makes more sense. I mentioned the 18
 AAC&U thing simply because that avenue has not been explored. As I understand 19
 it, you have got the Wilberites out there trying to do stuff, but I think teaming 20
 up with an established national organization would be a great tactic, and I think 21
 AAC&U would definitely be amenable to something like this. 22

JR: That is great because I think it is something that is possible to be of 23
 benefit, and a win-win kind of thing. It's a matter of getting into the right field 24
 of conversation. 25

This has been a great conversation, and I want to thank you again for shar- 26
 ing your insights. Discussing these topics with you has brought out what I antici- 27
 pated—an understanding that there are many trends and forces in higher education 28
 offering the possibility to enable a more integral orientation to flourish. 29

Note 30
31
32

1. Astin, A. (2007). *Mindworks: Becoming more conscious in an unconscious world.* 34
 Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing. 35

