
Educational Philosophy for the Anthropocene: Zak Stein's Inquiry



R. Michael Fisher

© 2019

Technical Paper No. 85

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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First Edition 2019

Cover and layout by R. Michael Fisher
ISOF Logo (original 1989) designed by RMF

Printed in Canada

The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

Educational Philosophy for the Anthropocene: Zak Stein's Inquiry

- R. Michael Fisher,¹ Ph.D.

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Abstract

Reimagining “humanity” is a powerful aim of the educational philosophy of Zak Stein. A relative new-comer to the field of Education and philosophy, Stein has in the last decade or so shown himself to be a potent “developmentalist,” and visionary of a “metamodern metaphysics” for reconfiguring how societies understand learning, new forms of education, and most interestingly he situates his work within a metaphysics of Love (*Eros*). Stein poignantly calls for a “return” (of integration) to important past wisdom in transforming learning but he does so from a critical integral perspective in ways that are unique in educational writing today. The author appreciates and demonstrates Stein’s awareness of the meta-context of the Anthropocene and “crises” as a critical basis for any design of future education. He particularly focuses this introductory technical paper on Stein’s views on *fear* and its essential core role in shaping human evolution and thus our ways of learning and designing curriculum. The author adds a brief critique of how Stein’s work could be improved in terms of a holistic-integral fear management/education in this discussion of a new metaphysics of love (*Eros*) for education in general.

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Educational Challenge Today: Elephant in the Room

As an educator and independent scholar for 45 years, mostly outside of the public institutional sectors of schooling, my task has been to offer insights that those ‘swimming in the waters’ of the public institutional mainstream cannot often see or even imagine. I have a teacher’s degree and worked in schools, have consulted to schools at times, but mostly I have practiced as a life-long critic of schooling and thus education in general. I know there are some good things to modern advances but one cannot say enough of the damages. Schooling (K-16, at least) as it is conceived through a W. colonial modernist (industrial) capitalist lens has to be challenged ongoing. Most recently, Stein, the American educational philosopher, has pointed to this reductive and violent approach to education as a “keystone” feature to critically address in systematic ways—that is, if we expect anything really important progressively to change, reform and transform the ways learning is typically organized.

Let us explicitly address the elephant in the room: teachers, students, and administrators are all subject against their will to the terms of the education commodity proposition. The politics of education are no longer really about within-school conflicts between students, teachers, and administration (and all various combinations and alliances), as it has been since the 1960s. Today the situation is one in which everyone involved in education can embrace a shared concern about the encroachment of approaches that are hyper-quantified, over-financialized, market-driven, and pedagogically naive. The education commodity proposition is the keystone of the broader framework of *reductive human capital theory*, which I discuss at length elsewhere (Stein, 2013; 2019). If the keystone is removed, the whole edifice crumbles. Innovations in the decommodification of education are potentially massively powerful leverage points for social change.²

Stein, like myself, is primarily addressing the North American scene in the domain of learning and education. That’s where we live and have studied education the most. I have no doubt what Stein says above applies to many other countries as W. globalization under the ideology of neoliberalism

² Stein, Z. (2019). Invited Editorial: The Education Commodity Proposition. *Allies for Education*, 2(2), 1-7. Retrieved from <http://www.zakstein.org/invited-editorial-the-education-commodity-proposition/>

knows no bounds, especially since the mid-1980s, and much of this is led by American elite interests. I am glad Stein, like any philosopher worth their salt, is looking for and detecting and naming the ‘elephant in the room’ in educational discourses today. I would add that any such elephant, be it as he describes as “keystone” or as others may have their own versions, is a monster so big as to be so ignored—invisible (?)—because of *fear* of facing it and its implications. The conformist consensus reality would be (apparently) shattered if the elephant was revealed. Thus, note my interest in the role of fear in learning and education. Stein too, in a very provocative and interesting way pursues an inquiry, that gives *fear* some due attention, into what he sees overall as the need to “return” to a “metaphysics of love”³ to counteract the elephant in the room.

The elephant is complicated and complex, and at the same time is perhaps, as Stein and I would agree, just as simple as facing the truth—of the reality of current human-planetary relations. I am speaking about the meta-context of the Anthropocene era⁴ and cascading crises the earth community is facing from the obvious global warming emergency to mass species extinctions as two of the more characteristic features of Anthropocene challenges. Near-immanent extinction of humanity is on the table and no educator who is alive today would ignore this factual reality of the Anthropocene and the pressures it is placing on the very definition of being human, of humanity, and of life on earth and the future.

We are being called to re-imagine everything under this ominous threat of great suffering and extinctions at unprecedented rates in at least the human memory of human history. What will learning and educational discourses look like in this transitioning into a metamodern state of collapse—deconstruction and reconstruction. How can we assist the intelligence of our species and beyond our species to catalyze and synergize to make the great changes required to perhaps stop the worst of the crises from their worst outcomes? Stein engages this without hesitation to call out the elephant in the room, which he does from different angles and with different scaling and precision. I appreciate that ‘call out’ and especially appreciate he ‘steps back’ from the urgency and emergency dictates so easy to be trap

³ I have not read all of Stein’s work, but only a small sample of late. Mostly, I’ll be drawing from his major article on a metamodern metaphysics for education (Stein, 2018). Stein, Z. (2018). Love in a time between worlds: On the metamodern “return” to a metaphysics of Eros. *Integral Review*, 14(1), 186-220.

⁴ For e.g. see <https://www.britannica.com/science/Anthropocene-Epoch>

within as grand narratives (mostly driven by excess fear⁵), while acknowledging them as well, and gives us as a species a point of reference for recalibrating the foundations of our very worldview (i.e., metaphysics)—and, he begins with Love and Fear. At least, that is the claim I am going to make and focus on in this technical paper.

Dr. Zak Stein: Short Biography

Stein, is an independent scholar, a creative and bold *integral* thinker, with an Ed.D. from Harvard University. His full bio and CV is available on his website,⁶ so I won't repeat that here. He serves as Co-President for the last few years for the Center for Integral Wisdom. It is this background that most interests me because of my own involvement with the Integral Movement (Theory) for decades. I met Stein at the 2010 Integral Theory Conference when he presented a powerful session on the learning outcomes and assessment process of the then active Integral Studies graduate program at JFK University. I recall how he was keen on unveiling the problems as well as the successes of the program, and of the ways we measure learning, in this case in post-secondary institutions. Integral is a particular label used here after the work of integral philosophers and theorists throughout human history, but in particular the work of the American philosopher Ken Wilber. I have followed, studied and critiqued Wilber's work since 1982.⁷

We have a severe “educational crises,” says Stein. Yet, he believes in “concrete utopian theorizing” and “social miracles” that “make enlightenment an everyday thing.”⁸ His visionary futurist sensibility can be read in nearly everything he writes. Stein argues we need to recover the “learning processes” over and above content accumulation and all the excessive quantitative measurement expectations (“tyranny”) that often inhibits the

⁵ The work of the Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi is helpful as a counter-hegemonic to “emergency time” narratives, as well as the critical educator Henry A. Giroux; for e.g., see Giroux, H.A. (2003). *The abandoned generation: Democracy beyond the culture of fear*. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan.

⁶ See www.zakstein.org

⁷ For a quick overview see my recent video on Wilber:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPI3-ANv308>

⁸ According to Stein & Gafni (2017), p. 93. Stein, Z., & Gafni, M. (2017). The apocalypse of the modern world-system and related possibilities for democratizing enlightenment. *Spanda Journal*, 2(1), 93-103.

best and most adaptive learning necessary for a complex future. As a self-declared educational-psychological “developmentalist,”⁹

Stein is a gen-Xer who had at some point been attracted to Wilber’s work and others and has invested his career as an educator in that pursuit, offering his own twists, turns and critiques. In that session in 2010 he noted *via* his findings (among other things) that masters students in integral studies, although they were complex holistic thinkers, and sensitive to well-being and other “integral” types of values, they seemed more be able to espouse theory and principles but not really apply them—and, especially not very creatively or originally to cases. That’s what I remember stood out.

And, at that point I was confirmed in some of my own beliefs and experiences of just how hard it is to find a well-integrated integralist. Stein seems well on the way to his own integration of the spectrum of consciousness that Wilber offers and of the multiple-intelligences required to be a great integral thinker and philosopher, and educator.

Integral in this context, is a meta-theory which Stein is always relying on, amongst other approaches, and this offers him great depth and scope in analyzing what is going on and creating interventions. It shapes his view of learning and its relationship to schooling and life itself—and evolution of consciousness itself. I won’t go into the details of this overall integral approach as one can read up on that or watch videos online.¹⁰ It is just so important to say that Stein is an up and coming young educational philosopher who ought to make a big impact on Education and he’ll do so by his abilities as an integralist. Rare are highly original and provocative integralists found in Education overall. So, I believe that contributes to why his work deserves my attention.

However, beyond the many things I agree with (mostly) in Stein’s work, there is nothing as important to my way of thinking than to examine how he constitutes a *metaphysics of Love* in his transformative vision. That said, one ought to keep in mind that this technical paper is a cursory process piece of inquiry and writing and not in any way meant to do full-justice to Stein’s overall work or his views. Further research and discussion with Stein and others will fill in gaps in the future before I write more about his

⁹ Stein, Z. (2009). Educational crises and the scramble for usable knowledge. *Integral Review*, 5(2), 355-67.

¹⁰ For e.g., [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_\(Ken_Wilber\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_(Ken_Wilber))

work. However, I think my few critiques offered herein could act as initial prompts to enrich future conversations.

Metaphysics of Love and Fear in a Time of Great Crises

Before diving in really deep to Stein's metaphysics of Love (*Eros*), I'll briefly overview some of my own prior explorations in this regard before encountering Stein's inquiry. This will serve to situate my own work (largely, but not totally) within the pivotal work of Wilber's on this topic. Thus, readers will better be able to assess sources and contexts for my critiques of Stein's approach¹¹ to "reimagining humanity's identity" in the face of "shocks" of existence through history and the evolution of consciousness itself.

First, Stein's unique "meta-disciplinarity" approach requires some mention as core to his understanding of philosophy's task, and is certainly applicable for his view of an educational philosophy for the rather horrific and somewhat terrifying period now, of the Anthropocene. He wrote,

Meta-disciplinary reflections are often neglected. Ideally they would serve to give even the most focused expert a broader view about the nature of their discipline. The goals of inquiry would be put on the table. It would be admitted that other disciplines exist and generate valid knowledge, that each discipline knows only a piece of the world. And so, even the disciplinarian with no interdisciplinary ambitions would take a big view. In many ways this is the role of philosophy.... I will say more about this when we discuss Wilber's meta-disciplinary model of integral methodological pluralism.¹²

¹¹ I acknowledge the co-authorship and influence in Stein's views from Marc Gafni, and generally I'll draw also from their article: Stein, Z, & Gafni, M. (2015). Reimagining humanity's identity: Responding to the second shock of existence. *World Future Review*, 7(1), 1-10.

¹² Stein (2007), p. 101. For Stein, a meta-disciplinary approach is distinct from trans-disciplinary approach; the latter, which I utilize for much of my work on fearology, albeit, I agree with Stein that the scaffolding for good inquiry ought to be meta-disciplinary, and thus I often include a critical integral fearology structure to my work. See Stein, Z. (2007). Modeling the demands of interdisciplinarity: Toward a framework of evaluating interdisciplinary endeavors. *Integral Review*, 4, 92-107.

Stein’s comprehensive educational philosophy is designed for great crises,¹³ as I frame it initially and foundationally (i.e., ethically). And it’s based on a particular (integral) meta-disciplinary approach to Love and Fear and their interrelationship. Albeit, Stein typically does not say this so overtly. I’ll get to that later below.

How we humans, individually and collectively, negotiate (manage and/or transform) this *Love vs. Fear* classical (and strategic) binary formation (apparently) is crucial to everything that follows—because it is these ethical *meta-motivations* (my term) that determine all life—all Life. In oversimplified terms (ultimately): Do we choose to follow Love or Fear? Stein says choose Love. Interesting enough, the current 2020 Democratic candidate for President, Marianne Williamson, says exactly the same thing and a whole lot of people in America are supporting her bid on those moral grounds and metaphysical grounds. Again, it is not my focus for this technical paper to argue this binary’s validity at great length, I have done so elsewhere.¹⁴ Indeed, I appreciate Stein’s attention to offering both a critique of metaphysics due in our times, yet, he articulates a “metamodern” (i.e., post-postmodern) view for why a “return” to metaphysics at all. His point, “Metaphysics can be practiced after Kant and Darwin only by theorizing beyond what is thought of as acceptable in postmodern [anti-metaphysical debate] and late-stage capitalism.”¹⁵ Any futurist-relevant quality educational philosophy today must engage it—but in a grounded, if not scientific, emancipatory way.

¹³ And equally, is emergent *with* occurring great crises—arguably, with the two shocks he theorizes about, which I argue are fear-shocks at the deepest existential level of being (cf. Heidegger).

¹⁴ For e.g., see Fisher, R. M. (2010). *The world’s fearlessness teachings: A critical integral approach to fear management/education for the 21st century*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America; see also Fisher, R. M. (2012). Love and fear. Yellow Paper, DIFS #6. Carbondale, IL: Center for Spiritual Inquiry & Integral Education; Fisher, R. M. (2015). Teaching ourselves: A lovist or fearist perspective. Technical Paper No. 54. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute; Fisher, R. M. (2017). Radical love: Is it radical enough? *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 8(1), 261-81. Fisher, R. M. (2017a). Love-Fear: Uni-Bicentric Theorem as basis for the Fearlessness Movement. Technical Paper No. 65. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

¹⁵ The (re-)defining of “metaphysics” and “metamodern” is found in Stein (2018), p. 187-88.

We need something just that ‘big’—as Stein and Gafni¹⁶ suggest in their musings on the darker-side of world reality today:

[Stein quoting Gafni in a 2012 speech]: We live in a world of outrageous pain. [soft-side of the Anthropocene condition] The only response to outrageous pain [and fear] is outrageous [fearless] love. [Stein concludes:] Gafni’s books are unrivaled in their provision of a profoundly new language of liberation [corrective to most post-modern spirituality]. These are teachings for our time, which is a time to practice spirituality in the world, fearlessly, with eyes open, and to participate in a planet needing to be transformed by the power [of] justice and love.¹⁷

If it is not obvious by now, I’ll say it bluntly, Stein takes a *spiritual* perspective (but not only) on his metamodern analysis of the world’s crises and the crucial role of educational reform and transformation. Although, for him, this is equivalent to a *philosophical* perspective and both these are perspectives amongst other perspectives in an overall holistic-integral approach (i.e., an integral methodological pluralism¹⁸). As with interdisciplinarity, generally, the more views or perspectives the better on any topic, he would say; but also those many views need to be sorted and critiqued as to their best specificity for various levels of problems and analysis. My point is, that be it Love or Fear or “fearlessly” you can see Stein is not about to shy from such potent conceptions—albeit, later I’ll argue how little he directly talks about emotion(s), feeling(s), and the affective domain—and, more importantly, how he downplays the use of the word “fear” in his publications.

Okay, now to briefly state the germane foundational premises and the theories I operate from re: Love and Fear. Since 1989, when I took on the topic to study fear/fearlessness as a dialectical phenomenon at the core meta-motivational template of life (Life), perennial wisdom literature and a whole lot more, globally and historically, taught me that Love vs. Fear is a

¹⁶ Rabbi Gafni, American author, spiritual teacher, activist, and a radical Jewish theological scholar; go to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Gafni

¹⁷ Stein (2010), p. 177. Stein, Z. (2010). On spiritual books and their readers: A review of *Radical Kabbalah* [book review: Gafni, M. (2012). *Radical Kabbalah 2 Vol. Set*. Boulder, CO: Integral Publisher.

¹⁸ See Chapter One for details of this approach in Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Boston, MA: Integral Books.

near universal theme of great importance. The terms may slightly vary at times, but even Good vs. Evil could be seen as analogous or homologous to Love vs. Fear. The virtues and liberation depend on this distinction: Is one's life directed by Love or Fear?¹⁹ I also found this is easier to speak and theorize about than to actualize—as love and fear turn out to be very complex notions across pre-modern to modern to postmodern and integral considerations. Stein's important recent publication on Love is labeled by him a “metaphysics of Eros” for the 21st century.²⁰ Ultimately, I'll explore in this paper how such a metaphysics is constituted for education and learning and what may be some of its strengths and weaknesses.

Stein is certainly not the only one to posit “Love” is the answer for education (and the world)—for example, the great educationist Paulo Freire did so and many others before and since. Do we need a *philosophy of love* or a *philosophy of fear*—to best guide learning and education in the Anthropocene? A big question, not that I'll try to answer it this round of writing—but I invite others to take this up in the future. No doubt, we need a dialectical network of philosophies directed towards *both love and fear* with equal valuation. Unfortunately, what I have learned in postmodern academia and the average group of citizens, or teacher's circles, and just about anywhere in W. societies—is that people don't like to talk about fear and worse—if they do, they do so without much in depth knowledge about fear. Black feminist, queer critical educator, bell hooks wrote, “In our society we [educators] make much of love and say little about fear.”²¹ Our curricular discourse on reality is heavily skewed on many dimensions by this bias and ideology. It needs to be challenged.

Typically (stereotypically) most parents and teachers feel they have to be positive and hopeful all the time, especially in the current emerging “culture of positivity”—which is, arguably, very inhibiting to a good fear education in the Anthropocene.²² The Anthropocene, from an affective reality standpoint is terrifying, if anyone is really awake about it. Such denial,

¹⁹ Again, earlier I shared my writing on this. But one contemporary ‘new age’ movement called “A Course in Miracles,” popularly sets out this universal binary in very clear opposition and guides people. It is intended for ethical and spiritual development beyond the dogma of any one religious faith—inevitably, moving one's life from fear to love (see e.g., Foundation for Inner Peace (1975). *A course in miracles*. Tiburn, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace).

²⁰ Ibid., (Stein, 2018).

²¹ hooks, b. (2000). *All about love*. New York: William Morrow, p. 93.

²² E.g., see Fisher, R. (2019). How the “culture of positivity” debilitates Fear Studies. Technical Paper No. 81. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

that's all a major component of what I call the *Fear Problem*.²³ How can we know fear when: (a) fear is constantly morphing into varied disguises, (b) we are too afraid to investigate it, (c) and/or we may not even have adequate methodologies to investigate it without biased denial and fear-based motivations occluding the reality of fear (Fear) and the Fear Problem we live within—that is, within the 'Fear' Matrix?²⁴ That's all part of an *epistemology of fear* problem that has grabbed my attention since 1989. Many of my other publications have lots on that so I won't repeat it all here.

With this Steinian liberation perspective in mind, let's now turn to Wilber briefly for an integral philosophical 'big picture' and metaphysics on Reality. Yes, a liberation perspective too. Stein and myself are followers, more or less, of the Wilberian schema. It has to be acknowledged that Wilber's comprehensive metaphysical scheme (especially pre-1997) and his later post-metaphysical scheme may be somewhat distinct for sure, but they overlap and the latter is inevitably influenced by the former.

My own deepest regard is for Wilber's work prior to 1997 and that's mainly because his work on fear (Fear) is most profound in that period and quickly dissipates after that regarding Fear, or what he has called earlier *Phobos-Thanatos* (Fear) in contradistinction (and opposition) to *Eros-Agape* (Love).²⁵ The nutshell Wilberian schema, influenced he says highly by Plotinus's philosophy, is that the universe (or at least Life) is motivated by the spirit—and that is Love, of which he categorized graphically as ascending (*Eros*) and descending (*Agape*) currents on the great Spiral of Evolution. Development of any organism or living system will be healthy and justly growing fine *via differentiation* processes and a corrective self/system regulation of ascending and descending in some kind of 'har-

²³ I owe this term to Bonaro Overstreet in a marvelous book from the early 1950s in her Chapter One "Why Our Fear-Problem Remains Unsolved," in Overstreet, B. W. (1951/71). *Understanding fear in ourselves and others*. New York: Harper & Row.

²⁴ In my dissertation in Education, I called this out, especially in a post-9/11 era and asked how will we create adequate "fearless leadership" for our times and the future? See Fisher, R. M. (2003). *Fearless leadership in and out of the 'Fear' Matrix*. Unpublished dissertation. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.

²⁵ He specifically gives these a good deal of attention in Wilber (1995). I have tracked out (Fisher, 1997) near all his publications the complexity (sometimes inconsistencies) in his labels on these conceptions throughout his work and offer my own interpretation of how he deals with Love vs. Fear (and/or Love-Fear) in his integral kosmology. Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology and spirituality (Vol. 1)*. Boston, MA: Shambhala; Fisher, R. M. (1997). *Thanatos and Phobos: 'Fear' and its role in Ken Wilber's transpersonal theory*. Technical Paper No. 4. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

monious balance,’ more or less. However, problems come when these currents are disturbed from their healthy functioning and *dissociation* overtakes differentiation as a growth (maintenance) process. Then, *Phobos* (more or less) begins to overtake *Eros* and *Thanatos* (more or less) begins to overtake *Agape*. In other words, Fear (i.e., fear-based²⁶ motivations) infect the Spiral and Love is no longer so pure and good and all-encompassing and/or powerfully influencing. It remains, but it is repressed, more or less. As a reminder, there is a kind of grand Will force invoked in the Wilberian philosophy for these dynamic meta-motivations because they aren’t typically conscious in their operations for any creature (species and/or institution), and are mostly (invisibly) unconscious. Yet, there is some relative degree of agency as well for creatures to make decisions and that comes down to what I call “fear management” systems (or Defence Intelligence, systems).²⁷

This is part of Wilber’s explanatory metaphysic for ‘The Fall’—a (near) universal theme found archetypally in narratives and myths throughout history. Again, these currents of Life and anti-Life (so to speak), could be called Good and Evil (so to speak) are dynamic and in constant tension (regulation), if not in (deadly) conflict for domination of one over the other. It is, philosophically, a conflictual kosmos, argues Wilber.²⁸ I find this well-substantiated from various angles, elegant, and makes a lot of sense; but of course, there is so much nuance I have omitted here for convenience to make my brief points of critique.

²⁶ “Fear-based” has an ordinary meaning in which one could say all things living at some level have some “will to survive” (*a la* Schopenhauer) and thus have some amount of fear and are motivated within this fear (and/or anxiety). This is typical of a psychoanalytic and existential view. For my work, I use *fear-based* (see Fisher & Subba, 2016, p. 156 for definition) more strategically to point to pathological formations, which has to do with when approximately 51% or more of the motivation of a system (individual or collective) is fear-driven (of which one has to include, culturally-modified ‘fear’ into that; see Fisher & Subba, 2016, p. 156, re: ‘fear’). The complexities of defining fear (and ‘fear’) I have left out of this discussion and paper but they are always there in my transdisciplinary work on this topic. Fisher, R. M., & Subba, D. (2016). *Philosophy of fearism: A first East-West dialogue*. Australia: Xlibris.

²⁷ In my work I link Wilber’s “spectrum of consciousness” of evolution with fear management systems theory (e.g., see Fisher, 2010).

²⁸ For three decades I have, against the grain of most all interpreters, argued Wilber is foundationally a conflict theorist/philosopher (especially, his work in the pre-1997 period) (e.g., see Fisher, 1997a). Fisher, R. M. (1997a). A guide to Wilberland: Some common misunderstandings of the critics of Ken Wilber and his work on transpersonal theory prior to 1995. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 37(4), 47-54.

Already, you can see my tendency to talk more about Fear than Love, not that either is for my way of thinking ultimately more important than the other. I find such a ‘balanced’ and integral perspective not so evident in Stein’s work—he continually excludes talking about fear (or Fear)—other than in very minor ways—albeit, still important and still unique for any educational philosopher I know in the contemporary West.

Stein’s *Eros-Thanatos* Critique

So, Stein is looking to build a strong “cure” for crises in our times in terms of his critique of the “dysfunctions of post-modern identity formation”²⁹ and his critique of modernism and postmodernism and awareness of the demands of the Anthropocene era. I am curious to see in his major work on the metaphysics of Love (*Eros*) that he’s been influenced recently by his colleagues Gafni’s and Kincaid’s book *A Return to Eros* in 2017. Then to see he proposes a “cosmo-erotic humanism”³⁰ in a transpersonal and evolutionary register. This is no ordinary or personal (mere emotional) love or sexuality—*Eros* goes far beyond that into the higher spiritual consciousness domains. And, I agree, and so does Wilber. ‘Big’ crises need ‘Big’ solutions and thus Stein’s approach is extremely broad and deep in scope. He re-imagines learning and education (including schooling) as part of and serving of a cosmic evolution—an aim of a rare few other holistic and spiritual educators throughout the centuries. In my inquiry I focus on *Eros-Thanatos* in his schema, of which he has not published a lot as yet.

Certainly he writes mostly about *Eros*, relative to *Thanatos*—as part of his educational philosophy. Yet, I look for a ‘balanced’ (integral) conceptualization in any occurring discourse on Love (*Eros*) by anyone. I’m looking for equal valuation of Fear—again, whatever one may call this, for example, *Phobos* and *Thanatos* (*a la* Wilber³¹)—that is, as long as we remain in

²⁹ See Stein (2010), p. 176.

³⁰ Stein (2018), p. 186.

³¹ Wilber writes a good deal about *Eros* and *Thanatos* early on in his career, and then by 1995 he crystalizes his thought (metaphysics) on *Eros-Agape* contra *Phobos-Thanatos*; however, overall he (like most everyone) philosophizes way more about Love (*Eros*, especially)—the later very similar to Gafni & Kincaid (2017). Gafni, M., & Kincaid, K. (2017). *A return to eros: The radical experience of being fully alive*. Dallas, TX: BenBella. Note: Marianne Williamson (already mentioned earlier) first came out with a national USA best-seller book with a similar title in 2000: *A Return to Love*. Likewise, Williamson, in her impressive self-help type books, talks all about Love and Fear but never brings in concepts (dynamics) of *Thanatos* or *Phobos*. This is a very troublesome approach, philosophically. I

the register of the holistic, spiritual, metamodern, metaphysical, transpersonal, integral and mystical frameworks of Reality. Gafni and Kincaid, who's book highly influences Stein re: *Eros*, has one chapter on "Eros: From Fear to Liberation" but leaves *Thanatos* out of the picture. It also leaves "Atman Project" out. And this is exactly where I turn to Stein for a more extended and important rendering in this context of the topic Love and Fear or Love vs. Fear at the metaphysical level of discourse and reality. However, it is worthy that Gafni and Kincaid acknowledge, as would Stein, Wilber or myself, that moving from "fear to liberation" is a core conceptualization and principle of human development. And beyond that it is a great ethical guidepost to "which direction to go"—what I have called (with some others) the "path of fearlessness."³²

For my work, Love talk and Fear talk are central. Recently, I began a series of spontaneous recorded Feartalks with guests available on Youtube. I take this extremely seriously and thus have labeled myself a *fearologist* (since 2000) because of that. Perhaps Stein, Gafni and the like would prefer (if at all) to label themselves a loveologist. Recall, back to the earlier question undergirding this entire technical paper: Do we need a *philosophy of love* or a *philosophy of fear*—to best guide learning and education in the Anthropocene? Furthermore, do we need experts on fear as much as on love(?). And, to have them working respectfully together in any such metamodern philosophizing and theorizing—would be ideal. It hasn't yet happened, to my knowledge.

Let's return to Stein's critical educational and philosophical intervention in his major 2018 paper ("Love in a Time Between Worlds") on a metaphysics of Love (Eros) for our times. He starts the first page with a long quote from Sigmund Freud. That beginning is not exactly what one would expect from a decidedly "spiritual" approach re: the topic of Love. But there it is, and what Freud basically says in the quote is that just because humans have largely gained control over and managed their lives and Nature to their

tend to distrust their findings and see these works as overly 'romantic' (via their authors) because of this thinness in articulation and neglect (or denial).

³² I am virtually (and uncharacteristically) leaving out my philosophy and theorizing on "fearlessness" (i.e., the fear/fearlessness dialectic at the core of my work). It can be accessed in most of my other publications since 1989. The primary awareness (and *telos*) of growth, development and evolution from "fear to liberation" is not only from Stein, Gafni, etc. but has a long cross-cultural (perennial) history. For e.g., it's central in the work on dying and death work in the Buddhist praxis of Joan Halifax; see Chapter 13 "Doorways to Truth: From Fear to Liberation" in Halifax, J. (2009). *Being with dying: Cultivating compassion and fearlessness in the presence of death*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

own benefit, there is a deeper less positive side-effect from such a venture. Unfortunately, the dominating and controlling human species members are largely filled with unrest, unhappiness and a pervasive “mood of anxiety.”³³ We’re troubled souls; not that Freud was the first to say this about the human condition—and, my recent studies of Arthur Schopenhauer’s (19th century) philosophy indicate he took a mighty radical ‘turn’ in the history of philosophizing—his work is foundational on fear—and, his influence stunning on the later iconic depth psychologists like Freud, Jung, etc.³⁴

Depth psychoanalysis begins here—as does any quality deep-psychological (and sociological) analysis of the human condition. I thank, as does Stein, Freud for bravely saying what he said in this regard. The issue is that “anxiety” (i.e., a form of fear) is *pervasive*, more or less. Modern humans seem unable to escape this particular (neurotic) consequence of (at least) modernity. And, what Freud doesn’t say, nor does Stein point to it, there is also the causal aspect implied that *fear is at the root* (motivation) of the “control over the forces of nature” (using Freud’s words in quotes). In a living fear-based management system (arguably) *fear* is both a significant (if not dominating) consequence and cause—at least, that would be one premise to begin with,³⁵ as I do in my work and others have also done so.³⁶ The question remains if this premise is accepted for our inquiry: What is the role of (evolutionary) Love in this scenario? And, there we begin the approximation of a kosmocentric perspective and theodicy re: Love and Fear (or Love vs. Fear).

³³ Paraphrasing and quoting Freud’s words here (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1931/61) in Gafni (2018), p. 186.

³⁴ See Fisher, R. M. (2019). Schopenhauer on fear. Technical Paper No. 84. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

³⁵ In conceptualizing a ‘Big Picture’ (i.e., Spiral of Development), a case of theoretical support for this can be found re: “first-tier” v-memes (and their concomitant six fear management systems) developed in Fisher (2010); utilizing Wilber and Beck’s work re: Spiral Dynamics integral (theory). Suffice it to say, “second-tier” is defined, from the affective register, as no longer primarily fear-based—and, this fear-based condition (dynamic) dissolves into “third-tier” (nondual). It is beyond the scope of this discussion to develop this in detail and it is not necessary to the aim of this technical paper.

³⁶ Perhaps, most importantly, is the philosophical work of Ernest Becker (who is also cited heavily by Wilber in some of his pivotal earlier writings, and occasionally by Stein). Becker and the later “Terror Management Theory” (from experimental social psychology) has been foundational in a good deal of my own psychological theorizing, philosophy and philosophy of education—and, my asking: What would make an ideal fear management/education curriculum and pedagogy today(?); see e.g., Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

I'll begin with Stein's view on Love *vs.* Fear, for heuristic purposes and not focus on the more technical complex distinctions of Love *and* Fear as an equally valid (nondual) metaphysical orientation. I have to keep this technical paper short so much background context is left out. Stein's really important move philosophically occurs at the end of the Freudian quote and this articulation of the "struggle" of humankind (virtually from the start to today)—and that is, Stein's adding in square brackets "*Thanatos*" to end the opening quote. Rare can one find such a bold move by any W. educational philosopher that I know of. I'll return to this momentarily.

Indeed, Stein, like many others in history, believes we are currently (in the Anthropocene era) "witness to the greatest transformation of the planet since the first *Homo sapiens* began building languages and societies."³⁷ For Stein and his revisionist metamodern radical humanist philosophy, "this force *Eros*" has to be *central* in the human experience. Thus, he sets forth (in part) his educational philosophy (like some ancients) upon a continuous thread within the *affective* register—and, one may even reduce this to an emotional register. Again, a number of philosophers, old and new, have said as much, arguing that there are only two (grand) arch-emotions in the human experience: Love and Fear.³⁸ Typically amongst this tradition of philosophizing, Love is the thread that holds the universe together.³⁹ Stein argues in a metaphysical way that "an understanding of love" is "a transpersonal universal force akin to gravity"⁴⁰—and, if that is so, one has to ask then: What is Fear—anti-gravity?

A case could be made that Stein (*a la* Freud) is suggesting (theorizing) *Love* is central and already already the most powerful force in the universe—metaphysically speaking. But then comes the grist for the mill—the human experience—and, concomitantly (for diverse reasons) development of the human being is struck (as it were) with a lightning bolt (?)—in the process of waking up—becoming aware—and indeed Stein argues persuasively Fear appears in some powerful form as 'the Other'—*contra* Love. Stein argues because of us being 'shocked' (individually and collectively

³⁷ Stein (2015), p. 2; he noted this theme is detailed in a forthcoming Gafni, M., & Stein, Z. (2015). *Towards a new politics of evolutionary love*. San Francisco, CA: Integral Wisdom Press. I found no such book actually published.

³⁸ See Fisher (2012).

³⁹ Stein's work at times, on a superficial reading, could be seen by critics as akin to a lot of 'new age' (esoteric) discourse on "Love" is all and all is love and love will save the world. I have not read or studied his work (or Gafni's) enough to make up my mind in this regard.

⁴⁰ Stein (2015), p. 186.

as a species). This is precisely where the Steinian turn in educational philosophy for our times becomes really relevant. Stein added “Thanatos” at the end of Freud’s quote to make his point. Do not forget what it was that Freud was concluding in the early 1930s at the time when Germany’s Nazism was well on the rise in Europe. I expect the Jewish autobiographical and cultural roots of Stein (and Gafni) are significant in this ‘call to remember’ and ‘never forget.’ Nazi Terror reigned and did so for a reason. Educators, pay attention!⁴¹ And Stein says this overtly—beginning with the next part of Freud’s original quote and story—theodicy—(in Freud’s near-mythical words):

And now [in this discontent of civilization—becoming aware of its own condition by the 1930s] it is to be expected that *the other* of the two ‘Heavenly Powers,’ eternal *Eros*, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his *equally* immortal adversary.⁴² [italics added for emphasis]

Explicitly, what a powerfully evocative quote Stein chooses to open his work on a metamodern Love for his vision of learning, schooling and education in the Anthropocene. Citing Freud alone in postmodern times is usually enough to get one excluded within many circles in the academy and beyond—that is, unless you are dissing his work. But Stein, not particularly a psychoanalytic thinker, is obviously *not* hacking Freud but integrating Freud (somewhat) into his own unique philosophical thinking—into his building a case for “shock” at the roots of understanding metamodern Love. And, he’s doing so with a theological sensibility, a theodicy, like a story of Good vs. Evil.

Before I explicate his evolutionary “shock” (fear and terror) hypothesis, it ought to be noted that Freud, like Stein, are positing that the Kosmos is indeed a battleground (metaphysically) of two forces of ‘Heavenly Powers’ (Freud admits in his secular way). Freud’s quote was left out of the original 1929 version of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, but (according to Stein):

Freud added this reflection to the conclusion of the 1931 edition as it was becoming clear that Germany was sliding towards fascism under Hitler’s rule. In making appeals to metaphysics (positing the eternal

⁴¹ One may hear echoes within this grief and moralism as coming from some within the much earlier 20th century Frankfurt School of critical theory and their views on education post-Nazism (e.g., Theodore Adorno).

⁴² Quoted from Freud in Stein (2018), p. 186.

forces of Eros and Thanatos), Freud put a controversial finishing touch on the theoretical edifice of psychoanalysis [as metapsychology⁴³].

Stein concludes “Eros in particular has been repeatedly placed at the core of metaphysical characterizations of the human being”⁴⁴ and he wants to take this seriously for his own post-postmodern version.

On the other hand, more implicitly, *Thanatos* is acknowledged by Freud and concomitantly Stein as a co-participative emergent evolutionary (motivational) ‘equal’ (i.e., “*equally* immortal adversary” force, says Freud above) to Love. For Freud, Love is the “other” and for Stein Fear is the “other.” Leaving aside the problematics of unconscious ‘choices’ being made by humans, the question is: Can we recognize, when in the process of othering, that we make one the enemy of the other? And, if so (e.g., the Love vs. Fear form) then is that a fear-based othering (e.g., the postmodern concern of “fear of the Other”)? These topics are implicit and wanting for more explanation and Stein has not yet developed this detail and nuance, to my knowledge. Regardless, I’m appreciative he is pulling this up to the surface, even if implicitly, as indeed educators of all stripes ought to be concerned with this ‘equation’ (and ‘equating’)—at least (apparently), as part of an good educational philosophy for the Anthropocene—an era which undoubtedly is a scary one (perhaps) like no other era. Stein’s philosophy is a preparation (not unlike Freud’s) for a potentially dark confrontation—on the metaphysical battleground he is envisioning and mapping for us in the early 21st century.

With this establishment of ‘equal’ co-participation in evolution, then, we ought to be able to expect equal talking about *Thanatos* (Fear) as about *Eros* (Love) in Stein’s philosophizing. This is not the case, not even close. *Eros* gets near all the attention. However, a closer reading shows he’s aware of more than *Eros* as an important “force” and that is indicated by his beginning with Freud’s poignant quote shaping a modern metapsychology that has had amazing impact over the last century and more. However,

⁴³ In many ways Stein’s metamodern turn to metaphysics is aligned with his own development, even if partial, of a *metapsychology* (which he defines)—and, which also appeals to my work (see e.g., Fisher, 2019a). Fisher, R. M. (2019a). Fearlessness psychology: An introduction. Technical Paper No. 79. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

⁴⁴ Stein (2018), p. 187.

none of the followers of Freud gave *Thanatos* its metaphysical ‘equality’ in their theorizing.

Development (e.g., curricular) agendas re: human beings, for one, are going to be inherently very skewed (partial) if such an equalizing emphasis is dismissed. Spiritualities, of all stripes, likewise will be skewed. I have dedicated my work to a reconstruction of valuation for Fear as central in a post-postmodern metapsychology and philosophy.⁴⁵ Stein, at some level, takes this seriously, so let’s return now to what I mentioned earlier as his “shock” hypothesis as it relates to understanding his view on *Thanatos* and its role in evolution.

Stein’s Evolutionary Dual “Shock” Hypothesis

All along in this technical paper, paralleling Stein’s philosophy, is the immanent (if not threatening) sense of a world in *crisis*—and, in particular, says Stein, “educational crises.”⁴⁶ Rare is it to read Stein’s own fears shared but when talking about educational crises of the day, he says that the “institutional domination” via a “tyranny of measures” for everything in schooling and beyond has to be faced. He concludes, “I think that there is good reason to fear this as a possible future.”⁴⁷ It’s a future his own work is attempting to undermine and steer in a better direction—away from an impending oppressive, and terrifying, ‘Brave New World.’

We require, he insists, “*metaphysics*” again because its absence (particularly in postmodernism) “*is creating new and more dangerous problems.*”⁴⁸ In this meta-context of cascading crises on a global, if not cosmic (metaphysical) scale, clearly Stein is not providing us with another functionalist educational philosophy for status quo maintenance learning, education and socialization. That makes his work part of a critical philosophy (and theory) tradition. It is radical, in my view, on several levels including its meta-modern integral approach but more specific to this paper I am very interested in his evolutionary “shock” hypothesis, as I call it. The crises we face, for example, global warming and a climate emergency, for one, is a symptom arguably of a deeper metaphysical dis-ease.

⁴⁵ Another contemporary stream of such centralizing fear in philosophy is by the work of the Nepalese author Desh Subba (i.e., “philosophy of fearism”); for e.g., see Fisher & Subba (2016).

⁴⁶ E.g., Stein (2009).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁴⁸ Stein (2018), p. 190.

The metaphysical dis-ease (as pathology) is pointed to (somewhat) in Stein’s reading of Freud (above). Stein didn’t want to leave out ‘the Other’—the easily repressed Shadow—of the pair of ‘Heavenly Powers’ (i.e., great cosmic and dynamic “forces”). And, thus he inserts “*Thanatos*” to remind us of the other-side of Love (*Eros*), so to speak. He sets forth a metaphysical problem (even if rather implicitly in his published work), that Love needs to be theorized and understood along with its partner *Thanatos* (Fear). Yet, Stein, being an integralist in the Wilberian stream of critique, is not about to reduce ‘the Other’ of Love to only *Thanatos* and thus he brings in a more complicated relevant notion of the “Atman Project” (*a la* Wilber). I’ll get to that later.

First, to Stein’s evolutionary hypothesis of dual “shocks” (i.e., existential terror-awakening) in human development and history. Without any need to point the finger of blame/shame on any individual, group or institution in history, he wrote,

The first shock of existence—the awareness of a separate self, and its mortality—kicked off thousands of years of what might be best described as the collective construction of compensatory and defense mechanisms.⁴⁹

Stein is drawing on developmental theories but also perennial wisdom in this hypothesis (i.e., reality), with the likes of Joseph Campbell behind the notion that (in his own words) “There is a wonderful story of the deity, of the Self that said, ‘I am.’ As soon as it said ‘I am,’ it was afraid.”⁵⁰ Campbell’s study of the universal metapsychology behind in myths, showed this common Creation theme of how moving from innocence to awareness involves this initial (developmental) shock experience and thus the human journey of consciousness is grooved—as one of moving from fear to liberation (love). The dualism of language (especially, some languages) leads to this ‘separation anxiety’ with one’s true identity, which arguably the former is not the original state of human nature but it is the developmental outcome (like it or not) of evolution itself. Of course, such arising fear/anxiety/terror of this loss of innocence has great implications in human development and history overall. That’s another topic but one can hear some sense of the ‘Fall’ meta-theme (meta-myth) in Campbell’s description and Stein is articulating the same basic notion once again with identi-

⁴⁹ Stein & Gafni (2015), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Campbell, J. (with Bill Moyers) (1988). *The power of myth*. [Ed. B. S. Flowers]. New York: Doubleday, p. 50.

ying that that fear is both cause and effect—and constructs a network of ‘new’ systems of defence.⁵¹ Freud’s quote earlier above was articulating some of this generic developmental dialectic of progress alright but he also was articulating a pathological-side to history and development that was showing its ugly face in his time—and, yet, he was aware that the larger phenomenon of *Thanatos* (Fear⁵²) was even greater than Nazism. It stretched back across time and cultures—as he noted that the very long struggle of “civilization” (e.g., W. progress) was flawed with the neurotic pathology of a chronic “mood of anxiety”—and thus—his generic psychoanalytic diagnosis and indictment of W. history. This was not well accepted at the time nor even now; yet, today within Anthropocene realities of crises and what ‘progress’ has done, we are having to face Fear and its role head-on, not unlike what the world was facing with the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust.

Stein continues with the “first shock of existence” for humanity:

We worked to deny death by any means possible, from human sacrifice to immortality cults, the multitudinous “Atman projects” [*a la* Wilber] that litter the landscape of political history, and the often ill-advised attempts of modern science to control and predict nature.⁵³
[add: modern education to control and predict human nature]

All such projects of denial of death (*a la* Becker) are based on *fear of death* and thus attempt to remake the world/self and living systems into cultural systems of symbolic immortality,⁵⁴ more or less. Arguably, Stein has seen through this same drive/force underlying Education and socialization.

⁵¹ In my own thinking, I suggest it starts a set of v-memes (as fear management systems) in the Spiral of Development. Not good or bad in themselves, such fear management systems have a positive side (adaptation) and a negative side (self/system-limitation)—and, in extremes the latter may become fear-based pathology.

⁵² I realize in more concrete and literal (pragmatic) expression, *Thanatos* is closer interpreted as “fear of death” (or mortality fear)—but, that’s only partial in representing the larger cosmic evolutionary *Thanatos* that is at issue in this discussion and in Stein’s meta-modern philosophy.

⁵³ Stein & Gafni (2015), p. 3.

⁵⁴ To follow this line of philosophizing (and theorizing) I recommend Wilber’s early writings (1970-80s) as he starts with outlining this evolutionary (metaphysical) developmental phenomena under concepts like “Dualism-Repression-Projection” to “Immortality project” to “Atman project.” Later in the mid-90s he gives these a variant expression in *Phobos-Thanatos* dynamics (e.g., Wilber, 1995); for my way of thinking (within an affective register and metaphysics), these are all referencing the ‘Fear’ Project at the root core of existence (e.g., Love vs. Fear).

That's the basic meaning of Atman projects, albeit, there is a rich heritage of thought describing the spiritual dynamics of the Atman Project (which I have called the 'Fear' Project) that shall be omitted here.

Bottomline, Stein (and others) point to a basic (W. dominant) worldview⁵⁵ that articulates the Atman projects uniquely, not merely from their developmental evolutionary origins (of necessity with growth) but within cultural dynamics (I have called deep "culture of fear" patterns⁵⁶). The combination of the developmental *and* the cultural constructions compose the most vicious (toxic) constitutions of *Thanatos* in evolution and history. Yes, such constitutions can deeply undermine and twist *Eros*—at least, that's the basic metaphysics Stein is re-articulating. And that is in a sense a way to give meaning to the "first shock" Stein labels. Love is shocked by Fear (*aka*, in a Freudian sense, *Eros* is shocked by *Thanatos*; and, everything changes). What about the "second shock" for our species?

The second shock is on a much greater scale of impact, one might argue, than the first shock. Stein wrote,

It is not as strange as it may seem to compare ourselves [today in the Anthropocene era] to the so-called 'dawn humans'—those who displayed the first glimmers of self-awareness, as evidenced most clearly in their meaning-laden burial rituals. In the shadows of pre-history humanity faced the *first shock of existence*, as self-consciousness [p. 2] emerged from the ouroboric eternity of nature and humans became the first (and only) organism on Earth with an awareness of its own death. Each member of our species comes to understand and face its own mortality, a situation unique in the whole of the natural world.... What fearful and sublime things did the earliest humans speak when conducting the first funeral rites? What grief, confusion, and anger did they express? Could we today even understand?⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Four Arrows (2016) nicely nuances the W. Dominant worldview in contrast (opposition) to the Indigenous worldview. Four Arrows (aka Jacobs, D. T.) (2016). *Point of departure: Returning to a more authentic worldview for education and survival*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁶ For a review of the literature on "culture of fear" and "education" see Fisher, R. M. (2011). "Culture of fear" and education: An annotated bibliography [2nd ed.]. Technical Paper No. 28. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute. [original 2007]

⁵⁷ Stein & Gafni (2015), p. 3.

Before understanding, I ask: Could we today even empathize? Indeed, as Stein argues, our entry into the Anthropocene and the having to face collective extinction of near all humans and life itself—there is something much more profound in this “second shock” that is being felt and our empathy is being challenged to its limits. Can we, will we, be able to handle the mass empathetic resonance on this affective level—never mind, making sense of it all rationally—as the cascading crises get worse. And, the inevitable terror increases. What fear management/education systems has evolution equipped us with so far, that we may draw on? Implicitly, Stein is pointing to this consideration for the fields of learning, schooling and education overall. Our entire socialization and worldview, that is, the one that dominates (at least in the West)—has to be transformed. Stein remains optimistic in a realistic way:

The first shock of existence resulted in profound creativity and a genuine unleashing of Eros [from the grips of *Thanatos*], as humanity sought to overcome limitation, separation, and (in some cases) even death itself.⁵⁸

At this point Stein leaves discussion of *Thanatos* (with Eros) behind, more or less, and introduces a new conception of “pseudo-Eros,” the latter a product that also was (apparently) produced during the adaptations that followed the “first shock.” Now, we are confronted with a metaphysical two-pronged theory of Love (i.e., *Eros* and pseudo-*Eros*). It is not my goal to critique this theory *per se*. It would take more time to analyze than I have given it and it is tied into a larger (2003) work by Gafni on “mystery of love.” Instead, I wish to critique the quick (and unexplained) departure from where Stein began with Freud’s *Thanatos*.

A Few Concluding Remarks

[A] severe ignoring of the “include” and “integrate” part [of development]; that is, Eros degenerates into Phobos (fear), and transformation upward becomes not an expansion to “transcend and include” into higher Wholeness, but an active narrowing, contracting, and pushing away from the junior levels out of fear, escapism, or deni-

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

al—Phobos, not Eros, producing not higher Wholes but broken Wholes.”
- K. Wilber (2017, p. 356)⁵⁹

Most all the above discussion of *Eros* and *Thanatos*, is limited and weakened in my view because of its (partial) disconnect from Wilber’s stronger integral philosophical detailing of the dynamics of *Eros-Agape* vs. *Phobos-Thanatos*.⁶⁰ I explained this nutshell version earlier in this technical paper. I won’t repeat that. What is at issue, is why Stein, who knows Wilber’s work well, takes another course—call it a Gafnian route to his metamodern metaphysics. I will not say more on that choice but let Stein respond. My interest is to point this out and that with future work on a metamodern metaphysics, Stein and others would likely make new head-way with the very problems they are trying to analyze and “cure.” I cannot speak to the Gafnian way in this regard because I have not studied his work. Bottom-line, neither Stein or Gafni ever cite my work on Love and Fear—and, the path of fearlessness and fearlessness (meta-)psychology I spin out of the integral meta-theoretical approach.

If it is true, and it seems reasonable, Stein claims the first shock had an upside (*Eros*-driven) and downside (*Thanatos* or pseudo-*Eros*-driven)—and, we humans learned something from it. Learning is the process of life that is so special in his philosophy, and I agree, as would most quality educators. He also notes the downside “brought humanity to the verge of self-inflicted extinction” (i.e., the second shock). Both shocks play upon each other in some kind of dialectical formation—a fear-based one, unfortunately; albeit, Stein does not pursue theorizing that in detail as a growth/developmental dynamic.

My preference is that he adds the *Agape-Thanatos* (Descender) ‘return’ into his schema for what he calls a “return” to a “metaphysics of Eros” (his Ascender bias). Arguably, the “return” he calls for is (perhaps) not so much to *Eros* (maybe, it is mis-names or mis-recognized)—but rather, a return(ing) of focus and attention on the nature and role of *Agape* (and concomitantly *Thanatos*). Wilber repeatedly has called out the massive problem of postmodern Descenderism (Eco-Camp) destruction today—he asserts it as much worse than *Phobos*. However, Stein must not leave out

⁵⁹ It’s good to note, that even with Wilber’s venture into post-metaphysical theorizing since the 2000’s or so, he has 17 years later in his book (Wilber, 2017) kept on using *Phobos* and *Thanatos* (e.g., *Phobos*- pp. 356, 359, 367, 464, 479, 480; *Thanatos*- pp. 407, 479, 480-2, 715).

⁶⁰ For fine details tracking Wilber’s work on these, see Fisher (1997).

Eros-Phobos; in particular, the *Phobos* that Wilber shows also feeds into *Thanatos*—and, those two nasty ‘brothers’ really cause havoc on this planet. Welcome to the underbelly of the metaphysics of Fear (‘Fear’). Good interventions in the Anthropocene—if we are to at all reduce harm, perhaps even turn things around—have to be operating with the full four-aspects of the Wilberian kosmology I have mentioned all along in this technical paper, of which arguably, Stein has taken only 50% of that into account in his own Gafnian rendering of reality—and, of the nature and role of Love.

I take seriously the path of “from fear to liberation.” I see it as, like Stein, foundational to any ethical schema of guidance. We better then know well of what we are talking about re: “fear” (Fear). Arguably, the going from one “shock” to the next “shock” to our species—has, apparently, not stopped the worst down-side of growth and development and evolution—and, apparently, we have not well-learned our lessons and thus have repeated a lot of the same fear-based errors (e.g., obsessive domination and control). Maybe, just maybe, because we didn’t have a good theory and practice (praxis) around fear (Fear)—we fell short, learned little, and carried on making the same mistakes, more or less, for millenia. Not a good strategy! Isn’t there a message in that—to learn from?

Will educators, never mind Stein, be at all interested in this metaphysics that I suggest is more attentive to Fear? That’s a challenging issue, as my experience over three decades is not particularly inspiring regarding this reality—because instead of attraction I see a lot of repulsion—what Wilber recently calls the *allergy* (i.e., “allergies and addictions”) aspect of development and evolution.⁶¹ So be it, that doesn’t mean we ought not try to work this out, heal, transform and make Fear (at least 50%) ‘equal’ to Love in our curricular discourses in all aspects of our societies—but especially in discourses on learning and education.

One last critique of Steinian metamodern metaphysics, not that I can pursue it here, is that he seems to virtually ignore the ‘return’ to a pan-Indian universal *Indigenous worldview*⁶² going on around the world, and ever-present in North America where he and I live. I have found a great sense of

⁶¹ See Wilber, K. (2017). *The religion of tomorrow: A vision for the future of the great traditions—more comprehensive, more complete*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala.

⁶² Again, one Indigenous scholar-activist-educator has caught my eye for well over a decade in this regard, Four Arrows (aka Dr. D. T. Jacobs)—see also, Fisher, R. M. (2018). *Fearless engagement of Four Arrows: The true story of an Indigenous-based social transformer*. New York: Peter Lang.

re-calibration of my own thinking, values, etc. once I took seriously what this Indigenous worldview has to offer—looking to our ancestors and their traditional knowing is a real untapped ‘gift’ and has shown me that thinking about fear (Fear) has still a long way to go—integrating the past, present wisdom—toward a new (r)evolutionary fear management/education for the 21st century.
