

LIVING POSTMODERNISM:

The complex balance of worldview and developmental capacity

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Published in: ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation, 2005

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the connections between worldview and developmental “order of mind” using the theory of Robert Kegan (1982, 1994). Looking at four participants who hold postmodern worldviews in different ways, this paper seeks to tease apart the differences in how people enact their worldview and the connections between that enactment and adult development. It offers implications for those who seek to understand differing worldviews, for those who have concerns about the increasing complexity in the world around us, and for those who seek new perspectives about what wisdom is and where—and in whom—in might be found.

It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different parts of human culture, in different times or different cultural environments or different religious traditions: hence if they actually meet, that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow. (Werner Heisenberg)

Introduction

Theorist Robert Kegan claims that the human race is at the intersection of three very different social organizing realms, that we are operating at a time of traditionalism, modernism, and postmodernism all at the same time. His 1994 book, *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*, argues that the main thrust of the western world at the turn of the new millennium is toward modernism, with hints of postmodernism and traditionalism intermingling. As he theorizes about the developmentally-related capacities required for things such as understanding of issues of authority and self-authorship, Kegan describes three different adult “orders of mind” or ways of making sense of the world that hover, metaphorically, around the three social organizing realms. Kegan argues that the high percentage of the population whose capacity is for the traditional (or, as he calls it “socializing”) way of making meaning may find themselves “in over their heads” because

they lack the developmentally-related capacities to make sense of and fully understand the modern (or “self-authoring”) world. While it’s clear that this is a theoretical model (not everyone in a Traditionalist society has a traditionalist orientation to external authority and certainly in most societies there are people in every order of mind), it’s helpful to look at a society at large and see how it makes demands upon its citizens. Kegan thinks of these demands as the “curriculum” of the society, and he looks for the developmental “fit” between this “curriculum” and the adults within it.

Anderson (1997) extends that claim to argue that the curriculum that is approaching in this fast-changing, global age, is the postmodern world. Anderson and others see the beginning of a movement away from the modernist hope that there will be a perfecting of big ideas such as truth, democracy, or science. It is the modernist work to select the best of these big ideas and make them work to fit all people in all contexts. Post modernists, on the other hand, reject the idea that any single concept—no matter how excellent—could work in all contexts. Instead of seeing some kind of objective truth outside them to be discovered, postmodernists see the world as made up of overlapping and relative *constructions* of reality that are created by people in particular contexts for particular purposes. Postmodernists point to the increasing power of globalization and diversity to show us that context is not a factor to be overcome (as some modernists would have it) but rather a central mediating factor of society and perception. Because of this move toward postmodernism, Anderson believes that those who are growing to have modernist (or self-authoring capacities) are going to find “that they are trying to catch a train that has already left the station, and perforce be required to inhabit social orders much more pluralistic and changeable, and not always comfortably distinct from the world beyond their borders” (p.170). What is the role of wisdom in these two societies? As central unifying ideas change, does the notion of

wisdom change, too? Is wisdom related to developmental complexity? To worldview? To the match between the two?

This paper seeks to take a slightly off-center look at the issue that both of these theorists raise. This paper explores the intersection that both of these men name, the complex intersection between social worldviews and developmental capacity. If, as Anderson and Kegan both argue, people who do not yet have the developmentally-related capacities to most comfortably inhabit their own society still must inhabit it, what might that look like? Would someone with socializing, traditionalist capacities inhabit the modernist world very differently than someone with self-authored, modernist capacities? It is unlikely that someone who was developmentally *less* complex than the needs of her society would be considered wise, since wisdom, by its definition, is often *more* complex (even when the complexity leads to a new kind of simplicity). What are the implications, then, of finding wisdom in a postmodern world—which is too complex for almost everyone? Can we find wisdom in a postmodern worldview even without the developmental capacities of the self-transformational order of mind? How do people with different developmentally-related capacities understand and live out a postmodern worldview?

Robert Kegan's constructive-developmental theory

Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory of adult development examines and describes the way humans grow and change over the course of their lives. This is a constructive-developmental theory because it is concerned both with the *construction* of an individual's understanding of reality and with the *development* of that construction to more complex levels over time. Kegan's theory is concerned with one particular kind of "development": the development of greater capacity for complexity. This involves moving those things which were hidden into view so that we can observe them and make decisions about them, thus

making our field of vision more complex. This is not a theory of morality or action; there is no clear correlation between this form of development and intelligence, happiness, satisfaction, or morality. Instead, the theory is useful for understanding the different ways people make sense of their worlds, or, in other words, for making sense of the wildly different psychological worlds different people inhabit.

The object of using this theory is not to celebrate the developmental achievements of some while bemoaning the slow pace of others. This theory suggests that development is a journey, not a race, and a happy person is one who has found a space where her developmental capacities fit with the demands made upon her. Neither does this theory seek to describe (or explain) every thing about a person. Rather, it offers one different vantage point from which to view questions about how a person lives in and makes decisions about the world. Because this is a theory about perspective taking and capacity for complexity, the orders are defined around what people can identify and take a perspective about (and take action around) versus what people are embedded inside. In this paper, I'll focus only on the two most sophisticated of Kegan's orders—the self-authoring and self-transformational orders of mind. Both of the brief descriptions which follow are necessarily partial (for more thorough descriptions, please see Kegan, 1982; 1994 or Berger, 2002a; 2002b).

The Self-authored, Modernist Mind

By the time they become self-authored, adults still have the internalized ideology, philosophy, or purposes that they became embedded in when they reached the socialized, traditionalist mind, but the hallmark of those with a self-authored mind is that they now have a *perspective* on those ideologies, etc. This perspective comes in the form of an *internal*, self-authored set of rules and regulations—a self-governing system. This self-governing system means that those with a self-authored mind are now able to examine those various

rule-systems and opinions and are able to mediate between them. These are the people we read about in the literature who “own” their work, who are self-guided, self-motivated, self-evaluative. As is true with every qualitatively different order of mind, the gains one makes from a previous order also describe the limits of the new order. The gain of the self-authoring meaning-making system is that the person has a self-governing system, a way to generate larger goals, principles, and commitments that transcend any one particular culture of embeddedness. The limit of the self-authored meaning-making system is that a person becomes embedded in this self-governing system.

Does the self-authored mind necessarily guarantee wisdom? No. Can there be wisdom in the self-authored mind? Surely. The self-authoring mind offers the wisdom that comes from certainty, from having a perspective and believing in it fully. It is the wisdom of persuasion, of taking on multiple perspectives in order to hone and sharpen your own.

The Self-transformational, Postmodernist Mind

Those very few adults who have reached the self-transformational order of mind have achieved all that those at the self-authored have, but they have learned the limits of their own inner system—and the limits of having an inner system in general. Instead of viewing others as people with separate and different inner systems, those who have self-transformational minds see across inner systems to look at the similarities that are hidden inside what used to look like differences. Those who are now self-transformational are less likely to see the world in terms of dichotomies or polarities. They are more likely to believe that what we often think of as black and white are just various shades of gray whose differences are made more visible by the lighter or darker colors around them.

Does the self-transformational mind necessarily offer wisdom? Perhaps. Is that wisdom accessible to all? Perhaps not. Self-transformational wisdom is the wisdom of the

well-placed question, the wisdom of multiple answers to each question. Here, indeed, is the wisdom of transcendental teachers, the wisdom that knows that there is rage in peace and peace in rage. Many of the ancient wise ones, in fact, at least sometimes spoke in ways that we might now describe as post-modern or self-transformational. As they rejected single ideologies for the power of the multiplicity, these wise ones were asking pre-modern people to choose a post-modern worldview. No wonder so many have been confused by their teachings.¹

Methods

What happens, then, when someone who makes sense of the world through a self-authoring meaning making system chooses to live out a postmodern worldview? Does it look substantially different than the postmodernism enacted by someone with self-transformational capacities? Does a postmodern worldview *create* the capacities associated with the self-transformational meaning making? To answer these questions, I sought recommendations from those knowledgeable about Kegan's theory for participants who were thought to be—and also considered themselves to be—holding the kinds of beliefs and values normally associated with postmodernism. The participants ranged from their mid 50s to their early 60s, and were highly-successful at their respective fields (in the profit and non-profit world, government, and religion). I sat down with each participant for a Subject-Object Interview (SOI) (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1988). The SOI is a measure for characterizing a person's order of mind based on Robert Kegan's (1984; 1992) constructive-developmental theory. One of the values of the SOI is that while it provides a single score based on Kegan's constructive-developmental theory, it also attempts to

¹ It is also not so surprising that the many open, embracing ideologies (most notably, perhaps Christ's teachings) have been interpreted by people at different orders of mind and different societies as being rule books that show who is In and who is Out of favor.

understand and describe one important aspect of how another person understands the world and situates himself within it—a central task of this paper. I scored each interview and then had a reliability score for 75% of the interviews (inter-rater reliability was 100%). I then analyzed the data to look for patterns in *the way* the participants held their postmodernist ideas, the way they spoke of issues of spanning-boundaries, the context-specific nature of reality, and the contingencies of meaning. In the section that follows, I introduce four of these participants and explore the intersection of their worldview and developmental capacities.

The participants

*Stanley*²

Stanley is the CEO of a relatively new non-profit organization dedicated to spanning boundaries between industry, environmental, and policy-making groups. In his mid-50s, he has had a career filled with world-travel and dedicated to building bridges (sometimes literally) between people with very different goals and orientations. When he first joined this organization, it was in big trouble, mired in bureaucracy and unable to mediate among the wildly different views of its constituencies. Into “this really dynamic, multicultural, cross complexity, spanning type of environment,” Stanley brought his post-modern, boundary-spanning skills: “What I’m really good at and what I’ve done a lot is turn around these types of organizations and make these things work and pull all these people together.” He explains, “My strategy for dealing with these is to build up solid relationships along numbered vectors, you know, build up those relationships and then sort of start building relationships across the vectors. And that’s how you make it a success.” He really values the work his organization is doing and feels that it has great potential for helping improve the

² All names are pseudonyms.

environment, and he's certain that the way he goes about building the bridges will eventually be successful:

I don't waver in the sense that it's the right thing to do generically in terms of coming together and define... responsible management from a social, economic and environmental perspective. That is absolutely the right thing to do.... The overarching vision is extremely easy to believe in and based on my absolutely empirical experience in a variety of different ways. This is the only way to do it.

The problem is that he's feeling increasingly exhausted and frustrated with the operations of the organization which have developed a weighty bureaucracy. He knows that the bureaucracy began in useful ways because when "groups that have historically distrusted so much [have] well-defined processes everybody says, 'Okay, that's the process.'" Now, though, even with his "expertise in sorting through all that bureaucratic junk and getting stuff done...the bureaucracy is like people keep throwing wet blankets on me. 'Well, you know, that's not the way we've ever done this.' And so it's like, 'For God's sake, you've only been around for three years!'" Stanley feels, "I've done the best I can trying to solve these problems. But some of the bureaucracy, some of the policies, some of these just wrong headed stupid things that people do in this organization, you know, can I really overcome them?"

Instead of fighting these "wet blankets," Stanley wants to start his own company. He worries, though, that the effort of beginning his own company would "take me away from my family too much right now." So he is weighing the various pulls on his time and talents to figure out what next steps to take.

Luke

Luke, at 63, has taken an early retirement from a satisfying career in the ministry. His work there, in a liberal, inter-faith denomination, has been to focus on increasing the ways his denomination can reach out to become more of an inclusive, global religion. He

has an image of how his denomination can “begin...developing a new way of doing ministry, which is to basically minister to the world, and develop the capacity to minister to the world, which means a lot of workshops and a lot of people are stretching themselves, just to be able to sympathetically begin to grasp, you know, what woos a Chinese Confucian.” As a practicing minister, Luke was frustrated with what he sensed was his colleagues’ inability to focus on goals as complex as his. He felt that the other ministers “in general are vastly more interested in identity...I guess this is something common to all liberal groups. They’re really worried about identity, who are we and who are we not.” Before his retirement, Luke would speak his mind at conferences and meetings, and explains, “I don’t express my impatience as such. You really can’t. You just sort of try to nudge people, because you really can’t force people to be anxious about something that really doesn’t, that they’re not experiencing. You have to try to just sort of shake things loose enough so that they say, ‘Oh, yes, I do worry about that.’”

A prolific writer during his time as a minister, Luke has “retired with a generalized purpose in mind. I have a number of life projects which I wanted to get written down, published, and you know, taken care of before I lose my mind or some other crazy thing happens.” Now that he has retired, he has plunged into his writing projects and “actually I haven’t really looked back. I mean, occasional phone conversations andsome nice friendly visits. But I’ve been intentionally working on this book, and ...putting a book together is very challenging.”

Self-authored postmodernists

Luke and Stanley share a commitment to such things as boundary-crossing and finding fundamental connections among things generally considered to be quite different which is often the hallmark of postmodern thinking. As Stanley reflects on the difficulties of

finding common ground among the very different constituencies his organization serves, he describes a complex web of relationships and connections he must make in order to create a responsible future for each group. It is clear that one of the ways he can keep his stance is because he doesn't fully affiliate with any one of the groups; rather, he affiliates with the *idea* of a cross-group entity like his organization. Similarly, Luke describes his hope for a religion that serves congregants from multiple faiths simultaneously. He is interested in groups such as the International Association for Religious Freedom and describes his connection with those from other religions.

Luke and Stanley hold their postmodernism in very modern, self-authored ways, however. Even as they tell stories about their own work creating boundaries and helping others see beyond their own perspectives, Luke and Stanley are both critical of—and frustrated with—anyone who does *not* do that. Instead of having an orientation that all work is about the *process*, that particular ideas are not set in stone and needing to be perfected, Luke and Stanley are working to perfect their image of what the ideal postmodern religion/organization might be. Stanley talks about how he doesn't “waver” in thinking that his way is “the only way to do it.” Luke works hard not to feel frustrated that his colleagues do not understand his vision, but he never wonders whether his vision is the one best future for the church. Luke and Stanley both have codified their notions of postmodernism, treating it as the one best way for everyone (or at least everyone in their particular group) to act. Similarly, they are both very clear about the path they should be taking—or, when they aren't clear, they are searching for clarity. Luke has retired to complete a set of projects which he has already outlined; Stanley wants to begin his own business and is simply waiting until the time is right (a period he finds frustrating and disconcerting). While both of them have an orientation towards focusing on the process, they are both invested in fully

controlling that process as much as possible—and on the particular products that might emerge from the process. In the sections that follow, you'll meet postmodernists with very different orientations.

Matthew

Matthew was a successful organizational trainer and consultant with his own company and a “kind of addiction to work.” At the height of his success, however, he began to get increasingly dissatisfied with what he was doing. Unable to translate the work he was doing into something he could care deeply about, and unwilling to do the work without that caring, Matthew took a break from his consulting practice, decided to simplify his life and reduce his expenses dramatically, moved across the country and volunteered as a hospice worker for a year. Now, he has returned from what he thinks of as a “sabbatical” and finds himself a different person in some respects, but not with the kind of clarity he once thought he was seeking. “I find myself saying, ‘I don’t know, I need more time.’ I mean, I thought that [my lack of clarity] was going to be over at the sabbatical. I thought I’d know.”

Explaining his not-knowing to his family and friends, he tries to reassure them: “I don’t really know what I’m doing with my career, but it’s okay.” Still, being 53-years-old and at this uncertain place in his career is “stepping into a strange place, so it feels awkward...disoriented.”

Yet utterly absent from our talk together is any hint of frustration or impatience. Matthew is at peace with even the difficulty of having to explain again and again to family and friends that he still doesn’t know what he wants to be when he grows up. Recognizing that in the past, he likely would have felt frustrated, Matthew reflects that this disorientation is totally different than previous times of uncertainty or confusion. In the past, he says, “I

have wanted ... to figure it out so I can make it [the confusion] go away.” Now, he doesn’t want the confusion to end, he just wants “whatever is next.” And instead of clarity being next, he explains:

My sense is more of *this* is always next. That I’m not going to figure it out so the world gets clearer. And I’m not going to figure it out so relationships can clear. I do want to move in those moments where I’m not so confused that I don’t know what to do and that’s not what this disorientation feels like. And so I don’t want to make it go away but I’d like to go with it wherever we’re going to go next.....I could be completely wrong on this, but here’s how it feels, that if there’s going to be clarity at the end of this, it’s going to be a radically different kind of clarity than what I’ve experienced in the past, that...that in the past what I hoped is that I would kind of figure it out enough that it would bring clarity.... The part I think that feels different is I can’t imagine that something will come along that will make it really clear, that not...that maybe *not clear* is what it *is*.

Matthew approaches this “*not-clear*” time in his life with a quiet joy and anticipation for the future that coexists with a patience in the present.

Kathleen

By the time Kathleen was in her early 50s, she had become chief counsel for a large government agency. During her fast rise through the early years in her profession, she was “much more willing, for the sake of prestige, status, intellectual challenge” not to have what she would later think of as her “whole self” engaged in her work. While emphasizing the “whole person” and being “a leader in doing that” with her staff, Kathleen “was much less in touch with what that actually meant to me.” While her work “mattered to me a lot and was important to do,” Kathleen never “felt like it was an expression of who I was.” A professional development program designed “to bring the contemplative into the world of executives” was “the first shift” for her, raising her awareness that “it’s possible to bring an integrated self to work” which she says “was a totally foreign concept to me.” After that experience, she decided “life was out of my control,” and she applied to take a paid sabbatical and spend a year as executive-in-residence at a leadership development institute.

While she was on sabbatical, there was a change in the administration, and Kathleen, after twelve years at the agency, found herself out of work. As part of her severance package, she negotiated a second year at the leadership development institute, and began to figure out what her next steps were. While the impact of her job loss was “huge, huge,” she did not feel panicked or rudderless. Instead, of hoping that this difficult time would quickly pass away, she believed :

I think *this* is the journey. I think this *is* the journey. And I could stay in this, I think, forever. You know, I could never hold another job again, I could, you know, start doing Hospice work, I could you know, spend time with my husband, I could...I don't know.... I don't know what to say. It just feels like it will emerge. But no, where I am right now feels very much like...it doesn't feel like a hiatus. It feels like it is the journey and that work will emerge from this place. That's what I think. I think work will emerge from this experience.

At this same time, Kathleen's mother became terminally ill. Spending time with her dying mother and making decisions about her medical care with her brothers and sisters, Kathleen had ample time to reflect upon the inter-connections of the events and relationships in her life—and about endings and beginnings. As she struggled with her siblings to gain consensus about when to remove their mother from life support, she found herself in disagreement with her brother whose opinion other family members wanted to disregard. While this was an enormously painful issue, Kathleen discovered that this disagreement was not an uncomfortable conflict for her. She reflects:

I was not in a position to put my experience of [my mother's illness] ahead of [my brother's] experience of her. I wasn't going to say, “I know what's best for her,” even though I felt I did from my perspective. ... I didn't think it was better or worse. I think it was part of the mix....So I don't think it was that he was right and I was wrong or that I was right and he was wrong. It was that he expressed a valid point of view that as long as he held it would...I mean, as long as he held it, he held it. And I wasn't going to override it.

Her experience of the loss of her job and her mother has not demoralized her, although it has changed her. Instead of focusing on the losses, Kathleen finds herself open to the new connections and new possibilities she has found:

So much has happened in my life in the past year that I had absolutely no control over, could not have predicted, and if it had turned out the way I intended, it would not have turned out as wonderful as it has. So at least for the time being, whatever emerges is what emerges. That is how I feel about it. And it doesn't feel scary.

*Self-transformational postmodernists*³

Like Stanley and Luke, Matthew and Kathleen have an orientation to process and connectedness. But unlike Stanley and Luke, Matthew and Kathleen have *both* a worldview that is postmodern *and also* the developmental capacities of the fifth order, postmodern mind. This means that the way they inhabit their postmodern worldview is very different.

Stanley and Luke were quite certain of their next steps—or frustrated when that certainty was not forthcoming. Matthew and Kathleen, by contrast, speak again and again about their sense that this place that they are in (and both of them are in a time of great flux) is not space in between one section of clarity and another; rather, this in-between space in all of its confusion is the way life is. As Matthew explains, “I can't imagine that something will come along that will make it really clear...that maybe *not clear* is what it is.” This orientation—the kind of process-oriented, contextual focus that is found in all definitions of postmodernism—leaves Kathleen and Matthew with an unusual kind of peace. And unlike the more fourth order or modernist kinds of peace I have seen in other participants (like that

³ A caveat. I describe Kathleen and Matthew as “self-transformational” for the sake of simplicity (an admittedly ironic choice in a paper about postmodern perspectives). In truth, there is great debate among those of us who administer and score the Subject-Object Interview about what a fully self-transformational meaning making system might look like, and how to distinguish someone who is mostly (but not entirely) self-transformational. One hopeful piece of this study is to gain clarity about the sub-stages between the self-authoring and self-transformational ways of making meaning (since there are four reliably identifiable sub-stages between each of the other named orders of mind), but until there is a robust body of data, the difference between entirely self-transformational and mostly self-transformational may be currently indistinguishable.

held by Luke), theirs is not the peace of knowing or certainty. Instead, this postmodern peace is about leaning back into the current of life and enjoying the ride.

Similarly, Kathleen and Matthew are not at all frustrated with those who do not see the world in the same way. They seem to have no sense that their viewpoint is better than the viewpoint of other people. They speak of conflicts they have with other people about differences of opinion, and about knowing that the opinions they themselves held were the most appropriate ones *for them* to hold at that time, but they do not seem to privilege particular opinions (even their own). There is a sense that it isn't the difference of opinion that matters so much (even in Kathleen's case, when it is a difference of opinion about the life and death of her mother); instead, the thing that matters the most is the negotiation among different view points, the finding of common ground, and the recognition that all viewpoints express something important about the person who holds them.

The sense of emotion that comes from this self-transformational, postmodern place is difficult to characterize, and impossible for me to find textual examples to illustrate. There were a wide variety of emotional tones that seemed present in these two interviews—and much of these tones seemed similar across the two interviews. The openness to possibilities, patience, and (to a lesser extent) joy are somewhat visible in the words of the participants. The other, barely-spoken emotion was a kind of a sense of loss that joined with the sense of possibility. Both Kathleen and Matthew asked me if I was finding other people who saw the world the way they saw it (and mostly, I wasn't). Talk of life and death, sadness and joy, losses and gains—mingled together—informed our talk.

Conclusion

The wise man doesn't give the right answers, he poses the right questions. (Claude Levi-Strauss)

The implications that come from a study about self-authoring and self-transformational postmodernists seem, at first glance, purely theoretical. Luke and Stanley, the two less developed of these four participants, have sophisticated meaning-making systems that are at least on par with—and perhaps beyond—the demands of the general, modernist society in which they live. In fact, the ways they are out of sync with their modernist society—their postmodernist worldview—seems to cause them much more frustration than their self-authoring, modernist minds. And Matthew and Kathleen represent a tiny percentage of adults with their post-self-authoring meaning-making systems. Perhaps understanding the way their developmental differences interact with their worldview and philosophy can help uncover and characterize some ways that wisdom is shaped by worldview, developmental capacities—and the fit between them.

| Self-authoring Postmodernists | Self-transformational Postmodernists |
|--|---|
| Have a sense of certainty about things—the philosophy they hold, the things they are good at, the tasks they wish to undertake, their career trajectory. | Have a sense of confusion, less clarity—also less interest in getting clarity, no sense of clarity ahead. |
| Want others to be this way, get frustrated when others cannot think in boundary-spanning ways, cannot put these goals before other goals. | Do not focus on the deficiencies of others’ perspectives, don’t have any orientation to criticize—but are very interested in how and why others have the opinions/worldviews they do. |
| Want to have specific accomplishments and then move on to the next thing; have images of what the next thing is—a particular product or project. | Have the sense that this <i>is</i> the journey; have a different kind of focus on the process of things and a patience with that process. |

Table 1

The self-authoring postmodernists have a kind of a certainty about their postmodernism, and they want other people to share their perspectives (see Table 1 for a

summary of these differences). It is as if they have discovered some higher way of thinking that they wish others would have, too. This perspective is especially interesting when viewed through a developmental lens because a real comfort with other perspectives—even much less complex perspectives—is the hallmark of self-transformational thinking. This means that the frustration with what these self-authoring post-modernists consider the “less complex” thinking of their colleagues is actually a sign of their own meaning making being less complex than self-transformational meaning making.

The self-transformational postmodernists, on the other hand, have the most profound orientation towards curiosity and openness that I have ever seen. They refrain from judging other ideas as less complex or somehow less than their own ideas, even when others frustrate or obstruct them. Their sense that this kind of confusion and constant back-and-forth is part of life is both inherent in the postmodern philosophy and also in the self-transformational meaning making system.

The self-authoring postmodernists—who have quite a complex worldview and also a complex meaning-making system—were frustrated with the mismatch between the way they saw the world and the way their colleagues and managers saw the world. It was hard for them to operate in the fullness of their complexity and in the certainty of their complex world view. Ironically, the self-transformational postmodernists, who have a more complex meaning-making system, did not seem as frustrated with the mismatch between their own meaning making and the meaning making of others. Rather, they were wistful about the differences they sensed in themselves and others, and they seemed hopeful that at some point there would be other people who thought about the world in complex ways—both to be company for them and also to help think in new ways about the world.

These findings point to three issues of central concern to people who care about adult growth and development—and care about supporting a move toward deeper levels of wisdom. First, the worldview people name and seek to live may be connected to—but is certainly not the same as—their developmental order of mind. This shows that while Kegan’s orders of mind may be metaphorically linked with particular philosophies or worldviews, there is no obvious causal link (holding a postmodern worldview does not make you self-transformational). This implies, by extension, that holding a modernist worldview does not necessarily mean that a person is self-authoring. Separating issues of worldview and meaning-making could help us become more clear about what people *mean* when they talk about particular philosophies.

Second, these interviews exposed once again the many ways there are to hold and live *ideas* like modernism and postmodernism (and traditionalism). The distinction between the ideas people have (especially if they are ideas about society) and the way those people live those ideas often gives rise to questions of who is living a particular worldview in the *right way*. When people live out their particular form of a worldview, others can judge that form as unsophisticated or in some way wrong-headed. Often, we connect *the way* people live their world view with issues of authenticity (as in, she isn’t authentic about that since she’s only doing it that way because she saw it in a book). This study helps pull apart ideas of authenticity, and helps people understand that all people live their worldview in complex and interesting ways, and that a full understanding of ideas like modernism and postmodernism must be both abstract and also grounded in the particulars of peoples’ lives.

Where, then, is wisdom found? This study points to the idea that wisdom—like philosophy—is found in the interaction between a person, his developmental complexity, and the demands/supports of his society. It is not enough for a person alone to embody

wisdom. Instead, she needs to offer wisdom in a way that can be seen and understood by others. The context of what kind of wisdom is needed in a particular situation is likely as great an influence as the actual wise one himself; if a person seeks answers when he looks for wisdom and he gets questions, he'll be frustrated. Similarly, if a person seeks a new complex understanding and gets simplistic guidance, she'll be frustrated. The interactions I point to throughout this paper show that we are created in—and from—our interactions with the world around us; similarly, those interactions are shaped by our own developmentally-related capacities.

This study begins to look at the relatively uncharted terrain of the upper edges of human complexity (as measured on Kegan's scale). If we, as a people, are interested in solving the enormous and complex problems that we have created, we had better all be interested in the “new and interesting developments” that Heisenberg posits. Increasing complexity of either worldview or meaning making is likely to be helpful in this regard. But it is the increased complexity of the self-transformational postmodernists that allows for the differences of opinions and worldviews to most profitably have the “real interaction” Heisenberg names. It seems the unique combination of an opening and questioning worldview with an open and questioning meaning-making system may hold the complexity of this world, listen—with respect and curiosity—to many opposing positions, and then come to a new place, a place from which we all might benefit.

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