

## **The Integral Smuts**

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**Abstract:** Integral Theory as developed by Ken Wilber and other contemporary Integral scholars acknowledge many antecedent foundational influences, and proto-Integral thinkers. Curiously, the philosopher-statesman Jan Smuts' theory of Holism is seldom acknowledged, although it has significantly contributed, albeit often implicitly, to the development of Integral Theory. This paper and presentation has two central aims: To point out that Smuts can be counted amongst one of the great Integral thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; that Smuts' notion of Holism had a significant influence on the development of Integral Theory. This paper and presentation will provide a brief outline of Smuts' theory of Holism as developed in his book *Holism and Evolution* and other philosophical essays.

**Key Words:** Jan Smuts, Integral Theory, Holism, Evolution.

No other epoch has accumulated so great and so varied a store of knowledge concerning man as the present one. No other epoch has succeeded in presenting its knowledge of man so forcibly and so captivatingly as ours, and no other has succeeded in making this knowledge so quickly and easily accessible. But also, no epoch is less sure of its knowledge of what man is than the present one. In no other epoch has man appeared so mysterious as in ours.

- *Heidegger*, (1962, p. 206)

If the soul of our civilization is to be saved we shall have to find new and fuller expression for the great saving unities – the unity of reality in all its range, the unity of life in all its forms, the unity of ideas throughout human civilization, and the unity of man's spirit with the mystery of the Cosmos in religious faith and aspiration.

– *Jan Smuts* (1927, pp. v-vi)

## **Introduction**

The philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962) points out that in our current era, which has the most accumulated knowledge than any other time in history, man ironically, remains even more mysterious than before. Clearly the solution to our current state of existential

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bewilderment is not only to generate more knowledge but also, as philosopher and Commonwealth statesman General Jan Smuts (1927, p. v) points out, we “have to find *new and fuller expression* for the great saving *unities*” (Our Italics). What we desperately need are meta-frameworks that have the capacity to integrate the overwhelming amount of information at our disposal into a more coherent and meaningful worldview or *Weltanschauung*. Integral Theory (Wilber, 1995, 2000), like Smuts’ theory of Holism<sup>1</sup>, is an attempt at such an integrative “new and fuller expression” of man’s being-in-the-world.

Integral Theory as developed by Ken Wilber (1995, 2000) and other contemporary Integral scholars acknowledge many antecedent foundational influences, and proto-integral thinkers. Curiously, as this article will argue, South African philosopher and Commonwealth statesman, General Jan Smuts’ (1912, 1926) theory of Holism is seldom acknowledged, although it has significantly contributed, albeit often implicitly, to the development of Integral Theory (Du Plessis, 2010; Edwards, 2003). Furthermore, Smuts’ theory of Holism also had a significant influence on scholars that Integral thinkers point out as direct philosophical influences; though Smuts has been insufficiently acknowledged by contemporary Integral scholars as an Integral thinker in his own merit. In the canon of published Integral Theory literature Smuts is only explicitly mentioned once (that we are aware of), which is in the opening paragraph of the Prologue of Wilber’s (1980) book *The Atman Project*.

Everywhere we look in nature, said the philosopher Jan Smuts, we see nothing but wholes. And not just simple wholes, but hierarchical ones: each whole is a part of a larger whole which is itself a part of a larger whole. Fields within fields within fields, stretching through the cosmos, interlacing each and every thing with each and every other.

Further, said Smuts, the universe is not a thoughtlessly static and inert whole—the cosmos is not lazy, but energetically dynamic and even creative. It tends

(we would now say teleonomically, not teleologically) to produce higher- and higher-level wholes, ever more inclusive and organized. This overall cosmic process, as it unfolds in time, is nothing other than evolution. And the drive to ever-higher unities, Smuts called holism (p. 13).

There could be many reasons why Smuts' philosophical contributions are not acknowledged as a foundational influence in Integral Theory or as one of the modern pioneers in integral thinking, but it is beyond the scope or intent of this article to explore this issue. It must be noted that Wilber (personal communication, 21 July 2009) does acknowledge Smuts' book *Holism and Evolution* as having a significant influence on his early thinking, but has not indicated this sentiment in his writings.

The neglect of the acknowledgment of Smuts' philosophical contribution is not unique to only the Integral community, but also in the field of psychology, where his Holism significantly influenced the development of humanistic and existential psychology, as well as transpersonal psychology (See Assagioli, 1975). Moreover, Fritz Perls (1947), co-founder of Gestalt Therapy, was greatly influenced by Smuts' work while living in South Africa after fleeing Nazi Germany, and wrote his book *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* in that time.<sup>2</sup> Barlow (1981) states that “[t]his basic premise [holism] was not only adopted by Gestalt psychology, but also by Gestalt therapy, and in fact all of the humanistic and existential psychologies” (Back, 1973, p. 1).<sup>3</sup> Kurt Koffka (1935), one of the founders of Gestalt psychology and author of the book *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*<sup>4</sup>, enthusiastically read *Holism and Evolution* and in a letter to Smuts indicated that was “interested in the wider principle of Holism...” (Smuts in Blanckenberg, 1951, p. 159).

Alfred Adler (In Blanckenberg, 1951) used *Holism and Evolution* for his university lectures in Vienna (and had it translated into German), and described Smuts' Holism theory as “supplying the scientific and philosophical basis for the great advance in psychology

which had been made in recent years” (p. 81). Furthermore, in his book *Psychosynthesis*, Roberto Assagioli (1975) acknowledges Smuts as the originator of the holistic approach in psychology, as well as of the psychology of personality. Assagioli (1975) describes Smuts’ holistic approach as one of the most “significant and valuable contributions to the knowledge of human nature and its betterment” (p. 14).

Perhaps, the most obvious reasons for the neglect of Smuts, was that he was not an academic, his theory of Holism was presented at a time when scientific materialism reigned supreme, and that he was so well known and revered as a international statesman that it completely overshadowed his philosophical contributions. It is remarkable that out of the numerous books and autobiographies written about Smuts, only two deals directly with his theory of Holism (See Kolbe, F. C., 1928, *A Catholic View of Holism: A criticism of the theory put forward by General Smuts in his book, Holism and Evolution* and Beukes, P., 1998, *The Holistic Smuts, A study in personality*).

This article/presentation aims to highlights some of the ideas presented by Smuts that are now associated with Integral Theory. This will serve as a brief introduction to the view of the authors, that Smuts can be counted amongst one of the great pioneering integral thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and that Smuts’ notion of Holism had a significant influence on the development of Integral Theory. To achieve these aims, the article will provide a brief outline of some foundational concepts of Smuts’ theory of Holism as developed in his book *Holism and Evolution* (1926).<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article/presentation to provide an exhaustive discussion on this topic, or to provide sufficient correlations between Smuts’ philosophy and Integral Theory. The article/presentation is intended for readers that are familiar with the foundational concepts of Integral Theory.

## **Historical Background**

In Smuts' 80 years of life (24 May 1870 – 11 September 1950) he contributed greatly to many areas of South Africa and world history, with his work on Holism being but one of his ventures. It is not the intention of this article to explore Smuts' political and other pursuits, yet it will be useful to place Smuts' holistic thought within a historical context.

In addition to being the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa (known today as the Republic of South Africa) from 1919 to 1924 and again from 1939 to 1948, he was an accomplished botanist, philosopher, jurist, soldier, politician, and Commonwealth statesman.<sup>6</sup> In terms of his political views, Smuts was an avid supporter of internationalism – the idea of international government, and was against the autonomous nature of totalitarianism. He exercised this belief in internationalism by being one of the two principal drafters and architects of the covenant of the League of Nations (Hancock, 1962). Smuts' holistic philosophy is evident in the pivotal role he played in the foundation of the League of Nations and later the United Nations.

He was born on 24 May 1870 on his the family farm, Bovenplaats, near Malmesbury, in the then Cape Colony. During his childhood, he often went out alone, exploring the surrounding countryside, while performing his duty of looking after the free roaming cattle, this instilled a lifelong a passion for nature, which was “an early awakening of the feelings and faculties that were shaping him as a person and would one day shape his thought about the atom, the cell, mind, personality, the whole universe” (Hancock, 1962, p. 8).<sup>7</sup> In those days a full formal education was typically reserved only for the first son, and being the second son of the family dictated, by rural custom, that he would remain working on the farm. When Smuts was twelve years old his older brother died and, and now as the eldest son of the family, he was then sent to school. Despite his late start he caught up with his classmates within four years and went to Victoria College in Stellenbosch where he attained a

combined degree in Arts and Science. At Victoria College he won the Ebdon scholarship for Christ's College Cambridge University, where he studied Law, and became the only person ever to have written both parts of the Law Tripos in one year and achieve a Double First. While at Cambridge Smuts was described by Professor Maitland, a leading figure among English legal historians, as the most brilliant student he had ever met. Lord Todd said in 1970 that "in 500 years of the College's history, of all its members, past and present, three had been truly outstanding: John Milton, Charles Darwin and Jan Smuts" (Smuts, 1994, p. 19).

After practicing law in the Transvaal he became a Boer general during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, and led many successful raids against the British troops. He was instrumental in the signing of the treaty of Vereeniging, which marked the end of the Anglo-Boer War, as well as convincing Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (the leader of the then newly elected Liberal Government) to give independence to the Boer republics 4 years later. During the First World War, he led the armies of South Africa against Germany, commanding the British Army in East Africa, and from 1917 to 1919, he was a member of the British War Cabinet.<sup>8</sup> Smuts' conviction on the need for reconciliation with the defeated Germany after World War I was not heeded, and predicted that the way the Germans were treated by the Versailles Treaty would be the prelude to the next Great War.

In World War II he served in the Imperial War Cabinet under Winston Churchill, and became a field marshal in the British Army in 1941. He was the only man to sign both of the peace treaties ending the First and Second World Wars (as well as the Anglo-Boer War).

### **Smuts' Theory of Holism**

Although the concept of holism has been implied by many thinkers, the term *Holism*, as an academic terminology, was first introduced and appeared publicly in print, by Smuts (1926) in his book *Holism and Evolution*. He writes that: "Holism (from ολος = whole) is the term

here coined for this fundamental factor operative towards the creation of wholes in the universe” (p. 86). Today, the concept holism is common place in many fields of study for example, physics, general systems theory, biology, anthropology, medicine, cybernetics, holography, and various branches of psychology. It must be noted that the concept of “Holism” as introduced and applied by Smuts is not the same as the word holism as it is generally applied in many disciplines. Smuts uses the word in a metaphysical context (as an ontological phenomenon inherent in nature), not as a broad principle as it is often used today, succinctly articulated by Aristotle as “The sum is bigger than its parts.” Smuts (1927) defined Holism as “the ultimate synthetic, ordering, organising, regulative activity in the universe which accounts for all the structural groupings and syntheses in it, from the atom and the physic-chemical structures, through the cell and organisms, through Mind in animals, to Personality in man” (p. 326).

Although Holism is an “attempt at a synthesis” it is not be understood as a system of philosophy, as Smuts did not “believe very much in systems”, and went on to say that Holism “tries to emphasize one aspect of thought that has hitherto a neglected factor. I am trying to hammer out this neglected factor, which is, to my mind, all-important in getting the synoptic vision” (1942, p. 147).

### ***The early roots of Smuts’ Holistic thinking***

The academic origins of Smuts’ holistic thinking can be traced back to his days as a student at Cambridge University, although the early roots of his holism theory can be traced to his childhood walks across the *veld* in the Malmesbury district of the Western Cape of South Africa.<sup>9</sup> In 1891, as a first-year law student he wrote a commentary called *The Nature and Function of Law in the History of Human Society*. Although never entirely completed it was nevertheless published as a shortened version, then titled, *Law, A Liberal Study* in the college magazine (Anker, 2001). In this article Smuts applied an developmental approach to culture,

and understood it as a “gradual evolutionary liberation from the biological realm (the origin of the word “liberal” in his title)” (Anker, 2001, p. 43). Moreover, he also viewed the history of civil law from a developmental perspective as developing from an archaic law in “the embryonic stages in society” to a sophisticated law in modern “Teutonic Europe” (Smuts, 1893/1996a, p. 40), and argued that public law evolved “from the primitive Family to the modern State” (Smuts, 1893/1996a, p. 41). He pointed out “that public laws gradually progressed towards more and more respect for individual freedom and greater unity within humanity” (Anker, 200, p. 43). Smuts (1893/1996) says that “[t]he Person is recognized more and more; the rights of personality become more and more inviolable,” with “one law for all humanity” as the endgame for the evolutionary process of civil rights (p. 41). All Smuts’ subsequent ideas on Holism and politics were a modification and further development on the basic ideas expressed in this article.

Shortly after the aforementioned article Smuts (1892) wrote an essay, *On the Application of Some Physical Concepts to Biological Phenomena*, where he attempted to point out the natural law that is responsible for the evolution of civil rights in culture. In this essay he points out that there is an inherent life-force in matter that accounts for the evolution from the inorganic to the organic world, and served as the “ultimate foundation for human evolution and the progress of civil society” (Anker, 2001, p. 43).

In 1895 he completed a book on Walt Whitman, after receiving an honorary grant, which allowed him to write on a topic of his own choosing. Shortly after finishing his book he submitted it to various publishers who did not accept the book, likely due to commercial reasons. The book was later published in 1973 as *Walt Whitman: A Study in the Evolution of Personality*. The aim of this book was to investigate the development of Walt Whitman’s personality “like any other organism” (Smuts in Hancock and Van der Poel, 1966, p. 53). Smuts understood Whitman as “an organic personality developing all his lifetime like a

product of nature, travelling through the successive cycles of his growth.” (Smuts 1895/1973, p. 30) Smuts believed personalities like Whitman and Goethe had achieved it highest possible development and therefore would prove to be valuable subjects of study when trying to understand the personality as a whole. Smuts (1895/1973), believed that Whitman was “a true personality, strong, original, organic; . . . a whole and sound piece of manhood” (p. 30) and that a study of his life, like other evolved wholes, could reveal a deeper insight in the nature of the evolutionary process of the universe. Smuts believed that the human mind and personality was not “an herbarium” of dead species; it was rather a synthetic, creative whole, a “Hegelian *Idee* inherent in the personality” (Smuts in Anker, 2001, p.44), where its diverse appearances are more than the sum of its parts. “The application of the idea of evolution has hitherto been too analytic,” Smuts lamented and instead advocated a holistic view of evolution because “life is the most synthetic phenomenon we know” (Smuts 1895/1973, p. 31).

Between 1911 and 1912 Smuts worked on a manuscript called *An Inquiry into the Whole*. In this manuscript he continued to deepen the ideas explored in his earlier writing. It is in this manuscript that Smuts first coined the term “Holism”, which later appeared in print in 1926 in *Holism and Evolution*. In 1912 Smuts sent a draft of the book to his lifelong Cambridge friend and mentor, H.J. Wolstenholme. To Smuts’ disappointment Wolstenholme was highly critical of the book and sceptical about the concept of Holism (Hancock, 1962). Many of the ideas contained within *An Inquiry in the Whole*, was later expanded upon and reworked in *Holism and Evolution*.

## **Holism and Evolution**

Smuts wrote *Holism and Evolution* in 1926, in which he provided an overview of his theory of Holism, during a time that a materialistic worldview was dominant in philosophy and

science. When Smuts developed his theory, the deterministic views of Hegel were popular, and Darwinian evolutionary theory was being gradually accepted. Smuts strongly opposed the deterministic view of Hegel, and set out to explore the deeper “internal” structures behind Darwin's theory of evolution from a scientific point-of-view. *Holism and Evolution* can be understood as a rebellion against the reductionist science and philosophy of his time, and an attempt at laying a new ontological foundation to understand the seemingly creative nature of evolution and man. Smuts (1926/1987) states:

At present the concept of life is so indefinite and vague that, although the Kingdom of life is fully recognised, its government is placed under the rule of physical force or Mechanism. Life is practically banished from its own domain, and its throne is occupied by a usurper. Biology thus becomes a subject province of physical science—the Kingdom of Beauty, the free artistic plastic Kingdom of the universe, is inappropriately placed under the iron rule of force. Mind again, which is closest to us in experience, becomes farthest from us in exact thought (pp. 3 – 4).

As mentioned already, Smuts’ notion of Holism is not meant to be a complete integrative system of thought, and as such it is better understood as a foundational ontological concept. Smuts pointed out that his idea of Holism is but merely one of many such foundational concepts in science and philosophy. In philosophy the term ontology is often used within the context of metaphysics, and refers to what exists or what can exist in the world. Epistemology refers to the nature of human knowledge and understanding that can be obtained through various types of investigation (Slife, 2005). Ontological and epistemological questions often concern what is referred to as a person's *Weltanschauung* or worldview. Philosophers point out that all theories have ontological and epistemological ancestry or foundational assumptions, whether implicitly or explicitly stated (Polkinghorn, 2004; Slife, 2005).

Smuts' (1926) book *Holism and Evolution* was at its core an attempt to provide such a new foundational concept into our understanding of the world, and which he hoped would show that life and mind "are in their own right as true operative factors, and play a real and unmistakable part in determining both the advance and its specific direction" (p. 15), and not "to reduce life and mind to a subsidiary and subordinate position as a mere epiphenomena, as appearances on the surface of the one reality, matter" (p. 8), as the scientific materialists proposed.

Smuts (1927) was well versed in Einstein's theory of relativity and pointed out that the universe was created in successive and progressive increments as the result of activity in Space-Time "which expresses itself actuality as a passage, a process, a passing beyond existing forms and structures" (p. 337), and that any phenomenon is really a "synthesised 'event' in the system of Relativity" (p. 89). Smuts (1927) concluded that there existed an "inner driving force" and "creative principle" as an intrinsic part of the progress of evolution and referred to this creative and active force as Holism (p. 101). Holism was the creative factor responsible for the progressive evolution from matter, to life, to mind and finally the human personality. "Holism constitutes them all, connects them all, and so far as explanations are at all possible, explains and accounts for them all" (Smuts, 1927, p. 329).

Smuts (1927) suggested that when observing material structures the traces of Holism would be barely detectable, but when we study complex organisms we would find that "something more" exists beyond the elements which holds it all together. "This 'something more' we have identified as Holism, and we have explained it as not something additional quantitatively, but as a more refined and intimate structural relation of the elements themselves" (p. 282).

A shallow reading of Smuts can easily give the impression that he is suggesting a type of teleological animism, but Smuts rejected the theory of animism, and he also rejected a common-place idea at the time, which suggested that a transcendent spiritual realm acts on physical matter to animate it (Whitford, 1998). He believed that it was equally inaccurate "to reduce the lowly organisms at the beginning of life to pure mechanism," as it was "to explain them on the assumption of their having a complete personality like human beings" (Smuts, as cited by Hancock 1962, p. 292). In critiquing other approaches that attempt to explain the emergence of life from matter, Smuts (1927) points out that Naturalism does not account for creative evolution; Monadism incorrectly attributes mind and spirit to the inorganic realm; Idealism inaccurately assumes that "spirit" was present from the beginning of evolution and does not recognize that spirit evolved creatively; and Spiritual pluralism fails to recognize the "really creative work of evolution" (p. 327).

To assist in providing a comprehensible articulation of Smuts' Holism it will be useful at this point in the article to indicate out how Smuts' Holism resembles and differs from other concepts of holism. In his book, *Holistic Thought in Social Science*, Phillips (1976) illustrates three philosophical positions that he calls Holism 1, 2, and 3. Phillips' (1976) analysis of the three types of holism attempts to define each of its basic tenets.

"Holism 1 maintains, in part, that one has knowledge of the parts only, then at least some properties of organic wholes or systems cannot be predicted" (Phillips, 1976, p. 34). Holism 1, which he calls organicism, is derived from the Hegelian idea that the whole is prior to, and more than its parts (Whitford, 1998). Phillips (1976) notes that organicism is essentially a deterministic approach. Smuts' Holism is often equated with organicism (Barbour 1996). However, Smuts (1927) would not support Phillips' Holism 1 as he did not accept Hegel's deterministic views, as Smuts viewed evolution as essentially a progression of freedom (Whitford, 1998).

Phillips' Holism 2 is a position that points out that, in contrast to holism 1, "that the properties of organic wholes or systems, after they have been found, cannot be explained in terms of the properties of the parts" (Phillips, 1976, p. 34). Phillips (1976) adds further that it "is only Holism 2 that is directly opposed to methodological individualism" (p. 40). Consequently, Smuts (1927) would not support Holism 2 as he endorsed the scientific method (Whitford, 1998).

Phillips' (1976) category of Holism 3 is the position taken by modern physics and is neither reductionistic or antireductionistic, but rather calls for definition of terms and methodologies to study wholes (Allen, 1991). Whitford (1998) believes Smuts' Holism is in many ways more closely aligned to Holism 3, but because Phillips (1976) does not address the existential dimensions of holism, it is not possible to place Smuts entirely in this category.

## **Foundational concepts in Holism**

There are several foundational concepts and ideas that form part of Smuts' theory of Holism. In the next section of the article several of the foundational concepts are discussed. It is beyond the scope of the article to provide an exhaustive discussion on all the key terms and concepts of Smuts' Holism. The authors will focus on what they believe are essential foundational concepts in understanding Smuts' Holism as well as some of those that have a direct or indirect association with Integral Theory.

### ***Conception of wholes***

Smuts (1927) suggests that "wholeness is the most characteristic expression of the universe in its forward movement in time" (p. 101) and "individuation and universality are equally characteristic of Evolution" (p. 93). Smuts distinguishes his notion of wholes from earlier concepts of wholes, especially from Leibniz's Monads. In making his distinction he points out

that his notion of wholes are not unchanging philosophical concepts and or mere mechanical systems that are confined to the biological domain (Whitford, 1998). "Not only are plants and animals wholes, but in a certain limited sense ... atoms, molecules and chemical compounds are ... wholes; while in another closely related sense human characters, works of art, and the great ideal of the higher life are or partake in the character of wholes" (Smuts, 1927, p. 100).

It is important to note that for Smuts the concept of wholes does not refer to the whole domain of nature as one unity. "When we speak of Nature or the Universe as a Whole or The Whole ... we do not mean that either is a real whole in the sense defined in this work" (Smuts, 1927, p. 352), nor does he refer to a spiritual Absolute. "The great whole may be the ultimate terminus, but it is not the line which we are following. It is the small natural centres of wholeness which we are going to study, and the principle of which they are an expression" (Smuts, 1927, p. 103). Consequently, the idea of God, Spirit or supernatural force active in evolution cannot be inferred from his notion of whole or whole-making.

For Smuts the whole and its parts are a synthesis which reciprocally influence and determine one another. He points to this fact by saying "that "holism is of the parts and acts through the parts, but [it is] the parts in their new relation of intimate synthesis which gives them their unified action" (Smuts, 1927, p. 125-126). This is not the same as the Hegelian viewpoint, often associated with holism, which propose that the whole determines the parts (Whitford, 1998). Although Smuts (1927) believed that wholes are more than the sum of their parts, he clearly pointed out that it was the result of the "structural relationship between the parts" that comprised the whole (In Whitford, 1998, p. 56). For Smuts (1927) a chief feature of organisms are that "they involve a balanced correlation of organs and functions" (p. 125) and that they display a degree of self-regulation. Smuts (1927) believed that if there was an anomaly or disturbance "among the parts which upsets the routine of the whole, then either this disturbance is eliminated by the co-operative effort of many or all the parts, or the

functions of the other parts are so readjusted that a new balance and routine is established" (p. 131).

### *Fields*

According to Smuts to be able to have an adequate understanding of how wholes function and evolve one must turn to the notion of "fields". He considered the idea of fields as central to understanding his Holism, and also that for philosophy and science to adopt the notion of fields it will be "[o]ne of the most salutary reforms in thought" (Smuts, 1926, pp. 18 - 19).

Smuts (1927) believed that one of the great mysteries surrounding life is that "the sensible data are insufficient to account for its character and properties" (p. 116). Consequently, he believed that an analytic and reductionist understanding is hopelessly inadequate in providing an intelligible understanding to living organisms, as well as how life evolved from inorganic matter. To unlock some of the mysteries of life he suggested we must understand that each object, as well as concepts, also exists as fields beyond their observable "luminous points". Smuts (1926) writes:

We have to return to the fluidity and plasticity of nature and experience in order to find the concepts of reality. When we do this we find that round every luminous point in experience there is a gradual shading off into haziness and obscurity. A "concept" is not merely its clear luminous centre, but embraces a surrounding sphere of meaning or influence of smaller or larger dimensions, in which the luminosity tails off and grows fainter until it disappears. Similarly a "thing" is not merely that which presents itself as such in clearest definite outline, but this central area is surrounded by a zone of intuitions and influences which shades off into the region of the indefinite (p. 17).

## *Causation*

Smuts' (1926) notion of fields influenced, and was in turn influenced by his understanding of causality. He was critical both of Cartesian dualism, which emphasized a fundamental split between mind and matter, and at the time the prevailing the mechanistic view of life that tried to account for life and mind in the same way as it explains the natural sciences. (See Medard Boss, 1983, for a similar critique of Freud's *Metapsychology*.)<sup>10</sup> He also criticized vitalism for being "nothing but a pale copy of physical force" believed to control an organisms externally (Smuts, 1927, p. 166). Smuts (1927) was of the opinion that these mentioned views represent an inaccurate view of cause and effect, and suggested that we should:

[c]onceive of a cause as a centre with a zone of activity or influence surrounding it and shading gradually off into indefiniteness. Next conceive of an effect as similarly surrounded. It is easy in that way to understand their interaction, and to see that cause and effect are not at arm's length but interlocked, and embrace and influence each other through the interpenetration of their two fields (p. 18).

According to Smuts the deterministic concept of causality was due to the mechanistic view of things with rigid boundaries which ignored the fact that these observable "luminous" point in Space-Time also extend as surrounding fields. It is only within these fields that things and organisms interact with each other. Whitford (1998) suggest that Smuts' view on causality is in keeping with modern systems theory; and his critique of the view that sees objects and organism as having rigid borders, is echoed in the work of Bohm (1984), de Bono (1994), and McNeill & Freiburger (1993).

### ***Mind-Body relationship***

Apart from suggesting that there are no rigid boundaries between objects and organisms, Smuts also did not see mind and body as having clear boundaries, nor is it correct to assume that they interact with each other. He believed the concept of 'interaction' is inadequate to decide the relationship between body and mind, and suggested a term "intro-action" as more accurately describing the relationship. "Mind does not so much act on Body as penetrate it, and thus act through or inside it" (Smuts, 1927, p. 270).

Smuts alleged that mind evolved from matter and life to move the organism towards greater freedom. The concept of freedom played a central role in Smuts' conception of the human condition, and correlates and predates Heidegger's (1927) ontology of *Dasein* and notion of "being-in-the-world" (A serious study needs to be conducted to explore Smuts' unarticulated contribution towards existential philosophy and especially existential-phenomenological psychology). He writes that Mind "through its power of experience and knowledge comes to master its own conditions of life, to secure freedom and control of the regulative system into which it has been born. Freedom, plasticity, creativeness become the keynotes of the new order of Mind" (Smuts, 1927, p. 234).

Smuts rejects the idea of a disembodied and transcendent spiritual realm that interacts or influences mind and the body. "The universal realises itself not in idle self-contemplation, not in isolation from the actual, but in and through individual bodies, in particular things and facts. The temple of the Spirit is the structure of matter; the universal dwells in the concrete particular" (Smuts, 1927, p. 93). Smuts also rejects the Gnostic outlook that Spirit or Soul is to be given ontological priority and value over the body. "The view that degrades the body as unworthy of the Soul or Spirit is unnatural and owes its origins to morbid religious sentiments .... The ideal Personality only arises where Mind irradiates Body and Body nourishes Mind, and the two are one in their mutual transfiguration" (Smuts, 1927, p. 270).

Smuts rejects the dualistic mind-body view of Berkeley, which suggests that “God is the agent that acts between the two different substances,” and Spinoza’s view that mind and body operate “as two modes of action under one substance” (In Whitford, 1998, pp. 60 – 61). Smuts (1927) says "the fact is all these theories have an element of truth...Mind and Body are elements in the whole of Personality...This whole is an inner creative, recreative and transformative activity, which accounts for all that happens in Personality as between its component parts” (p. 270-271).

### ***Deus absconditus***

Smuts (1927) was in agreement with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose book *A Critique of Pure Reason* he studied in great depth while fighting in the Boer War, that the ontology of God’s existence cannot be found in studying nature, and suggests that belief in a transcendent being “must rest on quite different grounds” (p. 342).<sup>11</sup> Although Smuts suggested that there is an inherent striving for continual growth in wholeness or fullness in the universe, he however insisted that such striving is not towards a being of any sort or a whole of any type. He argued strongly against positing the existence of a deity as a "Supreme Whole" (Smuts, 1926/1973, p. 338) of which all other things are parts, whether conceived as "Mind" or organically as "Nature," insisting that such reasoning was "unsound and false" (p. 341). "No inference to a transcendent Mind is justified," Smuts insisted, "as that would make the whole still of the same character and order of its parts; which would be absurd" (p. 342).<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that for Smuts the “spiritual order”, although he never clearly defines his use of the concept, is not something that has always been present in the evolution of the universe, but as a later stage of the process of Holism. "The evolutionary facts of Science are beyond dispute, and they support the view of the earth as existing millions of

years before ever the psychical or spiritual order had arisen; and what is true of the earth may be similarly true of the universe as a whole" (Smuts, 1927, p. 340).

Moreover, Smuts did not adhere to a belief of Spirit as transcendent from matter, or that Spirit infused matter with some creative energy. "There is ... no spiritual Society of the whole universe, but there is Holistic order, which is something far greater, and stretches from the beginning to the end, and through all grades and degrees of holistic fulfillment. Holism, not Spiritualism, is the key to the interpretation of the universe" (Smuts, 1927, p. 344). It must be pointed out that when Smuts used the term "Holism" instead of "Spiritualism" is not a mere semantic switch where the concept of "Holism" now has similar foundational assumptions that "Spiritualism" has. Smuts does not see Holism in any way as a spiritual force, with religious undertones. For him Holism is simply an imminent feature of everything in nature. He adds that Holism negates "the far reaching spiritual assumptions of the Monadology, or Panpsychism" and "is ... in firm agreement with the teachings of science and experience" (Smuts, 1927, p. 344). For Smuts, wholes are co-creators in the process of evolution. "It is the synthesis involved in the concept of the whole which is the source of creativeness in nature" (Smuts, 1927, p. 126). He also notes that apart from Holism's creative features it also contains repressive aspects so that "the balanced whole of the Type is achieved" (Smuts, 1927, p. 192).

### ***Freedom and human being-in-the-world***

Smuts considered the human personality to the latest and pinnacle manifestation of Holism in the known universe. In his theory of Holism he considered the movement toward human wholeness an important component. He states that "[t]he object of the holistic movement is simply the Whole, the Self-realisation and the perfection of the whole" (Smuts, 1927, p. 324). For Smuts this "Self-realisation" of the "holistic movement" manifests in the human realm as

a movement towards greater freedom. This position is in stark contrast to thinkers like Hegel (evolutionary determinism), and others who suggest humans are part of a greater collective movement towards realization of Spirit/God/State. For Smuts the highest manifestation of Holism is in the freedom of the individual.

To be a free personality represents the highest achievement of which any human being is capable. The Whole is free, and to realize wholeness or freedom (they are correlative expressions) in the smaller whole of individual life represents not only the highest of which an individual is capable, but expresses also what is at once the deepest and highest universal movement of Holism” (Smuts, 1926, p. 312).

This notion of freedom also has significant existential implications from a socio-cultural and political perspective. The highest realization of mankind does not lie in some future idealized collective state-of-being, realized Spirit or collective level-of-consciousness, of which the highest existential duty of the individual is to contribute to this goal - but rather in the here and now, in the free individual. The State is not seen as a whole, for which the individual is only a means to an end, and only exists to contribute to it, but rather the State should serve and promote the freedom of the individual. The State<sup>13</sup> should not be seen as a holistic unity or a holistic organism, they are merely aggregates of wholes (individuals), never more than the sums of its parts. Obviously Smuts is not suggesting a form of self-absorbed narcissism, but rather a state of being-in-the-world where an individual’s actions contribute towards greater freedom individually and collectively.

## **Conclusion**

This presentation/paper briefly attempted to point out that the philosopher-statesman Jan Smuts’ theory of Holism has significantly contributed, albeit often implicitly, to the

development of Integral Theory, and can be acknowledged as an pioneering Integral thinker in his own merit. This paper and presentation provided a brief outline of Smuts' theory of Holism, as developed in his book *Holism and Evolution* and other philosophical essays. If Smuts (1927) were alive today, we the authors believe, that he would champion Integral Theory as a astute articulation of his clarion call for a “new and fuller expression for the great saving unities” (p. v).

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<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that Smuts' theory of Holism was not meant to be a complete philosophical system, but merely to point out a certain neglected tendency in the universe. Although not a stand-alone system it has great integrative value and be understood as a type of metatheory, as the data of Smuts' theory are existent theories and not derived from direct empirical observation.

<sup>2</sup> Perls established a psychoanalytic training institute in Johannesburg and in 1942 joined the South African armed forces, serving as a military psychiatrist.

<sup>3</sup> The greatest value in the Gestalt approach, according to Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951), "lies in the insight that the whole determines the parts, which contrasts with the previous assumption that the whole is merely the total sum of its elements" (p. 19).

<sup>4</sup> In 1937 Koffka sent Smuts his book *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. In a reply Smuts (In Blanckenberg, 1951) says that "[y]ears ago I read your 'Growth of Mind' with deep interest and much instruction. Ever since I have followed, so far as my circumstances allow, the great developments which have taken place in Gestalt Psychology" (p. 159).

<sup>5</sup> It must be noted that the advances in psychics and biology after Smuts wrote *Holism and Evolution* made him state in 1945 that "my early chapters read like pre-scientific" and that he wished he could find the time to write his second volume, *Holism of the Spirit or Holism II* and "let the first become antiquarian as it is practically antiquated (Smuts in Beukes, 1994, p. 70)". Although certain elements of *Holism and Evolution*, became outdated Smuts felt that the main argument of his book remained valid.

<sup>6</sup> Smuts has at times erroneously been accused of being a racist and associated with institutional apartheid in South Africa. It must be noted that Smuts was the leader of The United Party, which was in opposition to D. F. Malan's National Party who officially implemented apartheid in South Africa 1948. Smuts (In Blanckenberg, 1951) was vehemently opposed to the implementation of the system institutional apartheid, and had the following to say about racial intolerance: "If we are a democracy we must pay careful attention to the point of view of minority. It is one of the essences of democracy to not only to rule by majority but to have a careful regard to the rights of minorities...We should take heart the lessons we have learned in our history [referring to the original European settlers in South Africa which consisted primarily of persecuted minority groups, as well as the oppression of the Afrikaner Boer's and many black South Africans by the British Government which lead to the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902, where 4 177 women and 22 074 children under sixteen died in the British concentration camps (Cloete, 2000)] and banish all ideas of persecuting a man because of race...Respect the other man's rights, although he is not of the same race as yourself and if he is not of the same colour as yourself..." He goes on to warn his South African audience, before the institutionalisation of apartheid, (and if only they took heed, what a better country South Africa could of been today), "Deal tenderly, circumspectly and delicately with this colour issue. Do not create problems, which for us might be difficult but for our children may be insoluble" (p. 169). There is a remarkable and strange book of historical fantasy wrote by Arthur Keppel-Jones in 1947 called *When Smuts Goes: A History of South Africa from 1952-2010*. This book predicted a bleak future for South Africa if Smuts' United Party lost the elections in 1948, and the National Party came into power. Some of Keppel-Jones' predictions were remarkably accurate.

<sup>7</sup> One of Smuts' favourite boyhood recollection in later years was walking around the 'veld' with old Adam, an aged black servant of the family, who loved to teach him various aspects of the veld, like where to dig for edible roots and look for tortoises (Hancock, 1962).

<sup>8</sup> Being a member of the British War cabinet after being one of their fiercest enemies 15 years before in the Anglo-Boer War is an unprecedented event in British war history.

<sup>9</sup> Since his youth Smuts had a mystical temperament and was prone to what could be called mystical experiences especially when in nature. Based on Smuts' writing about his childhood it can be assumed that his rudimentary ideas of Holism were mystical insights or peak experiences while walking in the *veld* (Translation, countryside) of the Malmesbury district of the then Cape Colony. One of the authors (Du Plessis) of this paper grew up in the same district as Smuts (exactly a hundred years later) and can relate how the expansive veld of the Boland is conducive to mystical insights. In his final letter to Queen Frederica of Greece written on the 7<sup>th</sup>

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of May 1950, four months before his death, his mystical temperament is very clear after witnessing a day in the then Transvaal after good rains which “made the earth look like a picture”. It is worth quoting a lengthy paragraph of this letter even if only for its poetic beauty.

And we are truly one with all things, but one realizes this at such great moments of inspiration, when the self merges into the Whole, and all life and consciousness becomes as today a great act of marriage in which the love at the heart of things finds its supreme consummation. It is occasionally that the real Truth is revealed to us as a flash of light in our happiest experiences. A day like today is like a real marriage feast in which we partake, not only to love but of the Highest. There is the Great Presence of nature, and there is the great feast which is consummated in it. This mystery of things should be an abiding impression and accompany us all the time. But it would be too much for us. It is only on the mountain summit of our experience that we have this great sense and realization of the meaning of it all, and feel ourselves of the Great Company at the great Feast. If this experience were too long continued it might be too much for us as we would be drunk of it and undone by it. So we get it in small doses. But those short moments of vital experience reveal the real truth and reality of things to us, and perhaps all our little strength can bear. The mystic whole is all the time with us, but we understand it only in flashes of high experience. (Smuts in Beukes, 1989, p. 211)

<sup>10</sup> Boss (1983) points out that the natural scientific method has its limitations in explaining the human realm, as it originated from and is only sovereign in the non-human realm (natural sciences). Boss points out the dangers of explaining higher-order complex phenomenon (human-being-in-the-world) by using methodology and epistemology dominant in lower orders of complexity (inorganic matter). He believes that in Freud's metapsychology there is inevitably an abstraction and tapering from our lived engagement in-the-world (human-being-in-the-world reduced to first and second order ontology) (See Du Plessis, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> We the authors found it amusing picturing Smuts reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* around the campfire, and upon enquiry from his fellow Boer soldiers (who were mostly illiterate) as to what he was reading, trying to explain (and we image with little success) to them. Hence his endearing nickname amongst his fellow Boer soldiers, “Slim Jan”, translated as “Clever Jan”.

<sup>12</sup> Piet Beukes in his books *The Holistic Smuts* (1989) and the *Religious Smuts* (1994) makes the case that Smuts was a deeply religious man and a Christian (which was true until Smuts went to Cambridge, where he states that his reading of Walt Whitman freed “me from much of the theological or conventional preoccupations due to my early pious upbringings” (Smuts in Beukes, 1994, p. 66)). Although I (Du Plessis) hold the work of Beukes in high esteem, I believe that Beukes had a strong personal bias to describe Smuts as a Christian. Although Smuts had great respect for certain aspects of the Christian, especially the Greek version of the New Testament and the historical figure of Jesus as a manifestation of a deeply evolved personality, one could not rightly call Smuts a Christian, as he did not believe in Christian and church dogma. Beukes fails to see, as Wilber (2006) points out, that any religious tradition can be understood from different levels of development. I have found no evidence in Smuts' writing that his interpretation of the Christian story would define him as a Christian in any conventional sense.

<sup>13</sup> Smuts called these type organisations “holoïds”, which are mechanical and not an organism.

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