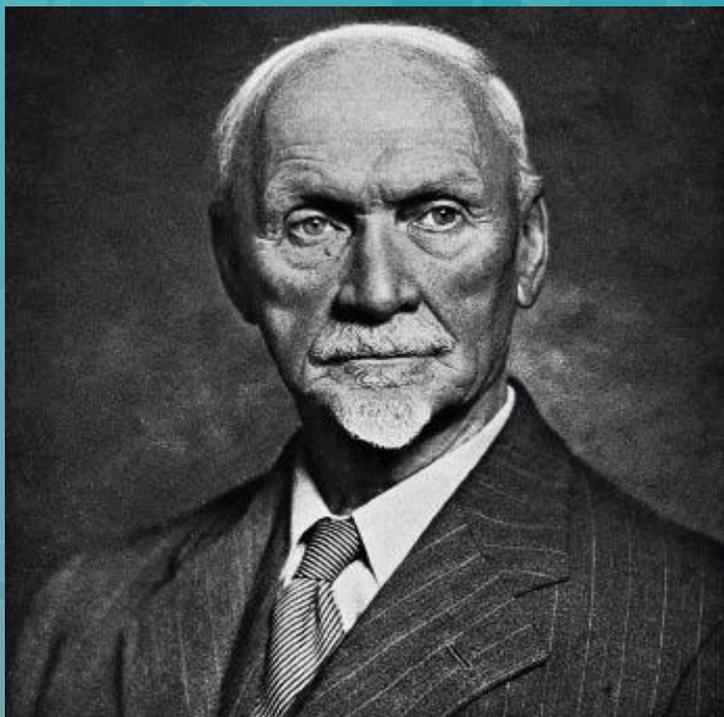


**Presentation for the
Fourth International
Integral Theory Conference
2015**



**The Integral
Jan Smuts**

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Integral Theory in Action

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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 **General 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 20th Century [cf. Marcus Aurelius]**; that Smuts' notion of Holism had a significant influence on the development of Integral Theory **[Integral Theory in Action]**. This paper and presentation will provide a brief outline of Smuts' theory of Holism as developed in his book ***Holism and Evolution* [easily available on Kindle]** and other philosophical essays.

Finally, we the authors are of the opinion that Smuts' role in the formation of the **League of Nations** and the **United Nations** is the **grandest and most ambitious manifestation of "Integral Theory in Action"** to date.



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.

- *Martin 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.

– *General Jan Smuts* (1927, pp. v-vi)

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* [cf. **Andre Marquis**].

Integral Theory (Wilber, 1995, 2000), like Smuts' theory of Holism, is an attempt at such an integrative “**new and fuller expression**” of man's being-in-the-world.

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.

- **Ken Wilber, 1980, (*The Atman Project*), p. 13.**

Influence on Psychology

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.

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). **Kurt Koffka** (1935), one of the founders of Gestalt psychology and author of the book *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, 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).

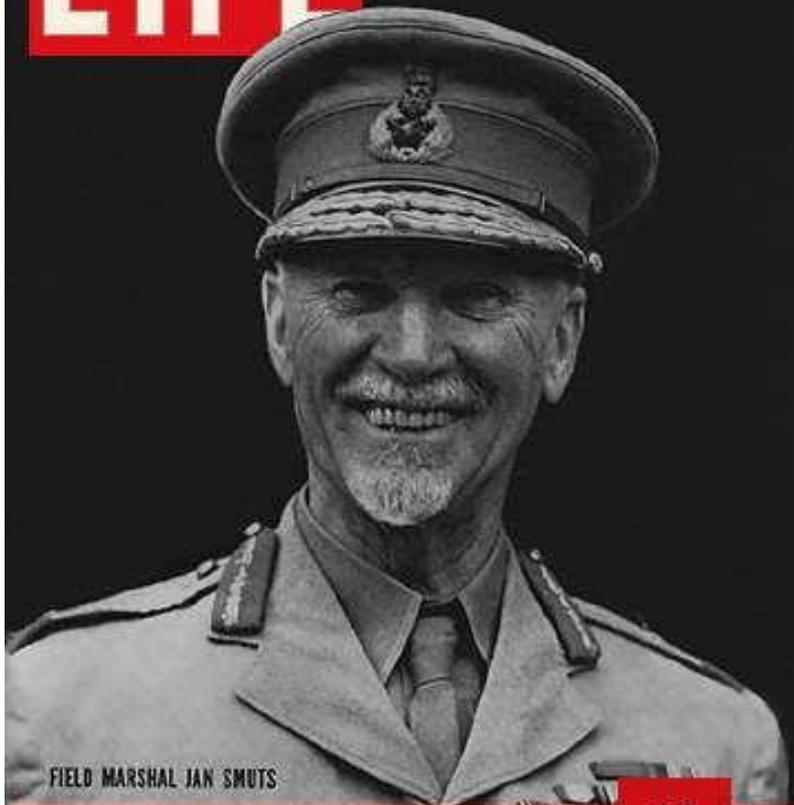
Historical Background

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.

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.

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/integral philosophy is evident in the pivotal role he played in the foundation of the **League of Nations** and later the **United Nations**.

LIFE



FIELD MARSHAL JAN SMUTS

NOVEMBER 8, 1943 **10** CENTS
YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$4.50

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 [cf. Guy's early upbringing]**.

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 . At Victoria College he won the Ebden 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 successfully 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**. 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 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...** (p.169).

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). 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 physico-chemical structures, through the cell and organisms, through Mind in animals, to Personality in man" (p. 326).

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" (Smuts, 1942, p. 147).

The early roots of Smuts' Holism

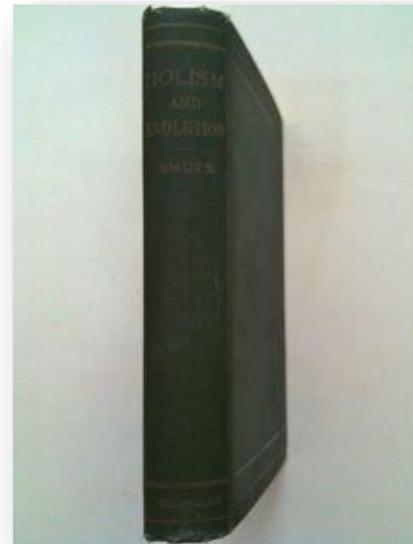
The academic origins of Smuts' holistic thinking can be traced back to his days as a student at **Cambridge University**. In 1891, as a first-year law student he wrote a commentary called ***The Nature and Function of Law in the History of Human Society***. In this article Smuts applied an **developmental approach to culture**, and understood it as a “gradual evolutionary liberation from the biological realm” (Anker, 2001, p. 43).

In 1892 Smuts 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**. 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).

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*.

Holism and Evolution



General. The Right Hon. J.C. Smuts (1926). *Holism and Evolution*. London: Macmillan.

Smuts wrote ***Holism and Evolution in 1926*** during a time that a **materialistic worldview [e.g. Early Wittgenstein and American Behaviorism]** 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.

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 (Smuts, 1926/1987, pp. 3 – 4).

Smuts' (1926) book *Holism and Evolution* was at its core an attempt to provide 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.

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).

Foundational
Epistemological and Ontological
Concepts
in
Holism and Evolution

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**.

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).) [cf. **Buddhist concept/experience of interpenetration or dependent co-origination; Andre Marquis on intersubjectivity in psychotherapy**].

Causation

Smuts' 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.

[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** (Smuts, 1926, 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).

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 (See Du Plessis, 2014).

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 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).

Deus absconditus

Smuts (1927) was in agreement with **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). 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).

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 psychological 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. **Smuts does not see Holism in any way as a spiritual force, with religious undertones. For him Holism is simply an immanent 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).

Smuts considered the human personality to the latest and pinnacle manifestation of Holism in the known universe. 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 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.

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.

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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