

GEORGE M GROW JR



# THE INTEGRAL SOCIETY

Nonfiction



THE PATH THAT UNDERLIES ALL OTHER PATHS

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## FROM TRADITION AND MODERNISM TO POSTMODERNITY

Living in the zeitgeist always carries a high price. Mass phenomena such as perversion, burnout and depression make clear that we as a society actually have no choice: we have gone too far in bearing the control and regulation of liveliness on the basis of a mechanistic, reductionist worldview and are in doing so slamming into the wall. A large number of patients are the outriders of a system crash. They are symptoms of the defects of our time, but we are blind to the warning signs.

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## Reading sample, page 11

### The historical development of reason in three stages

At this point we would like to look into why the giants [Traditionalism] in our parable loom so large. It is based on the fact that the sum of Western intellectual culture up to the Modernist era arose from a belief in the power of reason. Correspondingly, the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) found that all of Western intellectual history [up to Modernism] was simply a footnote to Plato.

Traditionalism, which Modernism rebels against, is faith in human reason, which reached its apex during the Enlightenment, meaning: the European Age of Enlightenment was born out of the notion that reason itself was capable of bringing the truth to light. Reason was to overcome dogmatic repression and the belief in the authority of the Christian religion while bringing freedom and prosperity to all.

The German philosopher, enlightened mystic and theologian Nikolaus of Cusa (1401-1464) stressed that reason [= thought directed at the totality of things] is a uniquely human capacity that develops its power through learning. Literally:

"A human being is to an ani-

mal what educated humans are to uneducated ones. Educated humans see the letters of the alphabet (*litteras alphabeti*) just as the uneducated. But the educated form syllables (*syllabas*) through various combinations of letters, and from these words and sentences. This is impossible for the uneducated, as they lack the capacity that the educated have gained through training of their reason (*ab exercitato intellectu*). A human being may then combine or separate the images of nature (*species naturales*) through the power of reason and use them to create motions and signs of reason and art. This is what elevates humans above animals and the educated above the uneducated, because the former have at their disposal a trained and educated sense of reason (*exercitatum et reformatum intellectum*)."

300 years after Cusa, the coming of the Industrial Revolution, the failure of Napoleon and social issues all came to cast doubt on human reason. And with regard to the terrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (imperialism, the Holocaust, Vietnam, Korea), which can all be seen in connection with industrialization, members of the Frankfurt School began developing a critique of rationality. This criticizes the method of modern science and its credulity towards facts, which is determined by Positivism. Reason

has grown into an instrument of repressing individuals and has almost totally stifled reason's "power of self-liberation". In other words: If the tradition of post-Platonic thought was centered on the concept of reason [phase 1], Modernism turns away from it [phase 2] and Postmodernism finds its way back to that point, but with a critical attitude [phase 3].

Traditionalism – belief in human reason

Modernism – Loss of faith in reason

Postmodernism – Dialectic of Traditionalism and Modernism

End of the reading sample

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