

Now is your opportunity to own almost two decades of the spiritual inquiry you love by purchasing a Collector's Set of nearly all the back issues of *EnlightenNext* magazine (formerly *What Is Enlightenment?*). The magazine is going out of print, and we are clearing out our storeroom—only a small number of Collector's Sets remain. Own yours today, before they're gone forever. (In fact, three of our 47 back issues have already sold out!)

Roshi Vernon Kitabu Turner

Ken Wilber, integral philosopher



Or purchase the complete set of back issues in a beautiful new digital format!



EnlightenNext

~~THE MAGAZINE FOR~~ EVOLUTIONARIESsm

*An important update
for subscribers*

It's a **New Era** at
EnlightenNext

**A Message from Founder Andrew Cohen
Genius Is Collaborative**

- The Scenius Conference, Harvard 2012
- Women and Genius: An Interview with Vivian Gornick
- A Review of Steven Johnson's *Where Good Ideas Come From*

Evolutionary Enlightenment: The Book





“THE GREATEST THRILL OF THIS PROCESS HAS BEEN THE AWAKENED
INTELLECTUAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND SPIRITUAL INSPIRATION
THAT HAS ARISEN BETWEEN US IN OUR WORK TOGETHER.”



Editorial

ALL TRUE EVOLUTIONARIES LIVE FOR CHANGE. We at EnlightenNext are not only committed to sharing an evolutionary worldview, we are also committed to putting the principles inherent in that worldview into practice—every single day. Nineteen years ago I founded the magazine *What Is Enlightenment?* in order to facilitate a collective inquiry between myself, my students, and culture at large. I wanted to think out loud with others about the important moral and philosophical questions that arise when ancient Eastern mysticism collides with a rapidly developing post-modern world. Working on the publication intensively with others has been intellectually nourishing and enlightening—both for myself and for our readers from all over the world who share our ongoing inquiry. For me, personally, the greatest thrill of this process has been the ongoing experience of awakened intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual inspiration and illumination that has arisen between us in our work together—a field of shared creativity we now call “scenius,” (a term coined by music impresario Brian Eno).

After ten years, our scenius took a big creative leap forward as we explicitly embraced an evolutionary worldview, connecting the dots that had been implicit in our work for many years. Eventually, this is what led us to change our name to *EnlightenNext* in 2008. Ever since our publication began, our shared inquiry has seeded cultural conversation at the leading edge, but that influence broadened even more as *EnlightenNext: The Magazine for Evolutionaries*.

Unfortunately, after all this time, the financial challenges of creating and publishing a serious and sophisticated magazine have finally become unsustainable for us, and therefore, for the foreseeable future, we will no longer be able to share our inquiry in print.

But our scenius continues to thrive. In fact, we are even more inspired and committed to the propagation of an evolutionary worldview than we ever have been and are bursting with creative



ideas and plans for the future. For all of our fans and loyal subscribers, the most imminent opportunity to directly experience what you have been enjoying in the pages of our magazine will be at our first annual EnlightenNext “Scenius” Conference to be held on May 16–19, 2012, at the Harvard Medical Center in Boston, Massachusetts (see p. 4 for details).

“WE ARE IN THE PROCESS
OF REINVENTING THE
‘THINK TANK’ THAT HAS
BEEN THE INTELLECTUAL
AND PHILOSOPHICAL
ENGINE BEHIND
THE MAGAZINE.”

In this unique forum, we intend to create the rarefied conditions in which five hundred friends and colleagues can come together and have the intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual experience of a lifetime. If you care deeply about where we are all going, save the date and don’t miss it!

In addition, to further the work we have been doing for many years, we are in the process of reinventing the “think tank” that has been the intellectual and philosophical engine behind the magazine, and looking for ways in which it can have the greatest

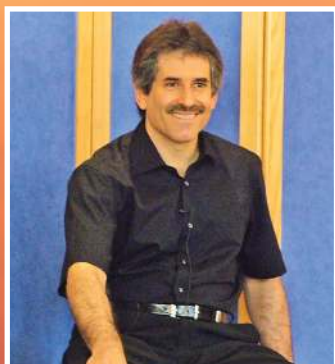
cultural impact as well as include many more of our friends and colleagues. Much, much more to come, so stay tuned...

Speaking very personally, the truly profound and deeply revelatory education I have received from the last twenty years of this process feels nothing less than miraculous. I look forward with eager anticipation to sharing the next twenty with even more of you.

Andrew Cohen
Founder and Editor in Chief

EnlightenNext's Third Annual Being & Becoming Retreat

with **Andrew Cohen**



Tuscany, Italy



Part 1

The Being Retreat

August 6–17, 2011

Experience the depths of enlightened awareness through the art & science of stillness



Part 2

The Becoming Retreat

August 17–28, 2011

Engage in a dynamic exploration of the evolutionary process in self & culture

For more information and to register for one or both of these uniquely transformative events, visit

andrewcohen.org/retreats

intensives@enlightennext.org 413.637.6079

An Important Update for Subscribers

Issue 47—The Cosmic Dimensions of Love—was the final edition of *EnlightenNext* magazine. This small publication that you are holding in your hands is to let you know your options as a subscriber and to keep you up to date on our future plans as we move forward with new initiatives and projects.

Q & A with *EnlightenNext* Executive Editor Carter Phipps

Why is *EnlightenNext* magazine stopping circulation?

Publishing this magazine has been a true labor of love for all of us at *EnlightenNext*, and we deeply appreciate the incredible loyalty and passion so many readers have shown us over the years. Yet like many other magazines today, we have been facing difficult financial headwinds. As a nonprofit, we simply could no longer afford to subsidize the substantial deficit required for us to produce a national magazine with this caliber of content. But the economic challenge of changing media is only one half of the story. The other half is that there are also so many other exciting things that we would like to accomplish.

Will *EnlightenNext* continue to publish content in other forms, digitally or otherwise?

We remain fully committed to delivering world-class content at the intersection between spirituality and culture, and we are actively exploring other publishing models. If you would like to stay up to date on future plans, please be sure to sign up for our biweekly email at www.enlightennext.org/email.

Our website, www.enlightennext.org/ magazine, and the *EnlightenNext* Editors' Blog will continue to be evolutionary hubs for our content. There, you will find articles, dialogues, and interviews by *EnlightenNext* editors as well as guest colleagues, reflecting on both the events of the day and on deeper currents of culture. We also encourage you to visit our Facebook page at <http://j.mp/enextfb>.



Also, as some of you no doubt already know, *EnlightenNext* is much more than a magazine. We are an educational nonprofit committed to furthering the evolution of consciousness and culture, and we offer many other programs and events featuring the same unique perspective and spirit of inquiry that has made *EnlightenNext* magazine such an influential journal in cutting-edge spiritual and philosophical circles. We really see ourselves as a kind of spiritual and cultural think tank, seeding ideas that have helped inspire and support a movement of evolutionaries who care deeply about the future and who prefer a more rigorous approach to spirit in this postmodern age.

What new initiatives is *EnlightenNext* working on?

One thing we do not lack at *EnlightenNext* is creative inspiration! And I promise that we are going to be working harder than

ever to serve and evolve the movement that the magazine has fostered.

In these pages, readers will learn more about the direction we are headed and hear about several of our newest offerings, products, and upcoming events. This list includes the announcement of our May 2012 conference. Building on our years of leading-edge inquiry, this event will convene a unique group of thought leaders to explore the theme of *scenius*—a new term that designates the way in which fertile “scenes” can give rise to creative genius. We believe that *scenius* is one of the keys to creativity and innovation as well as a driver of cultural evolution. The 2012 *EnlightenNext* Scenius Conference promises to be a special event, and we hope to see a lot of our magazine readers there, in person or as virtual participants.

Additionally, this fall, the founder of *EnlightenNext*, Andrew Cohen, will launch his new book, *Evolutionary Enlightenment*. Described by philosopher Ken Wilber as “one of the most significant books on spirituality written in the postmodern era,” it will be published in September 2011. As a complement to Cohen’s new work, my own book, *Evolutionaries*, is due out in early 2012 from Harper Perennial.

I have one or more issues of the magazine remaining on my subscription; will I receive any refund or compensation?

If you are owed one or more magazines, you should have received a letter with this publication explaining your options. Thank you again for your support. We have faced difficult choices in the last year, but we are excited about the future. It truly is the beginning of a new era at *EnlightenNext*, and we look forward to building deeper and even more satisfying relationships with our readers in the years ahead. We hope you can join us!

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EnlightenNext presents



The Scenius C

Genius Is Collaborative



POPULAR INTEREST IN THE POWER OF SHARED HUMAN CREATIVITY

has never been higher. Many of today's most respected cutting-edge forums, from TED to PopTech and WIRED to Fast Company, are featuring talks, articles, and in-depth inquiries about how to unleash the power of human networks to create and shape the future. But the science of this field is relatively unformed, still in its earliest stages. All we know is that certain environments at certain times in history have helped unleash surprising degrees of human genius, but we don't yet understand the dynamics that lead to these breakthroughs. We don't yet know the hidden keys that are responsible for putting the zest in the zeitgeist.

On May 16-19, 2012, EnlightenNext will launch a three-day, live inquiry into the dynamics that drive individual and cultural innovation. The topic will be "scenius." Coined by musical savant Brian Eno, scenius is a combination of the term "scene" and "genius"—the communal form of the word genius. Scenius comes from the recognition that genius doesn't simply arise in rare, extraordinary individuals but rather emerges out of vibrant, cutting-edge "scenes" or cultural niches where individuals compete and cooperate to push the edges of their field forward, generating the innovation and genius

that defines their moment in history. Think: The Renaissance, the Founding Fathers, the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists, the Suffragists, the Beats, Xerox PARC, Silicon Valley. Examples of scenius exist in the arts, philosophy, science, and technology across all cultures and over the last several thousand years of human history. Simply put, scenius has been an essential but underappreciated dynamic behind the evolution of consciousness and culture for much of human civilization.

So how does one create scenius? What key principles help define this breakthrough idea? What do experts say about the subtle dynamics involved in building a culture of creativity? How does understanding consciousness and cultural evolution help us to create scenius? These are the questions that the Scenius Conference will explore and answer.

At the Scenius Conference, everyone—from speakers to organizers to attendees—will have the opportunity to not only learn about scenius but to experience its potential in real time. Don't miss this rare opportunity to discover how scenius can transform the way we think, work, and collaborate in today's global village.

s Conference

May 16-19, 2012

Harvard Medical School • Boston, MA

DAY ONE: What Is "Scenius"?

The emerging science of creativity and collaboration

DAY TWO: Why Is Scenius Important?

The deeper dimensions of human transformation and cultural evolution that drive scenius.

DAY THREE: How Do You Create Scenius?

The principles that govern the emergence of scenius and examples of how to use these principles to evoke genius in groups.

REGISTRATION AVAILABLE FALL 2011

To stay informed about the conference, sign up for our "Think About This" newsletter at www.enlightennext.org/email.

The Gathering Force of Scenius

An Interview with Vivian Gornick on the Exhilaration of Women's Liberation, Emma Goldman, and the Suffragists

By Elizabeth Debold

Think: the 1960s. Rock and roll, civil rights... and the movement for women's liberation. When ordinary women by the thousands are catapulted into a new way of seeing and making sense of their lives that leads them to question everything, you know you're not in Kansas anymore. You're in scenius—a "scene," or happening between people, that gives rise to the kind of genius that can illuminate a new horizon for humanity.

As my colleagues and I have become spellbound by the fascinating phenomenon of scenius—which will be the subject of our first conference in May 2012—my mind turned to that time of foment and possibility for women, and, as well, to a favorite essay written by author and critic Vivian Gornick in a collection entitled *The Feminist Memoir Project*. "To be a feminist in the early seventies—bliss it was in that dawn to be alive. Not an I-love-you in the world could touch it," she writes. "There was no other place to be, except with each other.... The feminists were my sword and my shield: my solace, my comfort, my excitement." She captures the joy and indomitable spirit women shared at that time. It produced brilliant, shattering literature, criticism, and art that changed how we see women, men, and

what we are doing here together.

I wondered what Gornick would think about this idea of "scenius." Since she has a knack for describing the scintillating surge of the feminist zeitgeist, could she shed light on how it manifests? It turns out that while Gornick had never heard the term, she was something of a student of this phenomenon—attracted to those feisty and exhilarating times in history that are true scenius. Here, in this excerpt from our conversation, she speaks not only about the women's movement but also about anarchism, suffragists, and the spirit of scenius that can lift us all.

EnlightenNext: *Scenius is a term coined by the musician Brian Eno to describe a "scene," or milieu, that produces remarkable creative genius. The women's movement of the 1960s and 70s gave rise to so much creativity and new thinking, and seems to be a great example of scenius. Can you describe what was happening then among women?*

Vivian Gornick: Nobody can tell you why an atmosphere takes fire. I could analyze why that moment in the late 60s and early 70s suddenly made thousands of women



Vivian Gornick

all over the country take fire. I could tell you that it was the end of the Vietnam War or loss of faith of the middle class. But it doesn't really matter for your purposes. The fact is that it did happen and it does happen.

Two or three women would meet and suddenly they weren't exchanging whatever banalities they would exchange before. Suddenly they were talking class consciousness, suddenly they were talking about being



citizens of the world. Suddenly, we were seeing ourselves as activators of history.

We are describing what happens when a social movement gathers force. It is an atmosphere that is mysterious. And when it happens, everything rises with it—the minds, the skills, and the spirit of every human being so that the good get better and the better get even better; the humble get distinguished and the distinguished become genius.

This happens among all pioneering movements. I just finished writing a book about Emma Goldman [the political activist, anarchist, and birth-control advocate]. I speak a lot about how the radicalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century produced people like Emma Goldman. It made many, many people very brilliant radicals. In the thirty years between 1890 and 1920, a remarkable amount of thinking and acting took place because of the atmosphere, the zeitgeist. It's a dynamic that is very hard to pull apart. It makes people, and people make it. The two go together.

I also wrote a book about Elizabeth Cady Stanton called *The Solitude of Self*. Stanton and her peers held these suffrage conventions every year for fifty years. It was a piece

of scenius. It was their education; it was their blossoming. The suffragists became things they never dreamed of because they were suddenly meeting each other and learning from each other. Many of them became leaders they never dreamed they could become.

In the late 60s and early 70s, that is essentially what happened with us. First of all, lots and lots of people were writing in those years. Out of it emerged some writers—I'm one of them, but everybody wrote. Everybody had a theory, everybody had a memoir in them, everybody had something to say. People who never dreamed of putting pen to paper were doing so. A lot of it wasn't good, but it was useful. It made somebody else's talent suddenly emerge or suddenly get strong.

EN: *Inherent in what you are saying is that something happens in the social field between people that has the power to lift us up.*

VG: Yes. I was young in those particular years, but it wasn't just about being young. We were immensely excited by and absorbed by an atmosphere of promise,

a general atmosphere of excitement.

For many people, it was bad excitement—they felt the world was coming apart and wrote extensively about it. But there were also many millions of people who were immensely exhilarated by the time. I never remember hearing anyone speak of feeling empty or bored. Now you hear it all the time.

It's astonishing to me, remembering how different things were. Human nature hasn't changed. We're the same people. But the times have changed so drastically. When there was all this revolutionary fervor, people caught it from each other—what you are calling "scenius."

Today, in order to exemplify and live out a little piece of genius, you have to have a really strong dose of talent or genius, so that it is self-generating. While genius always makes its own laws, now the more ordinary talent goes underground. Without the support and uplift of this kind of zeitgeist—of scenius—many people's talents, ambitions, and desires are easily suppressed. People who are young now are at a loss. They make less effort than they would if the people around them were gathering and sharing this immense excitement.

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The Evolutionary Worldview Courses



Self-paced digital courses featuring premium audios, videos, and articles, created by the editors of *EnlightenNext* magazine.



with Andrew Cohen, Carter Phipps, Elizabeth Debold & Ross Robertson

For nearly two decades EnlightenNext has been exploring what we call the Evolutionary Worldview, an emerging philosophical perspective whose central insight is that everything in the cosmos—from the formation of galaxies to our own deepest spiritual aspirations—is part of one vast developmental process. We've brought together hundreds of the world's leading thinkers and visionaries to explore the profound implications of this perspective. And now, through this new series of online courses created by the editors of *EnlightenNext* magazine, we're sharing what we've learned about how the Evolutionary Worldview can enable each of us to become twenty-first-century agents of change.

FOUNDATIONS COURSE

The Evolutionary's Guide to Changing the World



Apply the Principles of an Evolutionary Worldview A 6-Part Online Course

Through six carefully crafted lessons—recorded from a live course offered by the editors of *EnlightenNext* magazine in the summer of 2010—you'll discover a new way of understanding the profound relationship between transforming yourself and transforming the world.

www.evolutionaryworldview.com

STUDY MODULES

Created by *EnlightenNext's* editorial team and featuring questions to guide you through the material, these modules weave together our feature articles, interviews, audios, and videos on some of the most important issues of our time.

www.evolutionaryworldview.com

OUR BRIGHT GREEN FUTURE:

Rebooting Environmentalism for the 21st Century.



With the urgency of climate change increasing by the day, we need a bold new approach to environmental problems and solutions. This course explores the leading edge of environmental thought and arms you with a surprisingly optimistic perspective on our bright green future.

Featuring: Ross Robertson, Alex Steffen, Michael Braungart, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and more.

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The Business of Saving the World.



Is globalization good? Can big business save the world? For decades, the common answer to these questions for many was an unequivocal "no." But the tides may be starting to turn. In this course, you'll explore

some of the innovative ways that forward-thinking leaders are turning business into a global force for change. **Featuring:** Jeremy Rifkin, Chip Conley, Dee Hock, Howard Bloom, Michael Braungart, Tex Gunning, Thomas Barnett, and more.

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Foundations of the Contemporary Path



Explore the most critical and complex questions that confront us as we seek to live a meaningful life. Presenting the best of ancient wisdom alongside radically novel insights into consciousness and

culture, this study module illuminates both the path and the goal of contemporary spirituality, presenting a curriculum that aims to provoke and inspire, changing one's perspective and, ultimately, one's life. **Featuring:** Andrew Cohen, Ken Wilber, Eckhart Tolle, Amma, Brian Swimme, Elizabeth Debold, and more.

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SPIRAL DYNAMICS:

A Powerful Tool for Cultural Transformation.



No theory or system will alter how you see yourself and the world more profoundly than Spiral Dynamics. In this course, you'll delve into this sophisticated model of human cultural development and discover powerful new tools for navigating the complexities of life in the twenty-first century. **Featuring:** Don Beck, Ken Wilber, Steve McIntosh, Christopher Cooke, Elza Maalouf, and more.

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The New Face of Spirit in the Age of Darwin.



We all know that evolution applies to the natural world, but how might Darwin's dangerous idea transform our understanding of spirituality, and even of God? In this course, you'll meet some of today's leading reinterpreters

of spirit for an evolutionary age. **Featuring:** Andrew Cohen, Brian Swimme, Carter Phipps, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Michael Dowd, and more.

EVOLVING WOMEN:

A New Spiritual Frontier for Transforming Self & Society.



For the past fifty years, women have been pushing the edge of culture, breaking through one glass ceiling after another. But today's glass ceilings exist inside—in the very structures of women's consciousness. This course

explores the deepest dimensions of women's liberation, showing how breaking through these inner glass ceilings can release a new potential to transform ourselves and our culture.

Featuring: Elizabeth Debold, Tenzin Palmo, Carol Lee Flinders, Vimala Thakar, and more.

INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY

The Theory that Changes Everything



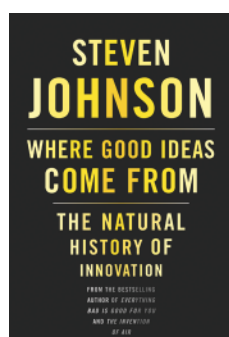
Integral may be the most important theory you've never heard of. Weaving together the many dimensions of human knowledge into one grand "theory of everything," integral philosophy is quietly affecting the way

hundreds of thousands of people think about the world they live in. This course will take beginners and experts alike into the heart of the integral perspective and show you why we consider it to be the philosophical foundation for humanity's next step. **Featuring:** Ken Wilber, Sean Esbjorn-Hargens, Steve McIntosh, Shawn Phillips, and more.

Where Inspiration Meets Collaboration

A review of Steven Johnson's
Where Good Ideas Come From

BY CARTER PHIPPS



EVERY SO OFTEN

I come across a line in a book or an article that hits me so deeply I never forget it. It happened a few years ago while reading

From Counterculture

to Cyberculture by Stanford University scholar Fred Turner. The book connects the communal ethos of the hippie counterculture with the network ethos of the emerging techno-futurist subculture that is having such an influence in Silicon Valley and beyond. Ironically, the sentence that caught my attention is in the acknowledgments of the book, an afterthought that was no less profound because of its placement. "If I've learned anything in the last seven years," Turner writes, "it is that ideas live less in the minds of individuals than in the interactions of communities."

This basic concept fits my own experience perfectly. Working in a highly creative and collaborative environment over the last decade, I can say for certain that it's often hard to tell exactly where one's own creativity stops and the creativity of another begins. New ideas are born as

much through the friction and engagement of a community (or communities) as through the contemplation and solitude of an individual. And sometimes it's hard to know in the creative maelstrom of the moment exactly which piece of which idea is one's own and which piece is borrowed from another idea down the hall or at the other end of the phone line. At the level of thought and inspiration at least, the boundaries between self and other are a lot more fluid than fixed.

Apparently, Turner and I are not the only ones struck by this notion. Popular science author Steven Johnson has cottoned on to more or less this same idea with his brilliant book, *Where Good Ideas Come From* [Riverhead, 2010], an analysis of the principles that have defined scientific and technological innovation over the last centuries. Johnson is a talented writer with a gift for clarity and making connections across disciplines, and his strengths are on full display in his newest book as he delves into the root causes of innovation, shattering a few well-worn myths along the way. He is the definition of a generalist and lets his fertile mind roam through the history of sciences as well as through more contemporary cultural examples of innovations

from both business and the academy. The result is a new perspective on innovation, much of which comes down to a fundamental lesson that is repeated throughout the book: innovation thrives when ideas have a chance to connect and collaborate across open networks. "When one looks at innovation in nature and in culture, environments that build walls around good ideas tend to be less innovative in the long run than more open-ended environments," he writes. "Good ideas may not want to be free, but they do want to connect, fuse, recombine... they want to complete each other as much as they want to compete."

There is a new word that describes this kind of innovative environment that produces creative breakthroughs. *Scenius*. Invented by musician Brian Eno, "scenius" denotes the communal form of the word genius and refers to the idea that genius is often inspired by the workings of a "scene," a collection of individuals collaborating and competing with one another in some form of creative activity. In the context of scenius, therefore, creativity is inspired not just by the brilliance of an individual mind but by the "interactions of communities." Johnson, without using Eno's term, gives us a whole book that helps explain the dynamics of

scenius and how to bring it about.

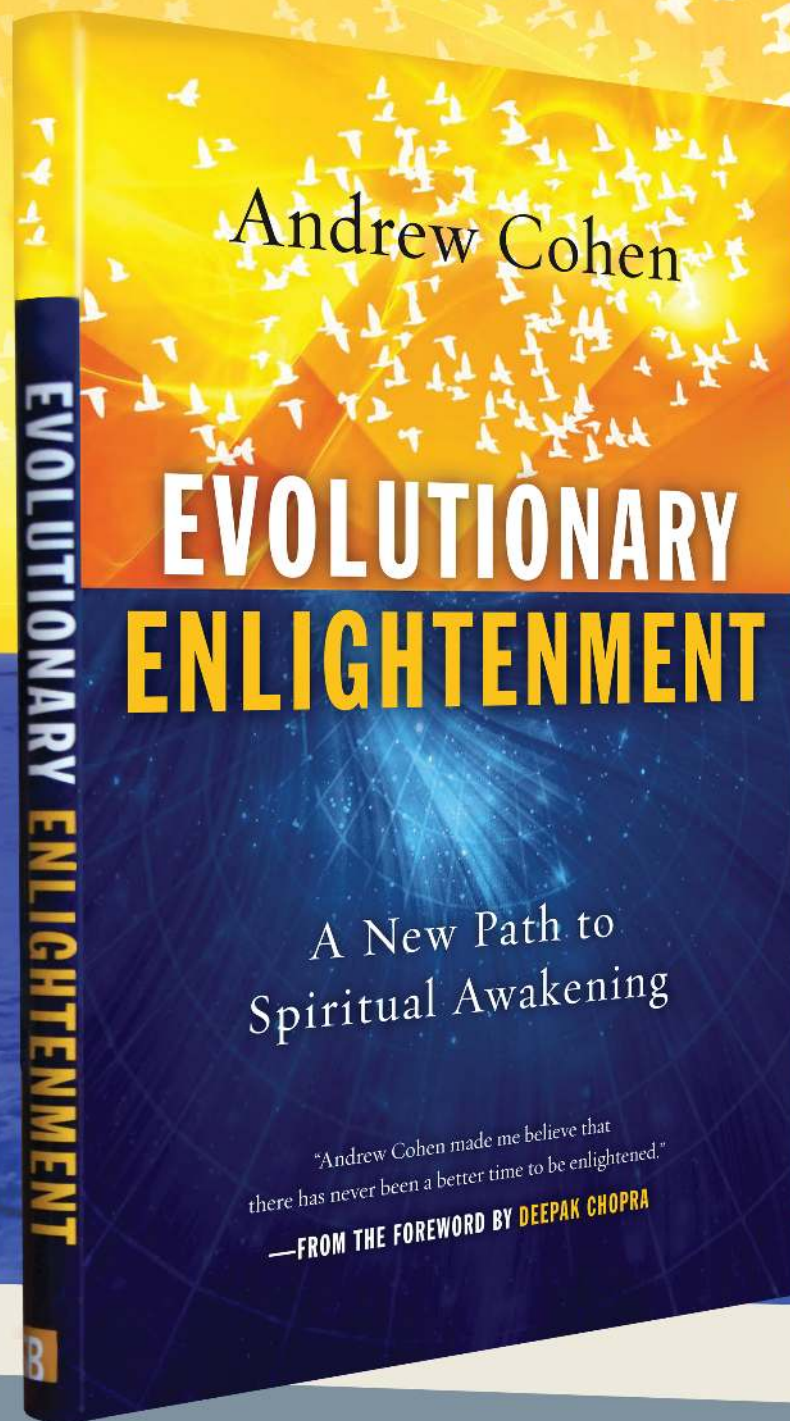
For Johnson, good ideas are not singular inventions of the mind but amalgamations of other ideas, insights, and hunches that have been gathered from around an intellectual environment. The idea of the lone inventor is an overplayed theme to Johnson; more often than not, a stroke of genius is also a fortuitous connection happening at just the right moment between disparate ideas. It is a connection between thoughts from one mind that somehow sparks and/or completes a long-held hunch in another mind, and genuine novelty is the result of this creative idea fusion. In Johnson's compelling story of innovation, good ideas, when looked at closely, are not monolithic structures reeking of creative individuality but novel combinations, networks, or communities of smaller ideas put together in just the right way. True genius, he suggests, is neither captured fully by inspiration nor perspiration but by the right kind of *collaboration*. The key to genius, then, does not only lie in brilliant people having creative thoughts but in a kind of scenius—in

creating the right kind of cultural environment for innovation. Much of the book is devoted to unpacking this point and pursuing the insights that can help us facilitate this kind of environment.

Recent descriptions of creativity and genius, like those presented by bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers*, have been corrective to the old idea that genius was primarily the result of God-given talent and luck-of-the-draw brilliance. Gladwell and others have pointed out that much of what we call creative genius is often the result of practice, effort, commitment, and the right opportunities. Johnson's book takes our understanding of innovation a step further. He doesn't overlook the importance of authentic innate genius or the sheer brilliance of a true pioneer, in whatever field. Nor does he dismiss the importance of inspired effort on the path of innovation. But his work is part of a new wave of thinkers suggesting that there is a complementary component to the customary tale of the lonesome trailblazer. Genius is aided and abetted by scenius. Many creative pioneers are inspired not just by private visionary dreams but by fertile collaborative scenes forming on the edges of the possible, generating the networks of ideas out of which genuine innovation emerges.

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A major new work from the founder of EnlightenNext



In *Evolutionary Enlightenment*, Andrew Cohen redefines spiritual awakening for our contemporary world—a world characterized by exponential change and an ever-expanding appreciation for the processes of evolution. His message is simple, yet profound: Life is evolution, and enlightenment is about waking up to this fundamentally creative impulse as your own deepest, most authentic self. Through five tenets for living an enlightened life, Cohen will empower you to wholeheartedly participate in the process of change as your own spiritual practice. *Evolutionary Enlightenment* not only makes deep sense of life today, it will show you how to play an active role in shaping the world of tomorrow.

“Truly one of the most significant books on spirituality written in the postmodern world.”

—Ken Wilber, author of
The Integral Vision

BOOK EXCERPT:

Why Are You Here?

When you take the perennial meditative journey to the depths of your own self, you discover what it was like *before the beginning*. You come to rest in the timeless empty void before the Universe was born, which the mystics call the ground of Being. When you taste the profound freedom that is the

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inherent nature of that primordial ground, it can seem like the end of the path. Where else could there possibly be for you to go? The very notion of seeking for liberation, for enlightenment, for meaning or purpose seems absurd. The question *Who am I?* is answered before it is asked. And the question *Why am I here?* simply does not arise.

In traditional enlightenment, this is the end of the path. But the journey of *Evolutionary Enlightenment* does not end here. Why? Because the cosmic experiment that is life did not end here. If that empty ground, where every question is answered, was all there was to know and to discover, why would the Universe exist? Why did something come from nothing?

Think about this for yourself: In the experience of the ground of Being, which you can discover for yourself through the meditative journey, there is no desire to *do* anything, no impetus whatsoever. There is nothing to do, nowhere to go, and no one to be or become. That's what it was like before the Universe was born.

And yet, here we are. Out of that utter peace, from the depths of that desirelessness, for some reason this miraculous process burst forth. Why? *Why did something come from nothing?*

This is not an abstract philosophical question but a profound spiritual contemplation that can take you to the essence of what it means to be alive. Why *did* something come from nothing . . . and become light, energy, matter, life, consciousness, and *you* — fourteen billion years later

reading these words? *Why are you here?*

If the eternal perfection that is the Source of everything knows no desire, why would the Universe have emerged? If the ground of all things has no impulse but to *be*, why did it *become*? But it did. And thanks to evolutionary science, we can behold just how far this miraculous explosion of Becoming has brought us in the fourteen billion years since that initial burst. We can reflect on its awe-inspiring progress, and wonder at its ever-greater complexity and integration and creativity. And we can ask ourselves, why did all of this come from nothing?

I believe that for a human being today who aspires to find enlightenment, that question is an essential part of awakening. It is not enough to follow the question *Who am I?* to that timeless place where all questions dissolve. We also need to know: *Why am I here?* And to find the answer to *Why am I here?*, understanding the primordial moment when something came from nothing is crucial. We need to know what actually happened at the very beginning, at that instant when Being gave rise to Becoming.

When I ask this question, I'm not just talking about whether you believe in a biblical God or a big bang, or a whole series of cosmic explosions. I'm talking about a different kind of knowing—a direct, experiential recognition of what occurred in that moment fourteen billion years ago. You don't need a powerful telescope to see all the way back to the big bang—you can *go there*, right now, in your very own experience.

Scientists look at the big bang from the outside, so to speak, using complex instruments and the laws of physics to show us the explosion of light and energy, which became matter, which, in turn, gave rise to

life, from which emerged the capacity for consciousness. But the perspective I'm sharing with you is one that looks at that very same event from the *inside*—that gets right beneath the surface of the stillness before the beginning, and locates the very impetus behind that primordial moment of birth.

The big bang is not just a metaphor or a disputed scientific theory about what occurred fourteen billion years ago. It's happening *right now*. Something is coming from nothing every second. You might not be conscious of it, but it's true. Your own experience of action and reaction is not unbroken—there are countless moments of zero between each and every thought, every impulse, and every response. Something is coming from nothing, in and through each and every one of us, constantly. If you slow your experience down, and keep slowing it down, you'll start to see that there is a vast chasm of empty space that is the foundation of everything that is occurring, the ground out of which each impulse arises. Even as you are aware of the body, of the passing of time and the movement of thought, beneath it all you can become conscious of this current of stillness that is the ground of Being.

Because you can locate that empty ground in your very own experience, you can also locate the seed of everything that came out of that nothingness. The essence of *Evolutionary Enlightenment* is found in that precise moment when nothing became something. When you contemplate the ground of Being, you can begin to intuit for yourself what that very moment must have been like. . . .

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