



The East-West Strategy: Toward Solving Personal and World Problems

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Article History

Received: 11.06.2025

Accepted: 22.07.2025

Published: 06.08.2025

Abstract: I center in this paper on personal experiences throughout my life. They include what happened to me in my early years, the times when I entered college, when I obtained advanced degrees and taught sociology, and the years after I retired from teaching. At the same time, I have charted here a lifetime of moving in a developmental or evolutionary direction, granting that I—like the rest of us—have been prey to many setbacks. What I’ve emerged with and have emphasized here is what I call “the East-West strategy” for solving personal and world problems. It combines ideas from ancient times with contemporary knowledge. It is based on one’s making a most difficult transition: movement from a way of life emphasizing hierarchy, narrow specialization and personal conformity to a pattern of behavior stressing democratic equality, interdisciplinary knowledge and personal autonomy and development. Based on such knowledge, I’m convinced that ever more of us can accomplish this transition. Further, I believe that fundamental problems throughout the world—such as climate change and the possibility of World War III as the result of accident or design—call for the rapid development of humanity to avert disaster. I see the East-West strategy as a powerful tool that any and all of us can and should use in these perilous times to move toward solving personal and world problems.

Keywords: East-West strategy, evolutionary perception, mindfulness, action, aspirations-fulfillment gap, revolution of rising expectations, bureaucratic way of life, evolutionary way of life.

Cite this article:

Phillips, B., (2025). The East-West Strategy: Toward Solving Personal and World Problems. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(8), 1-6.

This essay recounts my personal and intellectual evolution toward a transformative vision that seeks to address the invisible root of human suffering: the growing gap between what we desire and what we are able to achieve. I propose a path forward that draws from both Eastern and Western traditions—blending insights into personal development, social structure, and collective responsibility—to support both individual and societal transformation.

I will center on three topics: (1) My Academic Journey, (2) The Problem: The Invisible Crisis, and (3) Toward a Solution: The East-West Strategy. I plan to show how each of these sections follows in the footsteps of the quotations below:

Francis Bacon: “I have taken all knowledge to be my province.”

G. K. Chesterton: “It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. They can’t see the problem.”

Confucius: “It is man who can make the Way great, and not the Way that can make man great.”

My Academic Journey

My academic journey began at the age of 9. Mrs. Israel, my third grade teacher at Public School 61 in the East Bronx, appointed me Editor-in-Chief of The 3B4 News, selling for 3 cents a copy. The first and last issue appeared in June, 1940. We planned to send the proceeds to the Red Cross, which amounted to a grand total of 21 cents. This achievement was followed by my learning “who, what, where, when, how and why” in a journalism class at Herman Ridder Junior High School across the street from my apartment building at 1660 Crotona Park East. After acing the entrance exam for The Bronx High School of Science, I began to learn how to write.

Given the Jewish faith of my mother—joined by my father—I had to become a doctor. And so, I found myself shortly afterward as a pre-medical student at Columbia College, a subway-ride away in Manhattan, even though I’d hated dissecting frogs at Bronx Science. I was very proud of the A-plus I received in a 6-credit chemistry course, and was optimistic about my chances of getting



into a medical school. But my direction changed dramatically after a varsity-tennis teammate suggested that I'd be interested in auditing a course given by a new sociology professor, C. Wright Mills.

Climbing up to the second floor of Hamilton Hall and entering the designated classroom, I saw dozens of students crowding around the three large windows with views of the quad. I joined them, and a few minutes later I heard the roar of a motorcycle. It soon came into view, and there was the man I was shocked to realize was Mills in full riding costume, including a coonskin hat with its long tail waving in the breeze.

With Mills's extraordinary breadth of knowledge, deep personal commitment, and vision of how to solve the most devastating societal problems, it was a no-brainer for me to change from pre-med to sociology and work toward obtaining a doctorate. Although my mother was disappointed that I wasn't going to become "a real doctor" who could actually help people, she finally came around.

My resulting academic career is summarized by my resume in the Appendix. Yet that two-page document fails to explain the vision I finally emerged with of the nature of the fundamental problem of contemporary societies, the focus of the next section of this paper.

The Problem: The Invisible Crisis

In a book with my medical co-author, Louis C. Johnston, *The Invisible Crisis of Contemporary Society* (2007/2016; first published by Paradigm Publishers in 2007; republished by Routledge in 2016), we reviewed works by thirty-three individuals from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, literature, law and politics. We emerged with this conclusion as to the source of our "invisible crisis": "The gap between aspirations and their fulfillment is in fact increasing in contemporary society."

It was the Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha Sakyamuni, who claimed some 2500 years ago that *dukkha*, or negative feelings linked to the gap between what people want and are actually able to get, is the central problem of the human race. In modern times, we have what has been called by Harlan Cleveland—former President of the University of Hawaii and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State—"a revolution of rising expectations." They have been fueled by advertising, yielding what psychiatrist Karen Horney has called "a constant discrepancy between . . . desires and their fulfillment," yielding negative psychic consequences (1937, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, N.Y.: Norton, p. 288); also in Phillips and Thomas J. Savage, with contributions from others, *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State* (2024, 2nd ed., p. 71). **THIS BOOK'S INTERDISCIPLINARY RANGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IDEAS, BASED ON SEMINAL PUBLICATIONS, INTEGRATES KEY IDEAS THAT ARE THE BASIS FOR THE EAST-WEST STRATEGY.**

Horney has been joined by others who have referred to that gap using different language. For example, the founding sociologist Emile Durkheim wrote these words in 1897, a time when the industrial revolution was gathering momentum: "From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain" (*Suicide*, N.Y.: Free Press,

1897/1951, p. 255; Phillips and Thomas J. Savage, with contributions from others, *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State*, 2024, 2nd ed., p. 69).

The historian Daniel Boorstin provided us with examples of our unrealistic gap between aspirations and their fulfillment:

We expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious; luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to be rich and charitable, powerful and merciful, active and reflective, kind and competitive. We expect to be inspired by mediocre appeals for "excellence," ...to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly...to revere God and to be God. Never...have a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world could offer (*The Image*, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1961, p. 6; Phillips and Thomas J. Savage, with contributions from others, *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State* (2024, 2nd ed., p.75).

I'm claiming here that an increasing aspirations-fulfillment gap—what I've called "the invisible crisis," is the primary source of the major problems of contemporary societies, granting the existence of other sources. Given that this gap is so central to the basic social and personality structures of our world—to our very way of life—is it realistically possible to close that gap? Can we possibly move toward an alternative way of life? Is there, indeed, any direction for moving beyond the persisting hierarchies, narrow specialization and patterns of personal conformity versus agency that characterize our present bureaucratic patterns of behavior?

Toward a Solution: The East-West Strategy

The Eastern strategy for closing that gap, developed by the Buddha, is portrayed by a legend illustrating its realism:

A woman had an only son whom she loved, and he died. Overwhelmed with grief, she sought out one holy man after another to restore her son to life, and came at last to the Buddha. "Indeed, I will help you," he said. "Bring to me a handful of mustard seed from a household in which no one has died, neither father nor mother, neither son nor daughter, nor brother nor sister, nor yet servant nor friend." Throughout the countryside the bereaved woman went, from house to house, and though many offered her mustard seed, never was there a house in which no one had died. She came back to the Buddha weeping at her failure to find the seed, and he said to her, "To every house death has come, and is your son to be free of it? Be comforted; go now, and bury your son" (Abraham Kaplan, *The New World of Philosophy*, New York: Vintage Books, 1961, 255).

The Buddha's remedy for the emotional pain linked to the aspirations-fulfillment gap, or *dukkha*, was the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path:

First – all of life entails frustration. The Buddha called this reality "*dukkha*," based on our failure to fulfill our wants or aspirations.

Second – following the idea that is the basis for the

sciences, along with a rational understanding of the world, every effect or occurrence has a cause or causes.

Third – we should understand that by removing our unrealistic desires, such as for a materialistic life of total luxury, and by limiting our desires to what we can actually achieve, we can eliminate our frustration and fulfill those desires. By removing the cause of a problem, we remove the problem.

Fourth – we can accomplish this by following an Eightfold Noble Path of appropriate thoughts, goals, and actions (**Phillips and Thomas, with contributions from others, *Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State* (2024, 2nd ed., p. 84).**

The Eastern strategy, as developed by the Buddha, is a realistic one: (1) Recognize the universality of humanity's frustration, or *dukkha*, linked to our aspirations-fulfillment gap. (2) Understand the validity of the scientific law that every effect has a cause or causes. (3) Lower your unrealistic aspirations so that they become realistic. (4) Accomplish this with appropriate thoughts, goals and actions. Yet this is far easier said than done, especially in our modern situation of a revolution of rising expectations.

I should note that modern times have completely changed the non-industrial India of the Buddha's time, for modern India has experienced technological revolutions that rival those in Western societies. And contemporary Western societies have been deeply influenced by the Buddha's teachings, as illustrated by their interest in the practice of meditation.

As we continue on the story of my evolutionary journey, we turn to a Western strategy that can join the Eastern strategy so as to produce an East-West strategy. This approach was outlined in a paper by Sergio M. Sanseverino and myself:

Is there some way of reducing the world's escalating gap between desire and fulfillment, which the Buddha saw—long before that gap dramatically increased—as the central problem of the human race? *The Invisible Crisis* provides a general direction for a solution, based on the publications of thirty-three individuals, including C. Wright Mills, Friedrich Nietzsche, Emile Durkheim, Charles Pierce, George Orwell, Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, Alvin W. Gouldner, Georg Simmel, Robin M. Williams, Jr., Robert K. Merton, Karen Horney, Thomas S. Kuhn, Herman Hesse and Paolo Freire. Here is the book's key conclusion:

To the degree that a worldview or metaphysical stance is stratified versus interactive, there will be a large gap between aspirations and their fulfillment.

In other words, noting less than our present worldview or bureaucratic way of life—with its emphasis on stratification or persisting hierarchy (coupled with narrow specialization and personal conformity—appears to be the source of our escalating aspirations-fulfillment gap. And, by contrast, an evolutionary way of life, which stresses interaction versus hierarchy (“head”), interdisciplinary knowledge opposed to narrow specialization (“heart”), and autonomy versus personal conformity (“hand”), promises to reduce that gap.

Can we, in these perilous times, afford to be optimistic about our possibilities of learning how to actually fulfill

what C. Wright Mills called “the promise of sociology”? Our own personal experiences in applying evolutionary ideas to our own behavior, and as a result strengthening our own self-confidence and optimism about being able to move away from our bureaucratic way of life, provides an affirmative answer.

That answer is strengthened by our understanding of a quote from a review of Carl Zimmer's 2021 publication, *Life's Edge: What It Means to Be Alive* (New York Times, April 4, 2021, p. 20): “Life is a self-sustained chemical system capable of undergoing Darwinian evolution” **(You can read the entire article where this quote is located. See the ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences by using the procedure described at the beginning of Appendix 1 (2025, (volume 3, issue 7), p. 67).**

In other words, and following the boldfaced paragraphs, we can succeed in closing our increasing aspirations-fulfillment gap by changing our fundamental way of life: from hierarchy to egalitarian interaction, from narrow specialization to interdisciplinary knowledge, and from personal conformity to autonomy. That is all well and good. But it raises a new question: How in hell can we learn to accomplish these things, given that they are basic aspects of our entire way of life? To state the matter differently, how can we succeed in moving toward an evolutionary way of life as an alternative to our present patterns of behavior?

I attempted to provide a preliminary answer in a recent paper, “From a Bureaucratic toward an Evolutionary Way of Life”:

Please bear with me by reading this long quote from an article I've written recently. It is vital if you are to understand the nature of the East-West strategy

(1) Learning to practice mindfulness (or “HEAD”) throughout one's everyday life can teach one to center on one's own behavior no less than on that of others, by contrast with the teachings of our present way of life. (2) Learning to practice evolutionary perception (or “HEART”) can yield ever more frequent reinforcement of oneself for one's evolved nature as the very jewel of the universe, by contrast with our rarity of reinforcements. (3) One's practice of “HEAD” and “HEART” can in turn enable one to solve increasingly important problems by centering on the practice of **interaction** (or “HAND”), whether externally or internally, which can include how we spend our money as well as how we vote. Overall, these patterns of behavior can take us from our bureaucratic toward an evolutionary way of life. **(Note that currently I've decided to change that last concept of “interaction” to “action” in order to emphasize the overriding importance of the agency of the individual, granting the importance of interaction with others. This is because agency has largely been ignored throughout the literature of the social sciences. I didn't recognize that sufficiently when I wrote the article I'm quoting here).**

I'm not claiming that these procedures are the only path toward personal evolution. Rather, I claim that they have worked for me, and they might well work for others. I look forward to learning from readers how alternative

procedures have worked for them. By joining our experiences in moving away from our patterns of hierarchy, narrow specialization and personal conformity, we will be able to solve society's fundamental problems

For me to communicate how these techniques have enabled me to move in an evolutionary direction, I must give numerous personal examples.

Following the boldfaced description of my basic conclusion of how anyone can move toward an evolutionary way of life, I will now elaborate on five of those examples, #8 on "head" or mindfulness, #9 on "heart" or evolutionary perception, #3 on "hand" or external and internal interaction, #13 on "head-heart- hand" or mindfulness, evolutionary perception, and interaction, and #15 on the same three concepts.

8. "HEAD": Mindfulness was illustrated by my two invited essays in *Contemporary Sociology* (2019 and 2020). In both essays I emphasized the importance for sociologists to pay far closer attention to the potentials of the individual—and not just social structure—to contribute to the solution of social problems. Mindfulness requires attention to oneself as well as one's momentary situation, versus losing awareness of that situation by thinking of the past or future.

Mindfulness is similar to the practice of meditation, with its roots in what the Buddha taught 2500 years ago. One ignores external problems and centers on oneself, thus avoiding the outward orientation of our present way of life. In driving a car, for example, one remains centered on one's driving situation from one moment to the next, even though one might simultaneously engage in conversation. By so doing, a sudden stop by the car in front of you would be followed by your immediately stopping your own car.

By contrast with meditation, mindfulness is most effective when it is practiced throughout the day, and not merely for a brief period. By so doing, one can learn to improve the full range of one's behavior.

Mindfulness may be illustrated further by the practice of centering on the sound of one's breathing while attempting to fall asleep. In that way, that focus helps one block out of one's consciousness thoughts which would interfere with falling asleep.

A key problem of learning mindfulness is to assume that one has succeeded far earlier than one has in fact learned the procedure. For our outward orientation is a basic product of our bureaucratic way of life. Yet by continuing improve on such learning, one will be simultaneously moving away from that way of life.

9. "HEART": Evolutionary perception was illustrated in my 2024 article with others, "Personal Evolution: A Paradigmatic Solution for Personal and World Problems." By learning to perceive just how far external phenomena have evolved relative to one's own evolution, one can learn to reinforce oneself ever more frequently as being the very jewel of the universe. That reinforcement can, in turn, yield the confidence required to help one solve problems to an increasing extent.

In this way, one learns to perceive anything and everything from an evolutionary perspective, that is, one locates any perceived object in the time period when it appeared within the evolutionary process. By so doing, one locates human beings, including oneself, at the present time period, and one thus comes to see oneself and others as the most highly evolved creatures within the known universe.

As the result of that perception of self as at the leading point of the evolutionary process, one can become positively reinforced. And additional reinforcements can follow as one continues to perceive phenomena in this way.

Presently, reinforcements from others are generally rare events, and positive feelings resulting from our own accomplishments may occur equally rarely. Yet such feelings can become ever more frequent as one learns to practice evolutionary perception. For we perceive phenomena from one moment to the next.

For example, presently we might see the sun, the stars, or products of engineering like large buildings, planes or bridges as far more important than ourselves. Yet the practice of evolutionary perception can teach us our own overriding importance within the universe.

3. "HAND": With respect to a combination of external and internal interaction (**action**) a major article I submitted to *Sociometry* (1964) after years of work on it was rejected, and initially I accepted that verdict. However, after several days I concluded that the reasons for rejection made little sense, and I spelled out my conclusions in a letter asking the editors to reconsider, which they did, and the article was published.

External interaction (**action**) may be illustrated by my having accepted the rejection of my article by the editors of *Sociometry*. By contrast, my subsequent reviewing that rejection and concluding that it did not make sense exemplifies internal interaction. From this perspective, the interaction among one's "head," "heart" and "hand" is no less important than one's interaction with others.

Granting the importance of internal interaction (**action**), the focus on external interaction (**action**) within our present way of life has taught us to largely ignore it. As a result, we learn to look outward instead of both inward and outward. Yet we can learn to change this one-sided approach once we come to understand the importance of internal interaction.

Such interactions (**actions**) illustrate the learning or educational process. That increasing understanding is largely the result of the human being's development of complex languages, by contrast with the very simple languages of other forms of life. When we add written language to our accomplishments, we are able to interact with others who are distant in time and space.

After one has worked with the three concepts of mindfulness, evolutionary perception and interaction (**action**) over a period of time, one can simplify one's approach by including one's awareness of one's mindfulness, evolution perception as one proceeds with **action** (interaction). By so doing, one can move more

easily in an evolutionary direction **with the aid of the East-West strategy (ISAR: Volume 3, Issue 7, pp. 37-44, 2025; To read the article where this quote is located, see my directions at the beginning of Appendix 1 just below).**

So we come to the end of the story of my evolutionary journey. I hope you have found it both interesting and informative. I've enjoyed sharing it with you.

Appendix: Resume

Note: You can read my recent articles in the open-source ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences by following these directions: Go to ISARpublisher.com, hit the name of the journal on the left, then scroll down to "Archive" in the center, then scroll down to the following articles of mine or my colleagues, as identified by the volume number, issue number and page numbers: Volume 3, issue 7, pp. 60-67 (2025); Volume 3, Issue 7, pp. 37-44 (2025); Volume 3, issue 7, pp. 8-21 (2025); Volume 3, issue 6, pp. 90-102, 2025; Volume 3, issue 5, pp. 1-5 (2025); Volume 3, issue 4, pp. 71-74, 2025; Volume 3, Issue 4, pp. 11-16, 2025; Volume 3, issue 4, pp. 83-90, 2025; Volume 2, issue 10, pp. 41-49, 2024; Volume 2, Issue 12, pp. 41-49 (2024); Volume 2, Issue 10, pp. 99-105, (2024); Volume 2, Issue 8, pp. 13-20 (2024); Volume 2, Issue 7, pp. 30-39, (2024), Volume 2, Issue 6, pp. 1-10 (2024); Volume 2, Issue 1, pp. 102-104, (2024).

Education: B.A., Columbia University (1952); M.A., Washington State University (1954); Ph.D., Cornell University (1956)
Academic Positions:

Univ. of North Carolina School of Public Health (1956-58), Research Asst. Professor Univ. of Illinois Dept. of Sociology (1958-61), Assistant Professor Boston Univ. Dept. of Sociology (1961-98), Assistant Professor to Professor

Teaching: Introductory Sociology, Research Methods, Social Change, Social Disorganization, Sociology through Film, Sociological Theory, Social Problems

Research, Consulting, Editing, Publishing:

Universitet Skopje (Yugoslavia), Research Associate, summer 1963

Puerto Rico Dept. of Education, Research Consultant, summers 1967, 1968 Japan Center for Area Development, Tokyo, Visiting Scholar, summer 1969 Florida State University, Visiting Professor, summer 1970

Co-Founder of "Sociological Practice" Section of the American Sociological Association, 1975 Co-Founder and Co-Editor of Sociological Practice journal, 1976-77

University of Hawaii, Visiting Professor, summer 1983

Founder and Editor of Book Series for Aldine de Gruyter, "Sociological Imagination and Structural Change," 1995-2004:

Leo d'Anjou, Social Movements and Cultural Change, 1996 ; Frank Hearn, Moral Order and Social Disorder 1997; Pierre Moessinger, The Paradox of Social Order, 1999 ; Lawrence Busch, The Eclipse of Morality, 2000 ;David R. Maines, The Faultline of Consciousness, 2001; James Aho, The Orifice as Sacrificial Site, 2002; Dick Houtman, Class and Politics in Contemporary Social Science, 2003.

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Founder and Editor of Book Series for Paradigm Publishers, "Advancing the Sociological Imagination," 2004-2014:

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41 ISAR J Arts Humanit Soc Sci; Vol-3, Iss-7, 2025

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