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Meaning-making is the fundamental process by which living systems interpret ambiguous environments in order to orient themselves in the world. In humans, the pinnacle of this process is the development and maintenance of a coherent life story, or narrative identity, which predicts well-being (McAdams, 2011). Narrative identity emerges from an interaction between evolved cognitive systems that develop through adulthood, individual experiences, and culturally evolved systems such as religions, which constrain narrative structure. Within the neurocognitive theory of predictive processing (Friston, 2009), narrative identity can be construed as the top of a hierarchy of mental structures that are constantly adjusted in response to experiences that confirm or violate expectations (Hirsh et al., 2013).

The meaning-making process is catalyzed by experiences that challenge existing mental structures. In Piagetian terms, new experiences can either be assimilated to existing mental schemas, or schemas can be adjusted through a process called accommodation. Park's (2013) Meaning Making Model focuses on the process of coping with stressful experiences by making and remaking meanings. Successful coping entails either assimilating a stressful event into existing schemas through reappraisal, or accommodating the event by changing one's beliefs or goals. This framework can be applied to positive experiences such as awe, which is triggered by encounters with vast, complex stimuli and also characterized by a need for accommodation (Keltner & Haidt, 2003).

We present evidence that awe-eliciting experiences are associated with the development of narrative identity and increased well-being, especially to the extent that they elicit a subjective sense of meaning, ego dissolution, and closeness to one's "true self". We argue that the phenomenology of awe is related to the dissolution and reorganization of high-level neurocognitive networks, such as the default mode network, which has been observed during experiences elicited by psychedelic drugs (van Elk et al., in prep; Lebedev et al., 2015). Such experiences have been shown to produce lasting positive changes in personality and adaptive behavior, often mediated by changes in identity that can be understood as meanings made (e.g., Garcia-Romeu et al., 2013).

The constant fluctuation between stability and flexibility in the process of believing, which characterizes neurobiological predictive processing and psychological narrative identity, also occurs at the cultural level. Religiousness is fundamentally a meaning-making endeavor at the individual, group, and cultural levels, which facilitates a shared interpretation of events and thereby fosters both intrapersonal and interpersonal cohesion. This is illustrated by the evolutionary development of shared reality and "moral matrices" (Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Haidt, 2012), and the cultural selection of prototypical life narratives (McAdams, 2006). Religious mythology, and literature more generally, owe their structure to interactions between evolved cognitive attractors and culturally selected conceptual representations. These representations become cultural meanings made that are generally shared and believed, thereby facilitating adaptive interpretations of events, particularly encounters with the unknown that can characterize traumatic and awe-eliciting experiences. Parallels between the structure of cosmogonic myths and the current multilevel framework are discussed. We also discuss the implications of this framework as a neurological argument for education in the humanities.