**The George Washington University**

***University Seminar on Reflexive Systems***

**Tuesday, October 23, 2018, 10 a.m. to noon**

**Funger Hall 320**

**2201 G Street NW**

**Understanding Lightness and Darkness:  
a Path to Addressing Our Current Problématique**

William E. Smith, PhD

We opened this [conversation](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/way-through-incorporating-our-lightness-darkness-william-smith/) by acknowledging the appropriateness to our own times of Dickens’s “It was the best of times and the worst of times. “ In the [second part](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/way-through-part-2-understanding-our-lightness-darkness-william-smith/), we noted limitations in the value set we inherited from the enlightenment that gives rise to the darkness we feel now. We have developed cadres of smart, highly motivated professionals who have learned to take advantage of the best of our times. We know how to use logic, reason and objective data to manipulate complex technical, economic and even social systems to accomplish almost anything we wish. We know how to use markets to turn citizens into consumers, and client information into products. Our successes serve our stakeholders and ourselves well but they fail to address the interests and needs of the whole society and environment that supports us. While we may not have intended these consequences, time has shown that our programs have resulted in societal threats to health, education, and infrastructure, political and social justice.

When we see the best of times produce what feels like the worst of times, what can we do? Are we doomed to repeat the cycle in reverse, learn to emphasize the missing values only to find that they destroy the productive benefits of current values? Is there something that we are missing, something we have yet to learn that can encompass both sources of lightness and darkness at the same time? Is it possible for us to transcend such dualities?

My search for insights for this third part of our discussion has grown from an expected couple of weeks to many months. I revisited scientific, philosophical and religious views of lightness and darkness. I have reviewed my profession’s work and my own. I have discussed and debated with the artists in my family, my wife Deborah and two sons, Graham and Michael who make their living manipulating lightness and darkness. My daughter Michele is addressing similar issues as she tries to help people deal with their own darkness as they express it through body image and weight issues.

What stands out is that lightness, darkness and color are far more fundamental to all aspects of life from the physical to the emotional, intellectual and spiritual than we realize. We have not yet understood that darkness is not just the absence of light or accepted that it has equal power with lightness. We do not understand our own lightness and darkness and how they contribute to the best and worst of times for all of us and in each of us.

**William Smith’s** academic background is in Social Systems Sciences and he has been a manager and consultant in corporations and for global institutes. He is known for his creation and implementation of the natural systems philosophy called [AIC](https://www.odii.com/index.php?page=aic)(Appreciation Influence and Control ). After watching a [presentation](https://cdn.cato.org/archive-2018/cls-03-06-18.mp4https:/cdn.cato.org/archive-2018/cls-03-06-18.mp4) I circulated in which Steven Pinker of Cato Institute extols the virtues of the progress made as a result of the Enlightenment , Bill felt that we were more in the mode of Dickens *Tale of wo Cities* –‘The Best of times and the worst of times’. He felt that some of the darkness we are experiencing signaled by Brexit and he rise of Populism could be traced back to values that were underserved by the enlightenment. He began exploring our understanding of Lightness and Darkness in a series of articles on LinkedIn. Pinker’s presentation stimulated him to dig deeper. Instead of spending a couple of weeks he spent the next six months completely immersed in what he now refers to as LDC, Lightness, Darkness and Color. In the process, he believes he has stumbled on one the holy grails of systems theory the discovery of a natural language that can transcend all disciplines. He is presenting in his thoughts as a draft and is anxious to get your input on how best to proceed in completing the work.