

INTEGRAL LIFE⁺



THE FOUR FACES OF TRUTH

THE VALIDITY
OF INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

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INTRODUCTION

To understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts. To understand the parts, it is necessary to understand the whole. Such is the circle of understanding.

We move from part to whole and back again, and in that dance of comprehension, in that amazing circle of understanding, we come alive to meaning, to value, and to vision: the very circle of understanding guides our way, weaving together the pieces, healing the fractures, mending the torn and tortured fragments, lighting the way ahead—this extraordinary movement from part to whole and back again, with healing the hallmark of each and every step, and grace the tender reward.

THE BIG BANG has made idealists out of almost anybody who thinks. First there was nothing, and then in less than a nanosecond the material universe blew into existence. These early material processes were apparently obeying mathematical laws that themselves, in some sense, existed prior to the Big Bang, since they appear to be operative from the very beginning. Of the two great and general philosophical orientations that have always been available to thoughtful men and women—namely, materialism and idealism—it appears that, whatever else the Big Bang did, it dealt something of a lethal blow to materialism.

But this idealistic trend in modern physics goes back at least to the twin revolutions of relativity and quantum theory. In fact, of the dozen or so pioneers in these early revolutions—individuals such as Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schroedinger, Louis de Broglie, Max Planck, Wolfgang Pauli, Sir Arthur Eddington—the vast majority of them were idealists or transcendentalists of one variety or another. And I mean that in a rather strict sense. From de Broglie's assertion that "the mechanism demands a mysticism" to Einstein's Spinozist pantheism, from

Schroedinger's Vedanta idealism to Heisenberg's Platonic archetypes: these pioneering physicists were united in the belief that the universe simply does not make sense—and cannot satisfactorily be explained—without the inclusion, in some profound way, of mind or consciousness itself. “The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine,” as Sir James Jeans summarized the available evidence. And, using words that few of these pioneering physicists would object to, Sir James pointed out that it looks more and more certain that the only way to explain the universe is to maintain that it exists “in the mind of some eternal spirit.”¹

It's interesting that “mental health” has always been defined as, in some basic sense, being “in touch” with reality. But what if we look to the very hardest of the sciences in order to determine the nature of this bedrock reality—the reality that we are supposed to be in touch with—and we are rudely told that reality actually exists “in the mind of some eternal spirit”? What then? Does mental health mean being directly in touch with the mind of some eternal spirit? And if we don't believe these physicists as to the nature of ultimate reality, then whom are we to believe? If sanity is the goal, then exactly what reality are we supposed to be in touch with?

THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE

One of the great problems with this “spiritual” line of reasoning is that, unless one is a mathematical physicist wrestling daily with these issues, the conclusions sound too tenuous, too speculative, too “far-out” and even spooky. Not to mention the fact that all too many theologians, Eastern as well as Western, have used the stunning loopholes in the scientific account of nature to shove their version of God into the limelight.

¹ See K. Wilber, *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1985).

Which is why most modern working scientists, physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists go on about their business without much of this strange “idealistic speculation” clouding their horizons. From cognitive behaviorism to artificial intelligence, from psychological connectionism to biological psychiatry—most researchers have simply remained very close to a materialistic explanation of mind, psyche, and consciousness. That is, the fundamental reality is assumed to be the material or physical or sensorimotor world, and mind is therefore believed to be nothing much more than the sum total of representations or reflections of that empirical world. The brain itself is said to be a biomaterial information processor, explainable in scientific and objective terms, and the information it processes consists of nothing but representations of the empirical world (“no computation without representation”). A material and objective brain simply processes a material and objective world, and the subjective domain of consciousness is, at best, an epiphenomenon generated in the wake of the physiological fireworks. The mind remains, hauntingly, the ghost in the machine. And whether that machine be computer or biomaterial processor or servomechanism matters not the least. The plaintive call of the dead and ghostly mind echoes down the imposing corridors of today’s scientific research.

Typical of these objectivist approaches is Daniel Dennett’s widely esteemed *Consciousness Explained*, which, others have less charitably pointed out, might better have been entitled *Consciousness Explained Away*. In all of these approaches, objective representations are sent scurrying through connectionist networks, and the only item that differs in most of these accounts is the exact nature of the objective network through which information bits hustle in their appointed rounds of generating the illusion of consciousness. All of these accounts—quite apart from certain undeniably important contributions—are nonetheless, in the final analysis, attempts by consciousness to deny the existence of consciousness, which is an extraordinary amount of causal activity for what after all is supposed to be an ineffectual vapor, a ghostly nothingness.

But say what we will, these empirical and objectivist accounts— analog and digital bits scurrying through information networks, or neurotransmitters hustling between dendritic pathways—are not how we actually experience our own interior consciousness. For when you and I introspect, we find a different world, a world not of bites and bits and digital specs, but a world of images and desires, hungers and pains, thoughts and ideas, wishes and wants, intentions and hesitations, hopes and fears. And we know these interior data in an immediate and direct fashion: they are simply given to us, they are simply there, they simply show up, and we witness them to the extent we care to. These interior data might indeed be part of extensive chains of mediated events—that is very likely true—but at the moment of introspection, that doesn't matter in the least: my interior states are simply given to awareness, immediately, whenever I take the time to look.

And thus, even if we attempt to agree with the cognitivists and functionalists and behaviorists, even if we attempt to think of consciousness as nothing but information bits hopping through neuronal networks, nonetheless that idea itself is known to me only in an interior and direct apprehension. I experience that idea in an interior and immediate way; at no point do I actually experience anything that even remotely looks like an information bit dashing through a connectionist pathway. That is simply a concept, and I know that concept, as I know all concepts, in an interior and conscious apprehension. The objectivist approach to experience and consciousness, in other words, cannot even account for its own experience and consciousness: cannot account for the fact that digital bits are experienced, not as digital bits, but as hopes and fears.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

In short, my interior and subjective experience is given to me in terms that simply do not match the objectivistic and empirical terms of functionalism

or cognitivism or neuronal connectionism. My subjective and interior world, known by many names—consciousness, awareness, mind, psyche, qualia, idea, idealism—definitely appears to be at odds with my objective and exterior description of the world, also known by many names—material, biophysical, brain, nature, empirical, materialism. Inside vs. outside, interior vs. exterior, mind vs. brain, subjective vs. objective, idealism vs. materialism, introspection vs. positivism, hermeneutics vs. empiricism....

Small wonder that, almost from the inception of the human knowledge quest, theorists have generally fallen into these two rather different and apparently conflicting approaches to knowledge—interior vs. exterior. From psychology to theology, from philosophy to metaphysics, from anthropology to sociology, the human knowledge quest has almost universally consisted of these two broad paths.

(And, as we will soon see, one of the main tasks of an integral approach is to honor and incorporate both of these general paths, and to explain how both can be equally significant and important in the understanding of human consciousness and behavior.)

On the one hand are those paths that start with objective, empirical, and often quantifiable observables. These overall approaches—let us call them “exterior” or “naturalistic” or “empiric-analytic”—take the physical or empirical world as most fundamental, and all theorizing must then be carefully tied to, or anchored in, empirical observables. In psychology, this is classical behaviorism, and more recently, cognitive behaviorism (cognitive structures are granted reality only to the extent they manifest in observable behavior). In sociology, this is classical positivism (as with the founder of sociology itself, Auguste Comte); but also the extremely influential structural-functionalism and systems theory (from Talcott Parsons to Niklas Luhmann to Jeffrey Alexander), where cultural productions are taken to be significant to the extent that they are aspects of an objective social action system. And even in theology and metaphysics,

this naturalistic approach starts from certain empirical and material givens, and then attempts to deduce the existence of spirit on the basis of empirical realities (the argument from design, for example).

Arrayed against these naturalistic and empirical approaches are those that start with the immediacy of consciousness itself—let us call them the “interior” or the “introspection and interpretation” approaches. These approaches do not deny the importance of empirical or objectivist data, but they point out, as William James did, that the definition of the word “data” is “direct experience,” and the only genuinely direct experience each of us has is his or her own immediate and interior experience. The primordial data, in other words, is that of consciousness, of intentionality, of immediate lived awareness, and all else, from the existence of electrons to the existence of neuronal pathways, are deductions away from immediate lived awareness. These secondary deductions may be very true and very important, but they are, and will always remain, secondary and derivative to the primary fact of immediate experience.

Thus, in psychology, where the objectivist approach produces varieties of behaviorism, the subjectivist approach shows up in the various schools of depth psychology, such as psychoanalysis, Jungian, Gestalt, phenomenological-existential, and humanistic—not to mention the vast number of contemplative and meditative psychologies, East and West alike. All of these traditions take, as their starting point, immediately apprehended interior states and direct experiential realities, and they anchor their theories in those immediate data.

These schools are thus interested not so much in behavior as in the meaning and interpretation of psychological symbols and symptoms and signs. Freud’s first great book says it all: *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Dreams are an interior and symbolic production. But all symbols must be interpreted. What is the meaning of Hamlet? of *War and Peace*? of your dreams? of your life? And the introspective and interpretive schools of psychology are attempts to help men and women interpret their interiors

more accurately and more authentically, and thus to gain an understanding and a meaning for their actions, their symptoms, their distresses, their dreams, their lives.

In sociology, the subjectivist approach shows up in the immensely influential schools of hermeneutics and interpretive sociology (hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation). And once again, in contrast to the objectivist approaches, which are interested in explaining empirical behavior, the interpretive approaches in sociology are interested in understanding symbolic productions. Not “How does it work?” but “What does it mean?”

Take the Hopi Rain Dance, for example. A typical objective functionalist approach attempts to explain the existence of the Dance by seeing it as a necessary aspect of the integration of the social action system. The Dance, in other words, is performing a behavioral function in the social system as a whole, and this function—which is generally unknown to the natives—is said to be the preservation of the autopoietic self-maintenance of the social action system (e.g., Parsons).

The hermeneutic approach to sociology, on the other hand, seeks instead to take the view of the cultural native and to understand the Dance from within, as it were, in a sympathetic stance of mutual understanding. And what the interpretive sociologist (as “participant observer”) finds is that the Dance is a way to both honor Nature and sympathetically influence Nature. The interpretive sociologist thus concludes that, phenomenologically, the Dance is a pattern of connecting with a realm felt to be sacred. (Recent examples of hermeneutic sociology and anthropology include such influential theorists as Charles Taylor, Clifford Geertz, Mary Douglas; they often trace part of their lineage to Heidegger’s hermeneutic ontology and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy, and further back to such pioneers as Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Schleiermacher.)

In theology and metaphysics, the exterior and interior approaches likewise tend to diverge sharply. The objectivist approach starts with certain empirical and material facts, and attempts to deduce the existence of transcendental realities from those facts. Saint Thomas Aquinas takes this approach when he gives most of his various arguments for the existence of God. He starts from certain natural facts and then attempts to show that these facts demand an Author, as it were. And right down to today, many physicists and mathematicians use the “argument from design” to conclude that there must be some sort of Designer. This approach includes the recent (and quite popular) Anthropic Principle, which maintains that, because the existence of humans is incalculably improbable, and yet they exist, then the universe simply must have been following a hidden design from the start.

The subjective and introspective approach, on the other hand, does not attempt to prove the existence of Spirit by deduction from empirical or natural events, but rather turns the light of consciousness directly onto the interior domain itself—the only domain of direct data—and looks for Spirit in the disclosures of that data. Meditation and contemplation become the paradigm, the exemplar, the actual practice upon which all theorizing must be based. The God within, not the God without, becomes the beacon call. (In the West, this is the path laid out preeminently by Plotinus and Saint Augustine, which is why the great and enduring theological tension in the West has been between Augustine and Aquinas.)

In philosophy itself this is, of course, the colossal divide between the modern Anglo-Saxon and Continental approaches, a difference which both camps happily announce (while just as happily denouncing each other). The typical Anglo-Saxon (British and American) approach is empiric-analytic, begun principally by John Locke and David Hume, but made most famous in that Cambridge triumvirate of G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and (early) Ludwig Wittgenstein. “We make pictures of (empirical) facts” announces Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, and the aim of all genuine philosophy is the analysis and clarification of these empirical

pictures of the empirical world. No empirical pictures, no genuine philosophy.

Which always struck the great Continental philosophers as impossibly naive, shallow, and even primitive. Beginning most notably with Immanuel Kant—and running, in various ways and different guises, through Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault—a dramatically different theme was announced: the so-called “empirical” world is in many important ways not just a perception but an interpretation.

In other words, the allegedly simple “empirical” and “objective” world is not simply lying around “out there” waiting for all and sundry to see. Rather, the “objective” world is actually set in subjective and intersubjective contexts and backgrounds that in many ways govern what is seen, and what can be seen, in that “empirical” world. Thus, genuine philosophy, they would all maintain in their various ways, is not merely a matter of making pictures of the objective world, but rather of investigating the structures in the subject that allow the making of the pictures in the first place. Because, put bluntly, the mapmaker’s fingerprints are all over the maps he makes. And thus the secret to the universe is not just in the objective maps but in the subjective mapmaker.

The fact that both of these approaches—the exterior and the interior, the objectivist and the subjectivist—have aggressively and persistently existed in virtually all fields of human knowledge ought to tell us something—ought to tell us, that is, that both of these approaches are profoundly significant. They both have something of incalculable importance to tell us. And the integral vision is, beginning to end, dedicated to honoring and incorporating both of these profound approaches in the human knowledge quest.

TO HONOR THESE TRUTHS: AN INTEGRAL APPROACH

If we look at all the examples that I just gave of the different types of approaches to the knowledge quest, we will find that they actually fall into not just two but four large camps. Because both the interior and the exterior approaches can be subdivided into individual and collective.

In other words, any phenomenon can be approached in an interior and exterior fashion, and also as an individual and as a member of a collective. And there are, already in existence, major and quite influential schools in each of those four large camps. I have included a table (see figure 1) with some well-known theorists in each of these four camps. The Upper Left is the interior of the individual (e.g., Freud). The Upper Right is the exterior of the individual (e.g., behaviorism). The Lower Left is the interior of the collective (e.g., the shared cultural values and worldviews explored by interpretive sociology). And the Lower Right is the exterior of the collective (e.g., the objective social action system studied by systems theory).

As an example covering all four of these domains, let us take a single thought, say the thought of going to the grocery store. When I have that thought, what I actually experience is the thought itself, the interior thought and its meaning—the symbols, the images, the idea of going to the grocery store. That's the Upper Left, the interior of the individual.

While I am having this thought, there are, of course, correlative changes occurring in my brain—dopamine increases, acetylcholine jumps the synapses, beta brainwaves increase, or whatnot. Those are observable behaviors in my brain. They can be empirically observed. And that's the Upper Right.

Notice that, even though my brain is “inside” my organism, it is still not part of my actual interior awareness. In fact, I can't even see my brain

INDIVIDUAL

COLLECTIVE

LEFT-HAND PATHS

- Interpretive
- Hermeneutic
- Consciousness

Freud
C. G. Jung
Piaget
Aurobindo
Plotinus
Gautama Buddha

RIGHT-HAND PATHS

- Monological
- Empirical, positivistic
- Material form

B. F. Skinner
John Watson
John Locke
Empiricism
Behaviorism
Physics, biology,
neurology, etc.

Thomas Kuhn
Wilhelm Dilthey
Jean Gebser
Max Weber
Hans-Georg Gadamer

Systems Theory
Talcott Parsons
Auguste Comte
Karl Marx
Gerhard Lenski

FIGURE 1

without cutting open my skull and getting a mirror. My brain is an objective, physical, biomaterial organ, known in an objective and empirical manner (Upper Right). But I know my mind, my consciousness, in an immediate and direct and interior fashion (Upper Left). When I experience the thought of going to the grocery store, I do not say, “Wow, what a dopamine day”; rather, I experience the thought in its own terms, with its own contours. The brain is seen objectively, the mind is experienced subjectively. We might eventually find that they are indeed two different aspects of the same thing, or that they are parallel, or dualist,

or interactionist, or whatever, but the crucial point for now is that, in any case, neither can be reduced to the other without remainder, because whatever else might be said, they each have a drastically different phenomenology.

To return to the internal thought itself (Upper Left): notice that it only makes sense in terms of my cultural background. If I spoke a different language, the thought would be composed of different symbols and have quite different meanings. If I existed in a primal tribal society a million years ago, I would never even have the thought “going to the grocery store.” It might be, “Time to kill the bear.” The point is that my thoughts themselves arise in a cultural background that gives texture and meaning and context to my individual thoughts, and indeed, I would not even be able to “talk to myself” if I did not exist in a community of individuals who also talk to me.

So the cultural community serves as an intrinsic background and context to any individual thoughts I might have. My thoughts do not just pop into my head out of nowhere; they pop into my head out of a cultural background, and however much I might move beyond this background, I can never simply escape it altogether, and I could never have developed thoughts in the first place without it. The occasional cases of a “wolf boy”—humans raised in the wild—show that the human brain, left without culture, does not produce linguistic thoughts on its own.

In short, my individual thoughts only exist against a vast background of cultural practices and languages and meanings and contexts, without which I could form virtually no individual thoughts at all. And that’s the Lower Left, the interior of the collective, the intersubjective space of shared cultural contexts.

But my culture itself is not simply disembodied, hanging in idealistic midair. It has material components, much as my own individual thoughts have material brain components. All cultural events have social correlates.

These concrete social components include types of technology, forces of production (horticultural, agrarian, industrial, etc.), concrete institutions, written codes and patterns, geopolitical locations, and so on. That's the Lower Right, the social action system. And these concrete material components—the actual social system—are crucial in helping to determine the types of cultural worldview, within which my own thoughts will arise.

So my supposedly “individual thought” is actually a phenomenon that intrinsically has (at least) these four aspects to it—intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social. And around the holistic circle we go: the social system will have a strong influence on the cultural worldview, which will set limits to the individual thoughts that I can have, which will register in the brain physiology. And we can go around that circle in any direction. They are all interwoven. They are all mutually determining. They all cause, and are caused by, the others, in concentric spheres of contexts within contexts indefinitely.

I am not going to make a long and drawn-out argument for this, but simply take it as plain fact that the persistent existence of these four large camps in the knowledge quest is evidence enough that none of them can be totally reduced to the others. Each approach is giving us, as it were, one corner of the Kosmos. Each is telling us something very important about various aspects of the known world. And none can be reduced to the others without aggressive and violent rupture, distortion, dismissal.

In my opinion, these four large camps of human knowledge exist precisely because these four aspects of human beings are very real, very persistent, very profound. And one of the aims of an integral approach (and what we might call integral studies in general) is to honor and incorporate each of

these extraordinary domains—intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social.²

As we will continue to see, the integral approach is an “all-level, all-quadrant” approach.

THE FOUR FACES OF TRUTH

Each of these “four quadrants,” in fact, has its own particular type of truth or type of “validity claim”—the ways in which it goes about accumulating and validating its data and its evidence. I have given a brief summary of these in figure 2. And to say that none of these quadrants can be reduced

² “Integral” and “integral studies” have sometimes been associated with Sri Aurobindo, his student Haridas Chaudhuri, and the California Institute of Integral Studies (founded by Chaudhuri and others), so perhaps a few words on each of those is in order.

As the following pages will make clear, Aurobindo has been and continues to be an influence on my work. In fact, in chapter 6 we will see that he was instrumental in my moving from what I call a “Romantic/wilber-1” model to an “Aurobindo/wilber-2” model. Nonetheless, I eventually refined that model into “wilber-3” and “wilber-4,” as I will explain in chapters 9, 10, and 11. Those chapters therefore constitute my critique of Aurobindo (and Chaudhuri).

The essence of the critique is that both Aurobindo and Chaudhuri were pioneers in individual integral yoga and practice. This yoga especially focused on integrating the Ascending and Descending currents in the human being, thus embracing the entire spectrum of consciousness in both a transcendental/ascending and immanent/descending fashion. “Ascent and descent are then two inseparable aspects of the movement of integral yoga; they are the systole and diastole of integral self-discipline” (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 41).

I fully agree. But that approach is really just the beginning of a much more integral view (which I will explain in later chapters as wilber-3 and wilber-4). A truly integral yoga needs to take a much fuller account of the Western contributions to psychology, psychotherapy, and personal transformation (wilber-3), and it needs most especially to be set in the context of the four quadrants and their historical unfolding (wilber-4). Thus, my criticism of Aurobindo and Chaudhuri is a refinement, not a repudiation; but it is a refinement without which their systems are, I believe, limited and partial. This will become clear, I trust, in the succeeding chapters. [See *Integral Psychology* for a full elaboration of these themes.]

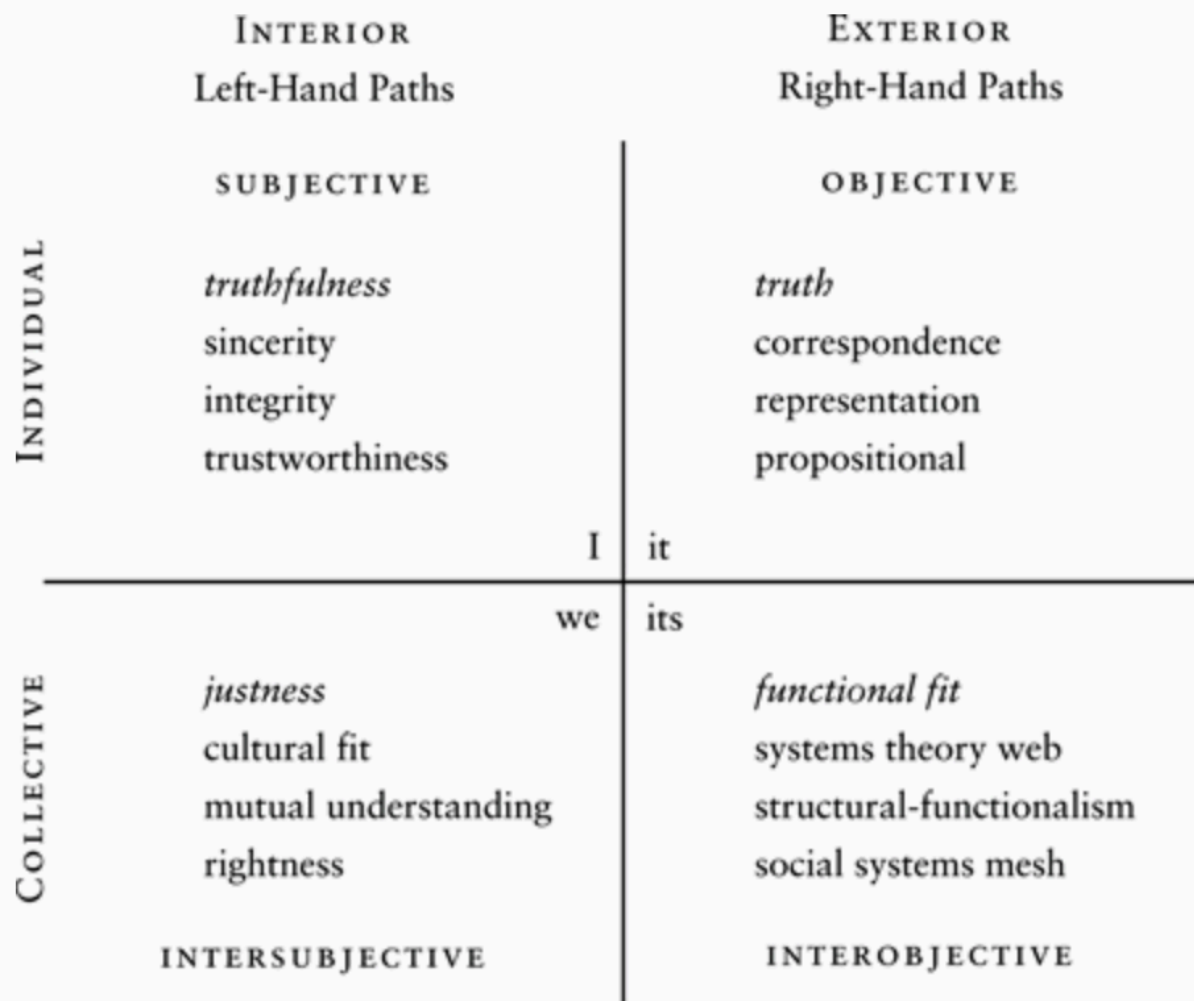


FIGURE 2

to the others is to say that none of their respective truths can be dismissed or reduced, either.

Here are some quick examples of the different validity claims or “types of truth,” going around the four quadrants in figures 1 and 2.

Truth

The type of truth found in the Upper-Right quadrant is known variously as representational, propositional, or correspondence. In propositional truth, a statement is said to be true if it matches an objective fact. “It is raining outside” is said to be a true statement if it actually matches the

facts at that moment. Propositions are tied to single, empirical, objective observables, and if the propositions match, they are said to be true. In other words, if the map matches the territory, it is said to be a true representation or a true correspondence (“We make pictures of facts”). Most people are quite familiar with this type of truth. It guides much of empirical science, and indeed much of our everyday lives. So common is propositional truth that it is often just called “truth” for short.

Truthfulness

In the Upper-Left quadrant, on the other hand, the question is not, “Is it raining outside?” The question here is, When I tell you it is raining outside, am I telling you the truth or am I lying? Not, does the map match the territory? but can the mapmaker be trusted?

Because here, you see, we are dealing not so much with exterior and observable behavior but with interior states, and the only way you and I can get at each other’s interiors is by dialogue and interpretation. If I want to actually know, not simply your behavior, but how you are feeling, or what you are thinking, then I must talk to you, and I must interpret what you say. And yet, when you report to me your inner status, you might be lying to me. Moreover, you might be lying to yourself.

And with the fact that you might be lying to yourself, we step into the whole realm of depth psychology in general. The validity claim here is not so much whether my statements match exterior facts, but whether I can truthfully report on my own inner status.

For, according to virtually all schools of depth psychology, “neurosis” is, in the broadest sense, a case of being out of touch with one’s true feelings, or one’s actual desires, or one’s authentic inner state. At some point in development, most of these schools maintain, the person began to deny, repress, distort, conceal, or otherwise “lie” to himself about his own interior status; he began to mis-interpret his subjective condition. And these misinterpretations, these concealments, these fictions, begin to cloud

awareness in the symbolic form of painful symptoms, telltale traces of the telltale lie.

And thus for these schools, therapy is first and foremost an attempt to get in touch with—and more accurately and truthfully interpret—one's interior states, one's symptoms, symbols, dreams, desires. A more accurate and faithful interpretation of the person's distresses helps the person to understand his otherwise baffling symptoms, helps him to see their meaning. And thus the person can become less opaque to himself, more transparent and open and undefended.

Thus, according to the schools of depth psychology, the individual's painful symptoms were generated by a misinterpretation, a concealing, a dynamic and forceful hiding, a "lying" about one's interior state; and a more truthful, faithful, and appropriate interpretation opens the depths in an individual in a more meaningful and transparent fashion, thus lessening the painful symptoms. Not so much objective truth as subjective truthfulness: and there is the validity claim of the Upper-Left quadrant.

(Incidentally, when it comes to therapy, an integral or "all-level, all-quadrant" approach would certainly not neglect the behavioral and pharmacological therapies of the Upper-Right quadrant. We are simply, at the moment, discussing each quadrant in turn, with its distinctive validity claim and type of truth.)

Notice also that, for example, the phenomenology of meditative states depends entirely upon the validity claim of subjective truthfulness, which is a totally different approach from the objective physiology of meditative states. That is, if you are interested in the neurophysiological changes that occur during meditation, you can hook me up to an EEG machine and monitor my brain states, no matter what I say about them. You simply use empirical and objective truth to map my brain physiology; you don't even have to talk to me. The machine will faithfully record what is happening in my brain.

But if you want to know what is actually going on in my awareness, in my mind, then you are going to have to ask me and talk to me—the approach is dialogical and intersubjective, not monological and merely empirical. When the needle jumps on the EEG machine, what am I experiencing? Am I seeing a brilliant interior illumination that seems to carry a compassionate depth and warmth? Or am I thinking of new ways to rob the local liquor store? The EEG machine will not, and cannot, tell you.

And in the quest for this type of interior truth, the validity claim is truthfulness, trustworthiness, sincerity (Upper Left). If I am being insincere in my reports, you will not get an accurate phenomenology of my interior states at all, but only a series of deceptions and concealments. Moreover, if I have already thoroughly lied to myself, I will honestly believe I'm telling the truth, and absolutely nothing on the EEG machine will be able to spot this. So much for empirical tests.

Thus, meditative physiology relies on objective data guided by the yardstick of propositional truth, whereas meditative phenomenology relies on subjective data guided by the yardstick of truthfulness; and we can see a striking example of the Upper-Right and Upper-Left approaches to consciousness, with their different but equally important validity claims.

Functional Fit

The two lower quadrants (interior-collective and exterior-collective) deal not merely with the individual but with the collective or communal. As we saw with the example of the Hopi Rain Dance, the Lower-Right camps approach the communal from an exterior and objective stance, and attempt to explain the status of the individual members in terms of their functional fit with the objective whole. That is, this approach attempts, with its validity claim, to situate each and every individual in an objective network that in many ways determines the function of each part. The truth, for these Lower-Right approaches, is found in the objective intermeshing of individual parts, so that the objective, empirical whole—

the “total system”—is the primary reality. And it is the objective behavior of the overall social action system, considered from an empirical stance, that forms the yardstick by which truths in this domain are judged. Its validity claim, in other words, is functional fit, so that each proposition must be tied to the intermeshing of the total system or network.

We all know this as standard systems theory, in its many guises. And when we hear theories about Gaia (and usually the Goddess), or about global networks and systems, or about “new paradigms” that emphasize “holistic networks,” or dynamic processes all interwoven into the great empirical Web of Life—these are all approaches that emphasize the Lower-Right quadrant: observable and empirical processes seamlessly intermeshed in functional fit.

Justness

Where the Lower-Right approaches attempt to explain how objects fit together in a functional whole or total web of empirical processes, the Lower-Left approaches attempt instead to understand how subjects fit together in acts of mutual understanding.

In other words, if you and I are going to live together, we have to inhabit, not just the same empirical and physical space, but also the same intersubjective space of mutual recognition. We are going to have to fit not just our bodies together in the same objective space, but our subjects together in the same cultural, moral, and ethical space. We are going to have to find ways to recognize and respect the rights of each other and of the community, and these rights cannot be found in objective matter, nor are they simply a case of my own individual sincerity, nor are they a matter of functionally fitting together empirical events: they are rather a matter of fitting our minds together in an intersubjective space that allows each of us to recognize and respect the other. Not necessarily agree with each other, but recognize each other—the opposite of which, put simply, is war.

We are interested, that is, not only in the truth, not simply in truthfulness, and not merely in functional fit: we are interested in justness, rightness, goodness, and fairness.

This intersubjective space (our commonly shared background contexts and worldviews) is a crucial component of the human being, without which our individual subjective identities could not even exist, and without which objective realities could not even be perceived. Moreover, this intersubjective strand develops and unfolds, just as the other quadrants do. (And thus a comprehensive theory of human consciousness and behavior will want to take all of these quadrants—and their development—into careful account. And this, I will argue, is a crucial aspect of integral studies.)

Notice that both of the collective approaches are equally holistic, but the social sciences tend to approach the whole from without in an objective or empirical stance, whereas cultural hermeneutics tend to approach the whole from within in an empathetic grasp. The former have a validity claim of functional fit or systems-mesh, an interobjective fit of each and every objective process with each and every other. The latter have a validity claim of cultural fit or mutual recognition, the intersubjective mesh that leads not to objective systems interlinking, but to human beings reaching mutual understanding. In other words, exterior and interior holism.

(It might be obvious that most theorists who call themselves “holistic” are ironically only exterior holists, an imbalance we need not champion. As of yet, there has historically been no “holism” that actually embraces all four quadrants in all their levels, and I will argue that this is one of the central aims of the integral approach.)

THE VALIDITY OF INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

The significant point is that each of these four validity claims has its own type of evidence and data, and thus particular assertions within each claim can be adjudicated—that is, can be confirmed or denied, justified or rebuffed, validated or rejected. Accordingly, each of these claims is open to the all-important fallibilist criterion of genuine knowledge.

We are all familiar with how fallibilism works in empirical sciences: maps and models and pictures that do not match empirical facts can eventually be dislodged by further facts. But the same fallibilism is at work in all of the genuine validity claims, which is precisely why learning can occur in all four quadrants: mistakes are dislodged by further evidence in those quadrants.

For example, Hamlet is an interpretive, not an empirical, phenomenon, and yet the statement “Hamlet is about the joys of war” is a false statement—it is a bad interpretation, it is wrong, and it can be thoroughly rejected by the community of those who:

- 1) perform the injunction or the experiment (namely, read the play called Hamlet);
- 2) gather the interpretative data or apprehensions (study the meaning of the play in light of the total available evidence); and
- 3) compare this data with others who have completed the experiment (consensual validation or rejection by a community of the adequate).

Those three strands of all genuine knowledge accumulation (injunction, data, confirmation) are present in all of the validity claims, which themselves are anchored in the very real intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social domains of human beings. In other words, these very real domains ground our quests for truthfulness, truth, justness, and functional

fit, each of which proceeds by the checks and balances of injunction, data, and confirmation. (We will return to this topic in chapter 3.)

Thus, the epistemological claims of integral studies are, like any other valid knowledge claims, thoroughly grounded in experiment, data accumulation, and consensual justification.

Fortunately, there is a very easy way to simplify all of this!

I, WE, AND IT

You can see all four of these equally important validity claims or “types of truth” listed in figure 2. And you might also notice that I have written the words “I,” “we,” “it” (and “its”) in the corners of the four quadrants. The reason is that each of these quadrants is described in a different language. That is, they each have a different but quite valid phenomenology, and thus each of them is natively described in a distinct language.

Thus, the events and data found in the Upper-Left quadrant are described in “I” language. The events and data of the Lower-Left quadrant are described in “we” language. And both of the Right-Hand quadrants, because they are empirical and exterior, can be described in “it” language. Thus, the four quadrants can be simplified to three basic domains: I, we, and it.

Because none of the quadrants can be reduced to the others, likewise none of these languages can be reduced to the others. Each is vitally important, and forms a crucial part of the universe on the whole—not to mention a vital part of a comprehensive understanding of the psychology and sociology of human beings. Here are just a few of the important ingredients of these three major domains of I, we, and it:

I (Upper Left)—consciousness, subjectivity, self, and self-expression (including art and aesthetics); truthfulness, sincerity; first-person accounts

We (Lower Left)—ethics and morals, worldviews, common context, culture; intersubjective meaning, mutual understanding, appropriateness, justness; second-person accounts

It (Right Hand)—science and technology, objective nature, empirical forms (including brain and social systems); propositional truth (in both singular and functional fit); third-person accounts

Science—empirical science—deals with objects, with “its,” with empirical patterns. Morals and ethics concern “we” and our intersubjective world of mutual understanding and justness. Art and aesthetics concern the beauty in the eye of the beholder, the “I.”

And yes, this is essentially Plato’s the Good (morals, the “we”), the True (in the sense of propositional truth, objective truths or “its”), and the Beautiful (the aesthetic dimension as perceived by each “I”).

These three domains are also Sir Karl Popper’s rather famous distinction of three worlds—objective (it), subjective (I), and cultural (we). Many people, myself included, consider Jürgen Habermas the world’s foremost living philosopher, and these three great domains correspond exactly with Habermas’s three validity claims: objective truth, subjective sincerity, and intersubjective justness.

Of enormous historical importance, these three domains showed up in Kant’s immensely influential trilogy—The Critique of Pure Reason (objective science), The Critique of Practical Reason (morals), and The Critique of Judgment (aesthetic judgment and art).

Even into the spiritual levels of development, these three domains show up as, to give only one example, the Three Jewels of Buddhism, namely: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Buddha is the enlightened mind in each

and every sentient being, the I that is no-I, the primordial awareness that shines forth from every interior. Buddha is the “I” or the “eye” of Spirit. Sangha is the community of spiritual practitioners, the “We” of Spirit. And Dharma is the spiritual truth that is realized, the “It” or “isness” or “thusness” or “suchness” of every phenomenon.

Dozens of other examples could be given, but that’s the general picture of these great domains of I, we, and it. And this is obviously crucial for integral studies, because any comprehensive theory of human consciousness and behavior will want to honor and incorporate all four quadrants, or simply these three great domains, each possessing a different validity claim and a quite different language. This is simply another example of the pluralistic, multimodal, and multidimensional attitude that is a defining hallmark of an integral approach: all-level, all-quadrant.

FLATLAND

Despite the resiliency of what we might call the Left-Hand approaches of introspection and interpretation and consciousness (approaches that honor the “I” and the “we” domains), nonetheless there has been in the West, for the last three hundred years or so, a profound and aggressive attempt by modern science (and the exclusively Right-Hand approaches) to reduce the entire Kosmos to a bunch of “its.” That is, the I and we domains have been almost entirely colonized by the it-domains, by scientific materialism, positivism, behaviorism, empiricism, and objectivistic-exterior approaches in general.

This entire Right-Hand imperialism, which in so many ways has been the hallmark of Western modernity, is known generally as scientism, which, as I would define it, is the belief that the entire world can be fully explained in it-language. It is the assumption that all subjective and intersubjective

spaces can be reduced, without remainder, to the behavior of objective processes, that human and nonhuman interiors alike can be thoroughly accounted for as holistic systems of dynamically interwoven its.

Gross reductionism we all know about: it is the reduction of all complex entities to material atoms, which is gross indeed. But subtle reductionism is all the more widespread, insidious, and damaging. Subtle reductionism simply reduces every event in the Left Hand to its corresponding aspect in the Right Hand. That is, subtle reductionism reduces all “I’s” and all “we’s” to their corresponding empirical correlates, reduces them to “its.” Mind is reduced to brain; praxis is reduced to techne; interiors are reduced to bits of digital its; depth is reduced to endless surfaces roaming a flat and faded system; levels of quality are reduced to levels of quantity; dialogical interpretation is reduced to monological gaze—in short, the multidimensional universe is rudely reduced to flatland.

But precisely because human beings do indeed have these four different aspects—intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social—this “scientific” approach can seem to make a great deal of sense, because every interior event does indeed have an exterior correlate. (Even if I have an out-of-the-body experience, it registers in the empirical brain!) And thus it initially makes all the sense in the world to try to simplify the knowledge quest by allowing only empirical data and objective its.

But when you have finally finished reducing all I’s and all we’s to mere its, when you have converted all interiors to exteriors, when you have turned all depth into shiny surfaces, then you have perfectly gutted an entire Kosmos. You have completely stripped the universe of all value, meaning, consciousness, depth, and discourse—and delivered it up dried and desiccated, laid out on the marble slab of a monological gaze.

Consciousness indeed becomes the ghost in the machine, precisely because it has just committed suicide.

And thus we end up with Whitehead's famous summary of the modern scientific worldview (of subtle reductionism): "a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly." To which, incidentally, he added: "Thereby, modern philosophy has been ruined."

It doesn't help that this subtle reductionism is often "holistic," because with subtle reductionism, the holism is always of the exterior variety alone: holistic and dynamically interwoven its! Open any textbook on holistic systems theory or the new holistic scientific paradigm, and you will find an endless discussion of chaos theory, cybernetic feedback mechanisms, dissipative structures, complexity theory, global networks, systems interactions—all described in process it-language. You will find nothing substantial on aesthetics, poetry, beauty, goodness, ethical dispositions, intersubjective development, interior illumination, transcendental intuition, ethical impulses, mutual understanding, justness, or meditative phenomenology (so much for being "holistic"). All you will find, in other words, is a monochrome world of interwoven its, without so much as an acknowledgment of the equally important and equally holistic domains of the I and the we, the subjective and intersubjective spaces that allow objective systems to be perceived in the first place.

Thus, systems theory admirably fights gross reductionism, but is itself the prime example of subtle reductionism, of the "it-ism" that has so defined modernity. "Thereby, modern philosophy has been ruined." So has modern psychology and psychiatry and cognitive science, to the extent they continue to reduce all I's and all we's to info-its running through neuronal it-pathways carried by it-neurotransmitters to it-goals. Your presence, your existence, your consciousness is not required. That these are often holistic and systems-oriented approaches is no solace at all: that's simply subtle reductionism at its worst: a flatland web of interwoven its.

But the existence of these objectivistic, empirical, systems it-approaches is not the problem. These approaches accurately and importantly report on

the exteriors of various phenomena, and they are indispensable in that regard! I fully support them in that regard. The difficulty is when these approaches attempt to corner the market on truth, and to claim that the empirical it-domain is the only significant domain in existence. It is this aggressive imperialism and colonization of the I and the we domains by the monological it-approaches that we must everywhere resist, and resist in the name of other and equally honorable truths.

And remember: “In the mind of some eternal Spirit” simply gives us fair warning that a world of mere “its” is no world at all. Consciousness and form, subjective and objective, interior and exterior, Purusha and Prakriti, Dharmakaya and Rupakaya, are the warp and woof of a wondrous universe that makes precisely no sense if either is dismissed.

THE PAIN OF DENIAL

In fact, it is fast becoming quite obvious that if any system of thought (from philosophy to sociology to psychology to religion) attempts to ignore or deny any of the four validity claims, then those ignored truths actually reappear in the system as an internal and massive self-contradiction.

In other words, if I refuse reality to any of these truths, then that denied quadrant will in fact sneak into my system—I will smuggle it into my philosophy—and there it will eat away at my system from within, until it eventually gnaws its way to the surface as a jolting contradiction.

We can go around the quadrants and see what happens to our theories of knowledge if we deny any of the quadrants. This is very important, I think, because not only orthodox but “postmodern” as well as “new paradigm” approaches have often been plagued by many of these lopsided

fads, which an integral approach would criticize in the name of wider and more inclusive occasions.

Scientism

As we have seen, empiricists (and positivists and scientists in general) deny constitutive reality to virtually all Left-Hand dimensions; only the Right Hand is real. All Left-Hand occasions are at best reflections or representations of the sensorimotor world, the world of simple location, the world of its, detected by the human senses or their extensions.

But “empirical objective knowledge” arises only because of, and in the space of, an intersubjective structure that allows the differentiation of subject and object in the first place. In Thomas Kuhn’s now-famous formulation, scientific facts are embedded in cultural practices or paradigms. This does not deny the objective component of the knowledge; it denies that the knowledge is merely objective or innocently empirical. In other words, in order to assert that all truth is “strictly empirical,” empiricists have to stand in intersubjective structures that their own theories cannot account for. The linguistic assertion that all valid knowledge is empirical is not itself empirical, and thus in asserting their own position, they contradict themselves; the denied intersubjective quadrant retaliates with a sneak attack! (This intersubjective component of empirical knowledge is the basis of many influential critiques, not just Thomas Kuhn’s attack on simple empiricism, but also Piaget’s cognitive-structural revolution and Heidegger’s notion of the “background”—to name a very few.)

Cultural Constructivism

More recently we have the reverse attempt: to deny any form of objective truth and dissolve it into cultural constructivism. (This approach is also called “social constructivism,” but the technical meaning is always cultural constructivism.) That is, with the extreme versions of postmodern constructivism, there is an aggressive attempt to reduce all quadrants to the

Lower-Left quadrant (i.e., an attempt to reduce all knowledge claims to intersubjective constructions). This backfires immediately and spectacularly. In fact, not even Derrida and Foucault accept this extreme constructivism (although their American followers often claim that they do). Derrida now concedes the existence of transcendental signifieds; without them, he says, we couldn't even translate between various languages. And Foucault's own archaeology is a series of universal constants in human knowing, within which culturally relative variations are constructed.

But extreme constructivists claim that there is no such thing as objective truth at all, because our ideas are simply constructed according to various interests—usually power, but also various “isms” and various ideologies (sexism, racism, speciesism, logocentrism, etc.).

Yet the constructivists themselves claim that their stance is true. And this they cannot do without asserting a theory of truth that is not itself distorted by power or ideology. In other words, they will have to acknowledge and admit the Right-Hand aspects of existence that ground correspondence claims of truth, for that is also an important aspect of all

knowledge.³ Instead, they are simply claiming that it is objectively true that there is no objective truth at all.

Aspects of knowledge are indeed intersubjectively constructed; but those constructions are set in networks of subjective, objective, and interobjective realities that constrain the construction. We will never, for example, find a shared cultural worldview where apples fall upward or men give birth: so much for arbitrary constructivism.

No wonder that John Searle's most recent book is an aggressive attack on mere constructivism. He calls it *The Construction of Social Reality*, as opposed to "the social construction of reality," the point being that social reality is in part constructed on a given sensorimotor world that is then reflected in correspondence, so that it itself is not socially constructed. His point is that we can't even get to the constructed aspects of reality without also having a foundation in correspondence: both are irreplaceable.

Systems Theory Reductionism

Whereas cultural constructivists attempt to reduce all reality to the Lower Left, systems theory attempts to reduce all reality to the Lower Right. That

³ With extreme constructivism, the individual subject (the I) is dissolved into intersubjective linguistic signifiers, loudly announced in the celebrated death of the subject, the death of the author, the death of man. Language itself replaces the individual self as the real subject of discourse (i.e., you are not talking, language alone is talking through you), and thus you and I are simply along for the irrelevant ride: the I is deconstructed into nothing but the linguistic We, and the death of the subject haunts the halls of the postmodern vacuum.

Not only are all I's (with their truthfulness) dissolved into a linguistic We, all its (with their objective truths) are likewise evaporated in the game of arbitrary construction. Gone is truth and gone is truthfulness, and in their place reigns a cultural construction driven only by power, by ideology, by gender, by this centrism or that centrism, by ugly motives of ugly people all lined up in a row.

And yet by the very fact of setting forth their theories they are actually doing something that their theories categorically state is impossible (namely, present what they feel is a power-free and ideology-free theory). The I and the it, which are both denied real existence in the face of the almighty constructing We, in fact reassert themselves as internal contradictions. And only by admitting the rejected domains can the partial truths of constructivism be taken up and worked into a larger, more open, more integral view.

is, social reductionism attempts to reduce all truth to functional fit, to the dynamic interplay of holistic its. All I's and we's dissolve in the dynamic web of mutually interwoven its.

Of course, that dynamic web is indeed real—it is the Lower-Right quadrant of the Kosmos—but it is a partial truth that, when expanded into a complete “wholism,” takes the entire Left Half of the Kosmos with it into oblivion.

In functional fit, all reality is ultimately reduced to Lower-Right terms (the social system), and so all other validity claims (from propositional truth to cultural meaning to personal integrity) are judged ultimately in terms of their capacity to serve the holistic functioning of the social system. All qualitative distinctions are thus reduced to terms of expediency and efficiency; nothing is “true,” because all that enters the equation is usefulness (i.e., “truth” becomes anything that furthers the autopoietic regime of the self-organizing social system; such theories dissolve their own truth value in the functional fit of that which they describe).

And yet, of course, those of the social theorists, ecologists, ecofeminists, and deep ecologists who use systems theory want to claim that their approach has a moral superiority to the alternatives. But this moral value cannot even be stated, let alone explained, in the terms of their own systems theory, because, in this theory, all existing things and events are equally strands in the total web of life, and so there is simply no way to say that one of them is right and one of them is wrong. Whatever happens is what the total system is actually doing, and we do not and cannot challenge the overall system because we are all equally strands in that web. What looks like evil to us is simply something the overall system is doing, and thus all ethical drives dissolve in the flatland web of dynamically interwoven its.

Of course, many systems theorists immediately attempt to sneak or smuggle moral and normative claims into their theory by saying, in effect:

that which furthers the system is good, and that which harms the system is bad. But to even be able to make that claim is to actually step outside of the system in order to comment on it, and this, according to systems theory, is impossible. Thus, to the extent that systems theorists claim to offer a moral or normative direction, to just that extent they have ceased to be systems theorists. They have moved from descriptive it-language to normative I and we language, terms which systems theory does not and cannot comprehend, and terms which therefore have to be smuggled into their overall view. To just that extent, the banished I and we domains reassert themselves as formal contradictions in the flatland and exterior holism of the systems approach.

Systems theory definitely has its important (if limited) place, yet it is now, by virtue of its extensive subtle reductionism, one of the great modern enemies of the I and the we domains, of the individual lifeworld and of cultural richness—what Habermas refers to as “the colonization of the lifeworld by the imperatives of functional systems that externalize their costs on the other . . . a blind compulsion to system maintenance and system expansion.”

These approaches have a wonderfully noble intent, which I believe we can all applaud, but somewhere on the way to the global wedding they took a wrong turn and found themselves deep in the flatland of subtle reductionism, which effectively perpetuates exactly the fragmentation they

so nobly desire to overcome.⁴ Thus, we wish to honor systems theory and its truth, but set in its own much larger context of other and equally honorable truths.

Cultural Relativity

⁴ It is very illuminating to contrast the cultural constructivists—who reduce everything to a dynamic collective We (Lower Left)—with the systems theorists, who reduce everything to a dynamic collective It (Lower Right). This is, in other words, another version of interior holism versus exterior holism.

Thus, for cultural constructivism (or interior holism), truth is primarily a coherence theory of truth, or intersubjective mesh and cultural meaning, because there are no objective its to anchor any correspondence theories of truth. The cultural alone is real, the We alone is real, and thus all truth and truthfulness are reduced to cultural interests and arbitrary constructions, which themselves exist only because they have a measure of coherence: the cultural alone is real, and all other “truths” are derivative to the great constructing We. No “I’s” and no “its” need apply for membership in this culture club—they are barred from entry at the door.

For systems theory (or external holism), truth is found in functional fit, or interobjective mesh: the social alone is the primary reality. What both interior and exterior holism have in common is that they anchor their truth claims in the collective—one cultural (Lower Left), the other social (Lower Right). Since they are both “holistic,” you might think they would be happy partners in the cause, but in fact they fairly despise each other, because the former is the epitome of subjectivism, the latter, of objectivism—the big system We versus the big system It.

Thus, you will never hear a systems theorist say that all systems are merely constructed, or arbitrary, or exist only as an ideology of gender, power, racism, and so on. No, systems theorists are by and large dedicated scientists, monological to a great degree, and they believe their systems are actually there, actually existing, largely independent of the terms used to describe them: real scientists study real systems in the real world! None of this “arbitrary constructivism,” thank you very much. Exterior holists are realists in almost every sense.

But, of course, the interior holists—the cultural constructivists—don’t believe in any independent or realistic “its” at all—whether dynamic, process, interwoven, systems or otherwise—because all “its” and all “I’s” are culturally constructed products of the linguistic We. They therefore believe that the “systems” of the systems scientists are just arbitrary fabrications of a Eurocentric rationality driven by its attempt to gain power, a power that finds its ultimate expression in grand narratives and totalizing agendas such as systems theory, agendas that are driven by the worst sort of marginalizing, hegemonic, oppressive, and brutalizing aggression, all dressed up in the name of a knowledge that is in fact nothing but thinly disguised power.

Interior and exterior holism: both of them, ironically, partially true but thus ultimately quite nonholistic—and therefore constantly at each other’s throats. And in each case the denied and oppressed quadrants wonderfully reassert themselves, upsetting the imperialists from within as massive self-contradictions, exploding their narrowness in a wider and more open vision, calling to us all in the name of a more integral embrace.

Those theorists who focus exclusively on the Lower-Left or cultural quadrant tend to fall into various types of extreme relativism, which, in denying other quadrants, ends up self-contradictory. Cultural relativists, extreme pluralists, and multiculturalists are all caught in a similar contradiction: The claim is made that all truths are relative, that there are and can be no universal truths.

Unfortunately, that view itself is claiming to be universally true. It is making a series of strong claims that it insists are true for all cultures (the relative nature of truth, the contextuality of claims, the social relativity of all categories, the historicity of truth, and so on). This view thus claims that there are no universal truths of any sort—except for its own, which are universal and superior in a world where nothing is supposed to be universal or superior at all.

This is yet another attempt to reduce all objective truth to intersubjective agreement, and it suffers the same fate: it cannot assert its own position without contradicting itself. It is maintaining that there are several objectively true things about all cultures—and this is correct, but only if we fully acknowledge some aspect of objective truth. Otherwise, the denied quadrant once again sneaks back into the system and explodes it from within.

Some aspects of culture are most definitely constructed, and some aspects are both relative and historically bound. But many features of the human bodymind show universal commonalities across cultures. The human body everywhere has 206 bones, one heart, two kidneys. And the human mind everywhere has the capacity to produce images, symbols, concepts, and rules. The sturdy conclusion is that the human body and mind cross-culturally share certain deep features that, when they appear, are everywhere quite similar, but the surface features—the actual manifestations of these common traits—are indeed relative, culturally bound, marked by historicity, and determined contingently. The human

body might indeed have 206 bones wherever it appears, but not all cultures use those bones to play baseball.

The integral approach fully acknowledges and honors the richness of cultural diversity in surface features, while also pinpointing the common deep features of the human family: neither monolithic universalism nor incoherent pluralism, but rather a genuinely universal pluralism of commonality-in-difference.

Aesthetics Only

We have recently seen a flurry of merely aesthetic theories of truth: whatever you happen to like, that is the final arbiter of truth. All objective, interobjective, and intersubjective truths are cheerfully reduced to subjective inclinations (all quadrants are reduced to the Upper Left). Personal taste alone is the arbiter of reality. I do my thing, you do yours. Nietzsche is always (incorrectly) accused of advocating this.

Integrating the aesthetic judgment (Upper Left) with truth and justness is certainly important, but a theory of knowledge that is merely aesthetic is simply inarticulate. Not only does it fail to deal with intersubjective goodness and justness, it trashes any objective aspects of any sorts of truths. And once again, as long as this aesthetic theory is totally silent and never utters its own views, it is fine. But as soon as it tries to explain why aesthetics alone works, it will smuggle in the other quadrants and end up contradicting itself. It will claim, at least implicitly, that what it is doing is true, and moreover, better than your view, thus sneaking in both objective and intersubjective judgments, where they explode from within, scattering the landscape with performative contradictions.

Conclusion

And so on around the four quadrants. The point is that every human being has a subjective aspect (sincerity, truthfulness), an objective aspect (truth, correspondence), an intersubjective aspect (culturally constructed

meaning, justness, appropriateness), and an interobjective aspect (systems and functional fit), and our different knowledge claims are grounded in these very real domains. And thus, whenever we attempt to deny any of these insistent domains, we simply end up, sooner or later, smuggling them into our philosophy in a hidden and unacknowledged fashion: the empiricists use interpretation in the very act of denying its importance; the extreme constructivists and relativists use universal truth in order to universally deny its existence; extreme aestheticians use beauty alone to claim moral goodness—and on and on and on. To deny any of these domains is, as it were, to be hoist with our own petard and end up in a severe self-contradiction.

A more integral vision attempts instead to include the moment of truth in each of those approaches—from empiricism to constructivism to relativism to aestheticism—but, in stripping them of their claims to be the only type of truth in existence, releases them from their contradictions—and places them, as it were, into a genuine rainbow coalition.

THE SPECTRUM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Integral studies in general are dedicated to an “all-level, all-quadrant” view of human consciousness and behavior. But if for the moment we focus on the Upper-Left quadrant—the interior of the individual, the site of consciousness itself—what do we find?

Biological and medical scientists are now in the midst of intensive work on the Human Genome Project, the endeavor to map all of the genes in the entire sequence of human DNA. This spectacular project promises to revolutionize our ideas of human growth, development, disease, and medical treatment, and its completion will surely mark one of the great advances in human knowledge.

Not as well known, but arguably more important, is what might be called the Human Consciousness Project, the endeavor, now well under way, to map the entire spectrum of the various states of human consciousness (including, as well, realms of the human unconscious). This Human Consciousness Project, involving hundreds of researchers from around the world, involves a series of multidisciplinary, multicultural, multimodal approaches that together promise an exhaustive mapping of the entire range of consciousness, the entire sequence of the “genes” of awareness, as it were.

These various attempts are rapidly converging on a “master template” of the various stages, structures, and states of consciousness available to men and women. By comparing and contrasting various multicultural approaches—from Zen Buddhism to Western psychoanalysis, from Vedanta Hinduism to existential phenomenology, from Tundra Shamanism to altered states—these approaches are rapidly piecing together a master template—a spectrum of consciousness—using the various approaches to fill in any gaps left by the others.

Although many of the specifics are still being intensively researched, the overall evidence for the existence of this spectrum of consciousness is already so significant as to put it largely beyond serious dispute. We will examine this spectrum in more detail in chapter 1. For the moment, we will simply note that this spectrum appears to range from instinctual to egoic to spiritual modes, from prepersonal to personal to transpersonal experiences, from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious states, from body to mind to spirit itself.

The field that has perhaps most carefully and meticulously studied this extraordinary spectrum of consciousness is the discipline known as transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychology is sometimes called “the fourth force,” after the first three of behavioristic, psychoanalytic, and humanistic schools. The word “transpersonal” itself simply means “personal plus.” That is, the transpersonal orientation explicitly and

carefully includes all of the facets of personal psychology and psychiatry, but then adds those deeper or higher aspects of human experience that transcend the ordinary and the average—experiences that are, in other words, “transpersonal,” or “more than the personal,” or personal plus. Thus, in the attempt to more fully and accurately reflect the entire range of human experience, transpersonal psychology and psychiatry take, as their basic starting point, the entire spectrum of consciousness.

The integral approach that I am advocating acknowledges and honors this all-inclusive spectrum of consciousness as being perhaps the best available map of the Upper-Left quadrant in general, a map that is the direct result of this extraordinary Human Consciousness Project.

But the integral approach does not stop there. The point, of course, is that if the entire spectrum of consciousness is acknowledged and taken into account, it will dramatically alter each and every discipline it touches—from anthropology to ecology, from philosophy to art, from ethics to sociology, from psychology to politics.

This is why we can say that integral studies in general are dedicated to an “all-level, all-quadrant” view of human consciousness and behavior—covering not just all of the quadrants, but all of the various levels and dimensions in each of those quadrants—the entire spectrum of levels in the intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social aspects of human beings.

In the following chapters, we will specifically look at examples of each of those branches of integral studies, including integral psychology (chapters 1, 9, 10), integral anthropology (chapter 2), integral philosophy (chapter 3), integral art and literary theory (chapters 4 and 5), integral feminism (chapter 8), and integral spirituality (chapters 9, 10, 11).

These are the parts that we will attempt to weave into the integral vision as a whole, thus completing, at least for this round, that extraordinary circle of understanding.

THE GREAT WISDOM TRADITIONS

Men and women, as the Christian mystics are fond of saying, have (at least) three eyes of knowing: the eye of flesh, which apprehends physical events; the eye of mind, which apprehends images and desires and concepts and ideas; and the eye of contemplation, which apprehends spiritual experiences and states. And that, of course, is a simplified version of the spectrum of consciousness, reaching from body to mind to spirit.

Indeed, the Upper-Left quadrant has historically been studied as the Great Chain of Being, a concept which, according to Arthur Lovejoy, “has been the dominant official philosophy of the larger part of civilized humankind through most of its history.” Huston Smith, in his remarkable book *Forgotten Truth*, has demonstrated that all of the world’s great wisdom traditions, from Taoism to Vedanta, Zen to Sufism, Neoplatonism to Confucianism, are based on the Great Chain—that is, based on some version of the overall spectrum of consciousness, with its levels of being and knowing.

Some postmodern critics, however, have claimed that the very notion of the Great Chain, since it is hierarchical, is somehow oppressive; it is supposed to be based on unpleasant “ranking” instead of compassionate “linking.” But this is a rather unfair complaint. First, the antihierarchical and antiranking critics are themselves engaged in hierarchical judgments of ranking—namely, they claim their view is better than the alternatives. In other words, they themselves have a very strong ranking system—it’s just hidden and inarticulate (and self-contradictory).

Second, the Great Chain is actually what Arthur Koestler called a *holarchy*: a series of concentric circles or nests, with each senior level transcending but including its juniors. This is a ranking, to be sure, but a ranking of increasing inclusiveness and embrace, with each senior level including more and more of the world and its inhabitants, so that the

upper or spiritual reaches of the spectrum of consciousness are absolutely all-inclusive and all-embracing.

Of course, any hierarchy—including the feminist hierarchy that values “linking” as better than “ranking”—can be put to severe abuse, repressing or marginalizing certain values. But this condemns not hierarchies in general, but merely pathological or dominator hierarchies. As Riane Eisler has reminded us, there is a big difference between actualization hierarchies and dominator hierarchies; and the Great Nest of Being was from its inception a profound actualization holarchy, quite apart from the abuses to which it was occasionally put. (We will return to the Great Nest in chapter 1, and examine its importance more carefully.)

But apart from such abuses, the great wisdom traditions even at their best still neglected several crucial items, items that the early investigators of the spectrum of consciousness could not, or at any rate did not, know. Two deficiencies in the wisdom traditions especially deserve mention, because integral studies, to be genuinely integral, must directly and forthrightly address these serious inadequacies.

The first is the recognition that the very earliest stages of human development can play a decisive role in subsequent growth—Freud’s pioneering work, for example. The great contemplative traditions excelled in tracing human growth from mental and egoic modes to transmental and spiritual modes, but they were extremely weak in their understanding of the stages leading up to the mental-ego itself. In Jack Engler’s memorable phrase, “You have to be somebody before you can be nobody.” That is, you must develop a strong and secure ego before you can transcend it; and whereas the great traditions were superb at the latter, they often failed at the former. And a truly “full spectrum” approach to psychiatry and psychology would rigorously embrace both: the move from instinct to ego, as well as from ego to spirit.

Precisely because the spectrum of consciousness develops, modern-day researchers can bring to bear the vast arsenal of developmental research techniques to help elucidate the various developmental lines of consciousness itself. That is, we can now begin to trace the developmental unfolding of such lines as cognition, affect, moral sense, object-relations, self-identity, modes of space and time, motivations, needs, and so on—and not just from pre-egoic to egoic modes, but also from egoic to transegoic modes. This gives integral studies the chance historically to be the first genuinely “full spectrum” model of human growth and development.

Likewise for integral psychotherapy. Precisely because the spectrum of consciousness develops, various “misdevelopments” can occur at any stage of this unfolding. As with any living entity, pathology can occur at any point in growth. Thus, the spectrum of consciousness is also a spectrum of different types of possible pathologies: psychotic, neurotic, cognitive, existential, spiritual. And a “full-spectrum” approach to psychology and psychiatry is devoted to a full range of treatments that address these different types of pathologies (we will return to this topic in chapters 6 and 7).

The second major weakness of the great traditions is that they did not clearly recognize that the various levels of interior consciousness have correlates in the other quadrants. In other words, it is not simply, as the great traditions assume, that human beings have different levels—body, mind, soul, and spirit, for example—but also that each of those levels has four aspects—intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social. This multidimensional grid—not simply “all-level” but “all-level, all-quadrant”—opens the study of human beings in a profound fashion. That, of course, is part of integral studies.

We can now, for example, begin to correlate states of meditative awareness with types of brainwave patterns (without attempting to reduce one to the other). We can monitor physiological shifts that occur with spiritual experience. We can follow the levels of neurotransmitters during

psychotherapeutic interventions. We can follow the effects of psychoactive drugs on blood distribution patterns in the brain. We can trace the social modes of production and see the corresponding changes in cultural worldviews. We can follow the historical unfolding of cultural worldviews and plot the status of men and women in each period. We can trace the modes of self that correlate with different modes of techno-economic infrastructure. And so on around the quadrants: not simply “all-level,” but “all-level, all-quadrant.”

Thus, modern-day integral studies can do something at which the great traditions generally failed: trace the spectrum of consciousness not just in its intentional but also in its behavioral, social, and cultural manifestations, thus highlighting the importance of a multidimensional approach for a truly comprehensive overview of human consciousness and behavior.

Finally, with these broader and more sophisticated tools of behavioral, developmental, and cultural analysis, we will also be able to more clearly spot those areas where the great traditions were all-too-embedded in the social injustices of the day, from sexism to speciesism to militarism to ethnocentrism.

In short, modern-day integral studies have reconnected with the world’s great wisdom traditions, honoring and incorporating many of their essential and pioneering insights, while, at the same time, adding new methodologies and techniques previously unavailable. This is multiculturalism in its best and deepest sense, cherishing cultural differences, but set in a truly universal context.

CONCLUSION

An integral approach is dedicated to an all-level, all-quadrant program, honoring the entire spectrum of consciousness, not just in the I-domain,

but also in the we and the it domains, thus integrating art, morals, and science; self, ethics, and environment; consciousness, culture, and nature; Buddha, Sangha, and Dharma; the beautiful and the good and the true.

In the following chapters, we will see very concrete examples of each of these many facets of the Kosmos, as we attempt to weave them into a blanket of many colors.

And who knows, we might, you and I just might, in the upper reaches of the spectrum of consciousness itself, directly intuit the mind of some eternal Spirit—a Spirit that shines forth in every I and every we and every it, a Spirit that sings as the rain and dances as the wind, a Spirit of which every conversation is the sincerest worship, a Spirit that speaks with your tongue and looks out from your eyes, that touches with these hands and cries out with this voice—and a Spirit that has always whispered lovingly in our ears: Never forget the Good, and never forget the True, and never forget the Beautiful.

The integral vision is the modern and postmodern attempt to honor just that pledge.

This essay was excerpted from The Eye of Spirit by Ken Wilber, originally published in 1997. The break-through ideas in this excerpt continued to be carried forward by Ken — 1) his recent work extended the 4 types of truth into an Integral Methodological Pluralism, with 8 zones and 8 different methodologies/truths; and 2) carefully differentiates structures of consciousness (Growing Up) from states of consciousness (Waking Up).

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Ken Wilber is a preeminent scholar of the Integral stage of human development. He is an internationally acknowledged leader, founder of Integral Institute, and co-founder of Integral Life. Ken is the originator of arguably the first truly comprehensive or integrative world philosophy, aptly named “Integral Theory”. You can find Ken’s full biography, as well as all of his recent media offerings, on his [Integral Life author page](#).