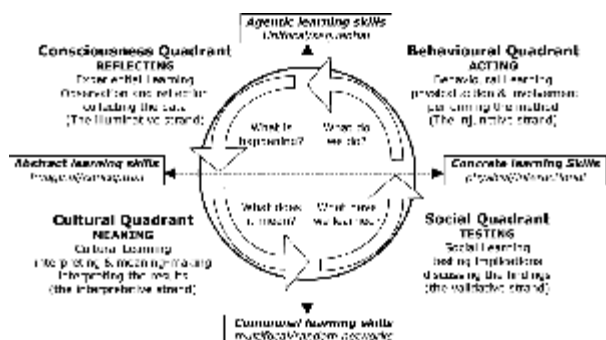


Indistinct Union: Christianity, Integral Philosophy, and Politics

The Integral Learning Cycle and the Map

In a previous post I said I would [go to into the metaphors within Wilber’s work](#) combining my long-standing interest in his philosophical work with my new interest in metaphor theory.



For the (heavy duty) theoretical background to this piece, [see this article by Mark Edwards](#) on uniting the developmental and epistemological elements of Wilber’s Integral Theory.

Ken discusses three strands of knowledge—injunction (action), empiricism (experience arising from action), and confirmation/verification (knowledge sharing with the community of the adequate. He relates those to three famous philosophers/schools of philosophy of science. The first (injunction) is [Thomas Kuhn](#) and his work on Scientific Revolutions occurring through new paradigms—new practices. The second, the empirical school with roots in Democritus up through Hume and to the [Positivist School](#). And lastly the third, verification being Karl Popper’s (justly) [famous work on falsification](#). To which Edwards adds a crucial missing fourth: interpretation. Science (or here the act of understanding) always takes place within meaning and interpretative contexts. In philosophy of science, this view is associated [with Paul Feyerabend](#).

By adding a fourth strand, we now have a correlation between the quadrants (the dimensions of existence in lines of development) and the ways of knowing. See the image above for Edwards’ connection of the two.

This learning cycle goes by many different names. The first version of it I’m aware of is the Ignatian Paradigm of the early Jesuit tradition: Action, Experience, Reflection (both philosophical-social and theological), leading to new action. Or [Kolb’s learning cycle](#). Edwards’ article has a whole list of similar variations on the same fourfold theme.

Another version of which is the so-called OODA loop of [military theorist John Boyd](#).

Observation->Orientation->Decision->Act (which leads to new Observation and the cycle starts all over again).

Correlating OODA with the quadrants (as a cycle of knowledge) lends: Action (UR), Observation (UL), Orientation (LL), and Decision (LR). In this sense really an AOOD Loop.

The Orientation moment (the LL-interpretative strand) is the one I would like to focus on. Going back to the

notion of Wilber's primary metaphor as map, then we have the map of AQAL as an orientating wisdom. What Wilber in his earlier work called an orientating generalization. One of, if not the, primary experience according to Wilber of postmodernity is that of disorientation. Hence the need for a map. Recall that orientation/disorientation is itself a metaphoric interpretive position (position being another metaphor). I could have said an metaphoric interpretive impulse (over position)—notice the feeling-thought difference between impulse and position. The map as Wilber says is (using a sub-metaphor) psychoactive. It is not simply a theory but rather an injunction-experience-theory-confirmed (all four quadrants/strands again).

But my sense has been thinking and living with these ideas for almost a decade now that there has been a tendency to see the map not as orientation but as automatic problem solver. I've made this mistake many times myself. A top-down view (which is what the integral view is) is always deeply revealing and simultaneously very seductive. It can seduce one to think that events/life can be managed from the top-down. The view is not the same as the action. The orientation is not the same as the decision nor the action (going back to the language of the 4fold cycle).

What is needed is bottom-up action through the mindset of top-down view.

In other words, the decision and action phases of the cycle are not predictable via the map. The orientation moment can certainly give clues but they are very generic. The moment of experience needs to be one in which we let go of the map filter for a moment so that we can experience (as much as possible) with the filter intruding too much.

In other words, all the elements of the AQAL map—perspectives, quadrants, states, stages, lines, types, self—should only be brought up I think in the moment of orientation. That is the interpretive moment.

Otherwise the de facto application of AQAL theory to any subject has generally been something like. The way to do X integrally is to do X across all quadrants, levels, states, lines, etc. I find this approach 1. deflating and not energizing 2. really confusing. Saying do X across all these elements of the map simply begs the question (or at least pushes the real question back one layer still unanswered): how do you do X across all these?

Rather instead I would focus—[as in holocracy](#)—on simply what is the next best step. What are the best practices in a certain realm—the best practice of X (holocracy being one)—attention to the experience (deep attention). Then in the moment of interpretation bring up (quickly) the elements of the map that are of value, that will orient one to the experience with the content added by whatever the moment/context is about and then having added that integral wisdom then (hopefully) there is a judicious judgment as to what next (the decision phase) and then the application of that decision.

That action (the application of the decision) leads to a new experience which will then shed light on the decision. Here then comes the notion of single, double, and triple loop learning.

After the new action leads to a new experience it may disconfirm the judgment—i.e. it didn't work.

Then the inquiry (orientation/interpretation growing out of integral mindset): why didn't it work?

Whatever we did that didn't work might have been right strategically but wrong tactically. That is we might have made basically the right decision as to how to go but the wrong decision as to what to do next that would promote the strategy. This would be a single-loop learning. All we need to do in this case is change to a different tactical action.

Now we may interpret/examine the experience (which failed) and realize we have the wrong strategy. This learning may come from multiple failures at the tactical level and realizing we are trying to achieve something from within the wrong frame and therefore no new tactic will ever work as we have the wrong strategy. This would be a double-loop.

And then we may even inquire into the process whereby we act-experience-interpret-decide itself. The integral learning cycle offered here is an actual practice that leads to an experience that is interpreted (you have to share with one another what it feels like to proceed this way) that will be verified or not (i.e. “is everybody on board? do you get this? do we find this helpful?”). This is a triple-loop. Learning about the learning. Practicing on the practice itself. Experiencing the experience itself. Interpreting the source of all interpretations themselves. And being confirmed (“strengthened”) in the process itself.

In other other words or in conclusion, the AQAL map does not specify content. Not experientially or phenomenologically but also not in terms of decision making. Not really. The process is emergent and therefore unpredictable. What the AQAL map does do is put us in the best place of recognizing (discerning) the potential that might emerge. It puts us in the best place for the emergent grace to happen to us.

The AQAL map is a practice not a theory alone—it itself follows the four fold learning cycle and should be taught that way as opposed to being a theory. As such it is only one of a series of practices necessary. It is less I think A Theory of Everything but more a Practice for Anything. But it’s a complementary practice—or rather a practice (embedded metaphorically as a map) that orients to other practices.

In this way of approaching the work, AQAL then practices its own admonition: it frees itself by limiting itself.

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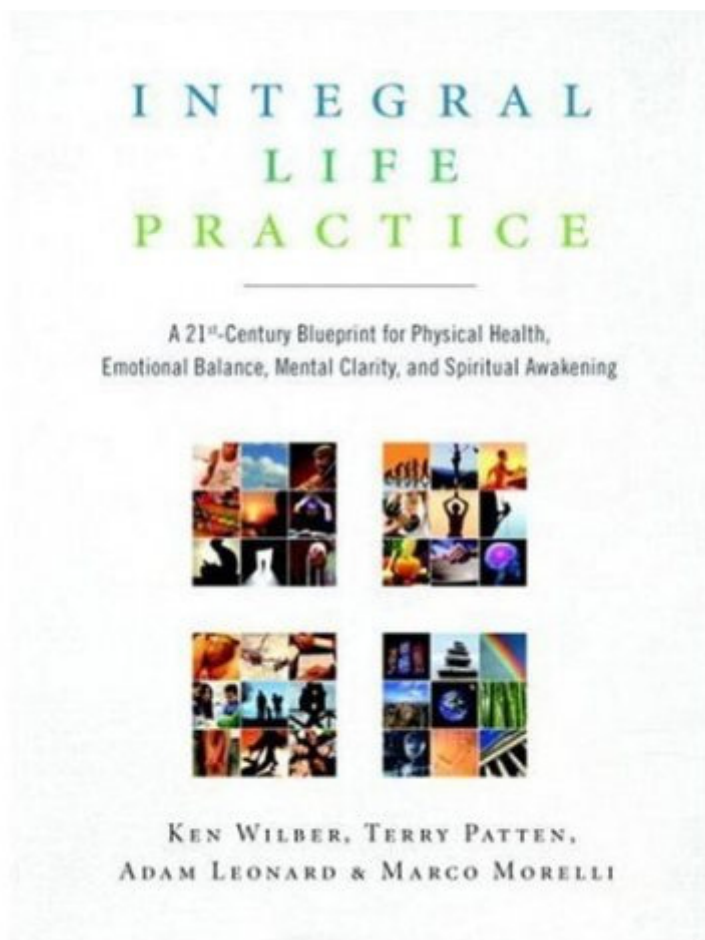
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on May 23, 2009 at 9:53 am [Leave a Comment](#)

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[Discussion of Integral Life Practice](#)



[Integral Life Practice](#). (Integral Books: 2008)

In the spirit of self-disclosure, Marco Morelli (one of the co-authors) is a close, long-time friend of mine. He sent me a copy of the book in order to review it.

—
“The meaning of a statement is the means of its enactment.” –Ken Wilber, Integral Spirituality p.258

The question I think that has really haunted integral thought to date is how do we do integral? How do we recognize when something is actually more integrated (my preferred term increasingly to integral as such)? How does integral become the enactment of an actually different lifeworld? How does it become an existential reality, a drive, even calling for individuals?

In academic disciplines, integral thought first clears away the clutter within a field. It opens up the vantage points and worthwhile findings of any sub-groupings already within a discipline. And finds a way to order them rightly with one another. Integral theory in other words is itself a practice.

The second phase of integral I would argue is the beginning of the creation of integral norms, standards, and best practices within a field. From [Holocracy](#), to Gail Hochachka’s [Integral Development work](#), to Daniel O’Connor’s [Mutual Praxis of Transparency, Choice, & Accountability](#), to Mark Edwards’ [Integral Cycle of Learning](#)—these are just a sampling of the various forays into the second phase. [For those wondering, I consider learning the integral map and language phase 0 or perhaps 0.5].

The Holy Grails of Phase 1 and 2 would be the ability of now more integrated disciplines—with their own houses in order—being able to truly and really inter-act with one another. True multi-disciplinarity, even trans-disciplinarity. Both at the level of discourse and at the level of practice. As a personal example, in my own work towards an Integral Christianity, I feel myself more and more pushed to be studying Integral Economics. Integral Economics somehow I sense has something to teach me about Integral Christianity.

And now **Integral Life Practice** joins this growing field of 2nd-phase integration. It seeks to help create a common language and practice structure across various spiritual lineages, so they can finally and truly dialogue. What Br. David Stendl-Rast calls in his blurb for the book a GPS (Global Practicing System). Following Wilber's own maxim, therefore, the meaning of an [More] Integral Life Practice is the means of its enactment. More on that in a sec.

Quickly—for the classical review points of a text: it is clearly written, well-organized, jam-packed with info but not so much as to be overwhelming, It's practical—as in practice-oriented and easy to use. It sets up a project for the individual reading the book, introduced from the beginning building to the accomplishment of that goal (the creating of an Integral Life Practice). It's well done. Really well done in my opinion.

But I would like to explore the text a little more deeply using the phases of integral categorization in order to help contextualize the work and its place within the emerging integral worldview.

Integral Life Practice provides the way (the means of enactment) through *phases 0, 1, and 2* relative to the discipline of life practice. ILP is one among many of the necessary applications of integral philosophy. The integral worldview is one that takes seriously life practice as an intrinsic dimension of its being. An intrinsic fruit of its seeding.

The book covers well *Phase 0*, the basic introduction to the AQAL system (pp.69-125). Actually the summary of AQAL in this text might actually be the best one yet.

It also has done the background work on *Phase 1*, the proper ordering/balancing of the work of different streams and types of personal growth, psychotherapy, spiritual practice, physical exercise, etc. The AQAL map allows us to value (within proper limits) any and all of these various practices, people are already doing. The authors have done that background work (i.e. mental practice); we the readers need to remember in some sense that we are cribbing their findings. For those whose primary discipline is not in this field—e.g. someone doing Integral Business or Ecology or Politics—that's perfectly fine, so long as we keep in mind it is an interpretation growing out of a practice that others can themselves take up and check their findings. In short, its open to debate.

Phase 2, the norms, the creation of best practices, the setting up of a scheduled integrated mode of life practice is also well delineated in the book. This aspect, to my mind, is the key contribution of the text. What I'm calling this 2nd phase is where the meat really gets on the bones, so I'm glad this book is adding some weight in this area.

The authors interpret the results of their initial findings. The way in which phase 1 is understood affects the shaping of phase 2. The minimum for an ILP is, according to the authors, a practice in the Body, Mind, Spirit (e.g. meditation/prayer), and Shadow work, with additional possible modules of Integral Ethics, Work, Relationships, and so on. That recommended format for designing an ILP depends on their interpretation of the results of the phase 1 findings. What I mean is their articulation of the Core Modules as consisting of four and those four being *Mind, Body, Spirit, and Shadow* is their interpretation. That's not dismissing what they've done—i.e. “oh it's just their interpretation”—but rather it's their way of understanding what their

studies have shown to them. [For the theoretical background on this point, follow the Mark Edwards link above. It's also why I like discussing more or less integrated than integral per se.**].

Put another way, there is no real argument (that I'm aware of anyway) but that the AQAL map points out that we have quadrants (dimensions of being), stages of development through streams (or lines), states-bodies, types, and self (with its own shadow). An ILP would in some fashion have to both take the multiplicity of that reality into account, without it becoming a kind of mania of practice—i.e. allowing for grace, simplicity, the joys of imperfection and so on. Distilling that swirl into the Four Core Modules they do has its advantages, and the practice structure they outline is dependent on that point of view, but that way of organizing the practice streams is one possible interpretation out of an essentially number-less potential configurations. I happen to think their version is a very good one but it is one nonetheless. e.g. As a contrast, my own view would be that Ethics/Relationships have to be essential core practices.

Now I don't want to be seen as putting too fine a point on that one because the authors provide what they term Core and Additional Modules, but make clear throughout the entire text that the choice is up to the individual. I think it's fair to say though their way of organizing the data and foregrounding what they call The Four Core Modules and backgrounding (somewhat) The Additional will probably have some impact in that direction on individuals who read the text and take up its recommendations. Those Categories are just that—categories—within which there are any number of potential individual different practices. The authors recommend what they call a Gold Star practice in each of the modules, but how the structure is configured depends on the individual and his/her choices. So again I want to make clear that they have not created some rigid cookie-cutter way of practice. Far from it. But in the final analysis, however, to see if they (or me or whoever) is right is to actually try it and see.

And that brings me to my last point: the question of communal verification and interpretation. That is, Life Practice in relation to the socio-cultural dimensions of experience.

The book clearly can function for any individual who wishes to undertake some practice in some fashion or other built around the specifics/format recommended by the text. The authors provide some excellent points towards the end of the book especially on the typical life cycles of practice, facing into the question of one's values/goals/vision, and so forth.

Generally, however, traditionally spiritual practice requires joining a community or group of (more or less) like-minded folks on roughly the same path, following roughly something similar in terms of practice, beliefs, and the rest. While on the surface this question of the intersubjective-communion-spiritual community may not seem like that big a deal, it can be very quickly. Verification & interpretation involves other people, at best trusted people, with say in your spiritual life. Questions about judgment, hierarchies (more/less compassionate, more/less wakeful), who can be trusted, who can't, in what ways can someone be trusted in what ways not. At what point must one in the face of opposing views, simply follow an inner intuition and at what point might a person need to follow someone else checking their ego?

It's a very fine line, so I'm not really critiquing the authors so much as empathizing with the inherent tension they face. The final section, entitled The Unique Self is a very important section of the book in my estimation. The point of practice, even in awakening to the nondual, is not to disappear as an individual. We have three identities: self, Soul, and Spirit (I AM). Traditions that tend to emphasize only the Spirit and self side (e.g. Vedanta and Zen) can end up advocating denial of the self and total absorption into Spirit. A potentially new and very subtle form of duality. That way of practicing forgets the Soul. The Soul is the deepest part of our uniqueness. I'm glad the authors are arguing we should not all become spiritual automatons.

On the other hand, Souls also exist in communities (communion). Four quadrants go all the way up as down as we like to say. In Chapter 10, entitled Navigating the Practice Life, the authors recommend seven design principles for an ILP. The seventh of which is “Get support.” The description of that design aid begins on page 333 and goes to page 340. They discuss practice community, spiritual teachers or coaches. They say such relationships (rightly) can help “create an accountability structure” (p.336). While I understand the hesitancy of the authors to prescribe community or a teacher as the sine qua non of spiritual practice because it could create a stumbling block to practice for someone, I guess I would have like to seen more emphasis placed on the creation of such communities. More as a goal to be sought where able and not a prerequisite.

These communities—at their best—could act as ways to strengthen our intersubjectivity. In the intersubjective, we are as individuals members of a group, not parts of the whole. This is a key fundamental insight of Wilber’s philosophy. Members are free to join, free to leave. Membership in this case has not only privileges but deep and abiding responsibility and commitment. We need commitment to our spiritual practice—God knows we need that—but also commitment in some sense to one another.

The shielding of the ego—even a trans-personally charged ego—subtly is reinforced through our social practices, lifestyles, and living arrangements. Not to mention the media, work, culture and all the rest. This is especially a spiritual concern in (hyper)individualistic North American society. The reason I put so much emphasis on the 2nd person mode of being-in-the-world, i.e. relationships, loving service, ethics, is that in my experience that is where the egoic self-coiling is most powerfully undone—when combined with the more personal kind of integrated life practice the authors prescribe. The we-space and the space of You-I/I-You (which isn’t always yet a “We” space) is where we suffer and our hearts are broken, are melted, and able to be re-shaped into a more divine-like pattern. But again, that is based on my own experience, which has its place but is not necessarily normative for everybody else either. I like everyone else am just trying to find a way in all this. I suffer from my own personal forms of this collective fear.

Using Daniel O’Connor’s notion of *(Mutual) Choice, Transparency, and Accountability*, the book **Integral Life Practice** deeply honors choice. That’s a great strength of the text. But I think it needs a little more grounding in mutual transparency and accountability. Individuals are again free (via choice/autonomy) to find the best ways for them of making those structures. It’s generally a good idea to check in with the tried and true ways of so doing as they tend to have some points in their favor (just from experimenting so long), but it can’t be said universally that they have all the answers. Still, this question of how do we properly hold each other to account. The mystery of the LL. The intersubjective spiritual path in the integral age of the 21st century. aka The Biggie.

—

**The notion that we could ever become fully integrated is the myth (and potential dark side) of integral. In Wilber’s language the Mean Turquoise Meme. Or the Kosmic IOU that the integral lifeworld writes but can’t ultimately cash. There is a certain degree of more integration and less so. Undoubtedly there is some threshold of capability that is passed wherein one achieves a more permanent structural capacity/identity in the integral layer of evolutionary development. Some will do that better than others even within that lifeworld. But there’s never complete total 100% integration. I understand the use of the word Integral (capital I) as used in the title of their book. I use it myself that way on occasion. I think it’s worthwhile reminder however that framing it that way can be problematic and lead to the kind of false/bad interpretation I outlined before. Especially when described as The Integral __ (Capital T, Capital I). Again I understand the rationale, but it has some shadows we should not forget.

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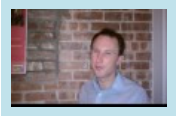
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Submitted by
Michael Brooks
on June 13, 2011

Ken Wilber's Quadrants System and Strategy

in [Inside Job](#), [Ken Wilber](#), [Quadrants](#), [Strategy](#) | 4 comments

Have you ever come across a picture of this [guy](#) at your local bookseller? Ken Wilber is something of an eccentric, intellectual hot shot. Wilber covers an unbelievable amount of ground and while I think in some places he misses a lot, his reach and attempt at integration is undeniable. His basic mission is to fit systems and worldviews together in a way that allows genuine room for as many perspectives as possible. One of the ways he does this is his 'Quadrant' system.

Wilber's Quadrant system attempts to integrate social, individual, objective and subjective views of the world. The end result is a deeper understanding of how all the many parts of ourselves and our systems in relate to one another.

Ken Wilber's, theory of quadrants is as follows:

Upper Right: Objective personal systems, brain chemistry, health, physical realities of the body.

Upper Left: Subjective personal stories, stories that describe our lives, our interpretation of reality and the stories we tell ourselves.

Lower Right: Objective social systems, economic systems, currency systems, organizational structures, role descriptions.

Lower Left: Myths and stories, cultural narratives. organizational value systems.

Needless to say, all systems are working in an organizational context. In many cases, certain groups focus on one dimension of the quadrants without addressing the others. Keeping all quadrants in mind helps illuminate the entirety of a problem or challenge.

Looking at the explanations for the collapse of Wall Street, we can see all of the different quadrants in play. Some people focus on the lack of regulation and over-sight (Lower Right), Simon Johnson's idea of "cognitive capture" that describes the ideological commitment to deregulation shared by most of Washington and Wall Street (Lower Left). In the academy award winning documentary [Inside Job](#), a therapist who treated a number of Wall Street patients addressed some of the specific mental health issues often seen on Wall Street (Upper Left and Upper Right).

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The prime takeaway from the Quadrants is that all of these explanations have validity. In certain situations one Quadrant may be predominant, but in almost all cases each Quadrant is activated. For strategists working with organizations or movements the Quadrant model can serve as an elegant way of addressing and meeting the needs of different stakeholders. Each Stakeholder may reflect a different part of the Quadrant depending on their organizational position or worldview.

With this integral view in mind strategists can remember and execute from a larger view of processes and systems. This methodology is immediately applicable. The next time you are meeting with your team or dealing with a organizational question think of the Quadrants and ask what type of solutions would address all Quadrants.

Share it!

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Michael Brooks June 21, 2011 Thanks for the feedback! Eric, I'm going to do a follow up post on some of Wilber's thinking on values systems

Brad McCormick (not verified) June 16, 2011 Nice Piece Micahel. I have been working to connect AQAL more explicity to bussiness. Would love to chat. I am at @darbtX

stubby holder (not verified) June 16, 2011 I have not heard about Quadrant's System. However, it seems that this theory can definitely help me especially in home and in my work as well. I am a teacher and it is basically related with socializing to different personalities. Thus, it has been said here that Quadrant System will be attempting to integrate social, individual, objective and subjective views of the world. I think this is perfect for me. :)

Eric Broder June 15, 2011 Thanks Michael, I'm a big Ken Wilber fan, happy to see him mentioned on our blog. I highly recommend his book [A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality](#).

In addition to quadrants, Ken Wilber also offers a profound description of waves of existence, or levels of consciousness. Three in particular that I feel like I see every day are Blue: Mythic Order, Orange: Scientific Achievement, and Green: The Sensitive

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