

Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight (2004)

Foreword

Ken Wilber

Ah, to see the future, yes? Omen readers, entrail interpreters, soothsayers, psychics and scientists, all want a glimpse of tomorrow. Well, so do I, which is to say, we are all human.

One of the great difficulties with Futures Studies is that it is the future of human beings we are particularly interested in, and in order to understand the future of humans, we obviously must understand their present. For us to better understand *what might be*, we have to better understand *what is*, and odd as it sounds, our understanding of the *what is* of humanity has, until recently, been something of a disaster. But without an adequate map of the present, our maps of tomorrow simply amplify and exaggerate the gaps in today's understanding (as the briefest examination of past predictions will quickly demonstrate). The point is that to better forecast tomorrow, we must better understand today.

Enter Integral Futures Studies. 'Integral' means 'comprehensive' or 'inclusive'. In the past few decades, a concerted effort on the part of numerous researchers has resulted in what many believe to be the first comprehensive or integral map of human possibilities. This integral map was developed by an exhaustive, cross-cultural study of the types of capacities that humans have evidenced in all known cultures, with the assumption that an examination of the sum total of human displays would give us a better map of the total potentials of the human being.

This integral map is just a map, but it is biggest map we've ever had; and the evidence strongly suggests that this integral map is much more effective and accurate in understanding human beings today...and, therefore, presumably tomorrow, if we are careful in exactly how we use it. But one thing is certain. An integral map is so much more comprehensive and more adequate than the alternatives, there is simply no going back. I don't know of any intelligent person who, after studying and grasping the integral overview, chooses a narrower alternative. The integral approach to understanding any area – from psychology to medicine to economics to Futures Studies – has basically revolutionized how we approach any area involving human activity, for the simple reason that it has revolutionized our understanding of what it means to be human. An integral map is a fuller map of human possibilities in the present, and therefore a fuller map of human possibilities – and probabilities – in the future.

Richard Slaughter has done a superb job in conveying the essentials of this integral map and its application to Futures Studies. He particularly focuses on several important items. One is that the integral map includes, as an intrinsic part of its landscape, the mapmakers themselves. Self-reflexivity has always been a difficult issue in Future Studies – that is, the very knowledge of a

possible future alters that possible future – a type of human Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle that says that the very act of examining something changes it. But self-reflexivity is a central and natural part of the integral map, and, as such, gives us a way to take it into account in an explicit and actually useful fashion.

Another feature that Dr Slaughter emphasizes is the central tenet of integral studies, namely ‘Everybody is right’. No human mind is capable of producing one hundred per cent error, and therefore everybody has an important piece of the integral puzzle. Exactly how to construct a map that takes literally everybody into account has been one of the major dilemmas of integral studies, but researchers in the field now believe that an adequate way to do so has been discovered, and Dr Slaughter gives an excellent overview of how this integral principle works. The point itself is very simple: integral theorists no longer ask, ‘Who is right and who is wrong?’, but rather, ‘What viewpoint allows them both to be partially right?’ This central tenet changes dramatically the types of futures scenarios that unfold, simply because it finds a much larger group of present vectors that can veer into tomorrow, and thus more accurately forecasts a future worldspace in which those vectors might land.

Another important item highlighted by Slaughter is the idea of development, and particularly the ways in which development – in consciousness, culture, technology – is a complex blend of past habits (which are knowable) and future emergents (which are not). The integral approach has significantly advanced our understanding of this complex mesh by more accurately pinpointing those areas that, as past developmental habits, appear to be fixed in every population they have been investigated; and also in a finer understanding of the general types of emergents that, although inherently unpredictable, appear circumscribed by a pool of possibilities about which a fair – but not exhaustive – amount can be said. (Technically, future stages of humanity at large cannot be predicted, although past stages yet to appear in any populations can; future stages must nonetheless mesh with past stages, which circumscribes their possible trajectories; and, further, any future *stages* of consciousness are impacted by *states* of consciousness, about which much can be known in the present. All of these factors enormously enrich our capacity to create possible futures scenarios, as Slaughter expertly explains in the following pages.)

Because integral metatheory takes seriously the idea that ‘everybody is right’, an integral approach makes use of systems theory, phenomenology, hermeneutics, developmental psychology, empiricism, behaviorism.... In short, paradigms long thought to be incompatible are judiciously woven together in an ‘integral methodological pluralism’ that further enhances the effectiveness of the integral approach. This meta-paradigmatic nature of integralism is another factor that increases the believability and confidence that one can have in the integral approach, simply because it includes – not excludes – so many important paradigms and methodologies.

Integral Futures Studies is literally just beginning. This book is the first word, not the last word. But it is indeed an approach that changes profoundly the

nature of the discipline. It is also an extraordinary opportunity to be on the ground floor of an historic shift in human understanding that promises to have such far-reaching consequences that the impact of a discipline like Integral Futures Studies can only be grasped by using...Integral Futures Studies. Thanks again to Richard Slaughter for producing such a superb introduction to this new field. My hope is that enough of the exciting possibilities are conveyed that Futures Studies experts everywhere will catch the fever of a more inclusive and comprehensive approach. If it is true that the actual contours of tomorrow are shaped by our visions of tomorrow, then a more integral vision promises a more inclusive future for all of humanity.

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