

## AN OVERVIEW OF INTEGRAL THEORY

*An All-Inclusive Framework for the 21st Century* Sean Esbjörn-Hargens  
"The word *integral* means *comprehensive, inclusive, non-marginalizing, embracing*. *Integral approaches to any field attempt to be exactly that: to include as many perspectives, styles, and methodologies as possible within a coherent view of the topic. In a certain sense, integral approaches are "meta-paradigms," or ways to draw together an already existing number of separate paradigms into an interrelated network of approaches that are mutually enriching.*"<sup>1</sup> – Ken Wilber

The world has never been so complex as it is right now—it is mind boggling and at times emotionally overwhelming. Not to mention, the world only seems to get more complex and cacophonous as we confront the major problems of our day: extreme religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation, failing education systems, existential alienation, and volatile financial markets. Never have there been so many disciplines and worldviews to consider and consult in addressing these issues: a cornucopia of perspectives. But without a way of linking, leveraging, correlating, and aligning these perspectives, their contribution to the problems we face are largely lost or compromised. We are now part of a global community and we need a framework—global in vision yet also anchored in the minutiae of our daily lives—that can hold the variety of valid perspectives that have something to offer our individual efforts and collective solution building.

In 1977 American philosopher Ken Wilber published his first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. This groundbreaking book integrated the major schools of psychology along a continuum of increasing complexity, with different schools focused on various levels within that spectrum. Over the next 30 years he continued with this integrative impulse, writing books in areas such as cultural anthropology, philosophy, sociology of religion, physics, healthcare, environmental studies, science and religion, and postmodernism. To date, Wilber has published over two dozen books and in the process has created *integral theory*.<sup>2</sup> Wilber's books have been translated into more than 24 languages, which gives you an idea as to the global reach and utility of integral theory.<sup>3</sup> Since its inception by Wilber, integral theory has become one of the foremost approaches within the larger fields of integral studies and meta-theory.<sup>4</sup> This prominent role is in large part the result of the wide range of applications that integral theory has proven itself efficacious in as well as the work of many scholar-practitioners who have and are contributing to the further development of integral theory.

Integral theory weaves together the significant insights from all the major human disciplines of knowledge, including the natural and social sciences as well as the arts and humanities. As a result of its comprehensive nature, integral theory is being used in over 35 distinct academic and professional fields such as art, healthcare, organizational management, ecology, congregational ministry, economics, psychotherapy, law, and feminism.<sup>5</sup> In addition, integral theory has been used to develop an approach to personal transformation and integration called Integral Life Practice (ILP). The ILP framework allows individuals to systematically explore and develop multiple aspects of themselves such as their physical body, emotional intelligence, cognitive awareness, interpersonal

relationships, and spiritual wisdom. Because integral theory systematically includes more of reality and interrelates it more thoroughly than any other current approach to assessment and solution building, it has the potential to be more successful in dealing with the complex problems we face in the 21st century.

Integral theory provides individuals and organizations with a powerful framework that is suitable to virtually any context and can be used at any scale. Why? Because it organizes all existing approaches to and disciplines of analysis and action, and it allows a practitioner to select the most relevant and important tools, techniques, and insights. Consequently, integral theory is being used successfully in a wide range of contexts such as the intimate setting of one-on-one psychotherapy as well as in the United Nations “Leadership for Results” program, which is a global response to HIV/AIDS used in over 30 countries. Towards the end of this article I provide additional examples of integral theory in action to illustrate the variety of contexts in which people are finding the integral framework useful.

Wilber first began to use the word “integral” to refer to his approach after the publication of his seminal book *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* in 1995. It was in this book that he introduced the quadrant model, which has since become iconic of his work in general and integral theory in particular. Wilber’s quadrant model is often referred to as the *AQAL model*, with AQAL (pronounced *ah-qwal*) standing for all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types. These five elements signify some of the most basic repeating patterns of reality. Thus, by including all of these patterns you “cover the bases” well, ensuring that no major part of any solution is left out or neglected. Each of these five elements can be used to “look at” reality and at the same time they represent the basic aspects of your own awareness in this and every moment. In this overview I will walk you through the essential features of each of these elements and provide examples of how they are used in various contexts, why they are useful for an integral practitioner, and how to identify these elements in your own awareness right now. By the end of this tour, you will have a solid grasp of one of the most versatile and dynamic approaches to integrating insights from multiple disciplines. So let us begin with the foundation of the AQAL model: the quadrants.

### **All Quadrants: The Basic Dimension-Perspectives**

According to integral theory, there are at least four irreducible *perspectives* (subjective, intersubjective, objective, and interobjective) that must be consulted when attempting to fully understand any issue or aspect of reality. Thus, the quadrants express the simple recognition that everything can be viewed from two fundamental distinctions: 1) an inside and an outside perspective and 2) from a singular and plural perspective. A quick example can help illustrate this: imagine trying to understand the components of a successful meeting at work. You would want draw on psychological insights and cultural beliefs (the insides of individuals and groups) as well as behavioral observations and organizational dynamics (the outsides of individuals and groups) to fully appreciate what is involved in conducting worthwhile meetings.

These four quadrants also represent *dimensions* of reality. These dimensions are actual

aspects of the world that are always present in each moment. For instance, all individuals (including animals) have some form of subjective experience and intentionality, or *interiors*, as well as various observable behaviors and physiological components, or *exteriors*. In addition, individuals are never just alone but are members of groups or collectives. The interiors of collectives are known generally as intersubjective cultural realities whereas their exteriors are known as ecological and social systems, which are characterized by interobjective dynamics. These four dimensions are represented by four basic pronouns: “I”, “we”, “it”, and “its.” Each pronoun represents one of the domains in the quadrant model: “I” represents the Upper Left (UL), “We” represents the Lower Left (LL), “It” represents the Upper Right (UR), and “Its” represents the Lower Right (LR) (see Fig. 1).

*Figure 1. The four quadrants.*

As both of the Right-Hand quadrants (UR and LR) are characterized by objectivity, the four quadrants are also referred to as the three value spheres of subjectivity (UL), intersubjectivity (LL), and objectivity (UR and LR). These three domains of reality are discernable in all major languages through pronouns that represent first-, second-, and third-person perspectives and are referred to by Wilber as “the Big Three:” I, We, and It/s. These three spheres can also be characterized as aesthetics, morals, and science or consciousness, culture, and nature (see Fig. 2).

*Figure 2. The Big Three.*

Integral theory insists that you cannot understand one of these realities (any of the quadrants or the Big Three) through the lens of any of the others. For example, viewing subjective psychological realities primarily through an objective empirical lens distorts much of what is valuable about those psychological dynamics. In fact, the irreducibility of these three spheres has been recognized throughout the history of Western philosophy, from Plato’s True, Good, and Beautiful to Immanuel Kant’s famous three critiques of pure reason, judgment, and practical reason to Jürgen Habermas’ validity claims of truth, rightness, and truthfulness (Fig. 2). Wilber is a staunch advocate of avoiding reducing one of these spheres into the others. In particular, he cautions against what he calls *flatland*: the attempt to reduce interiors to their exterior correlates (i.e., collapsing subjective and intersubjective realities into their objective aspects). This is often seen in systems approaches to the natural world, which represent consciousness through diagrams of feedback loops and in the process leave out the texture and felt-sense of first- and second-person experience.

One of the reasons integral theory is so illuminating and useful is it embraces the complexity of reality in ways few other frameworks or models do. In contrast to approaches that explicitly or inadvertently reduce one quadrant to another, integral theory understands each quadrant as simultaneously arising. In order to illustrate the simultaneity of all quadrants I will provide a simple example with Figure 1 in mind. Let us say I decide I need to buy some flowers for the garden and I have the thought, “I want to go to the nursery.” The integral framework demonstrates that this thought and its associated action (e.g., driving to the garden store and purchasing roses) has at least four

dimensions, none of which can be separated because they co-arise (or *tetra-mesh*) and inform each other. First, there is the individual thought and how I experience it (e.g., mentally calculating travel time, the experience of joy in shopping, or the financial anxiety over how I will pay for my purchase). These experiences are informed by psychological structures and somatic feelings associated with the UL quadrant. At the same time, there is the unique combination of neuronal activity, brain chemistry, and bodily states that accompany this thought, as well as any behavior that occurs (e.g., putting on a coat, getting in the car). These behaviors are associated with various activities of our brain and physiological activity of the body, which are associated with the UR quadrant. Likewise, there are ecological, economic, political, and social systems that supply the nursery with items to sell, determine the price of flowers, and so on. These systems are interconnected through global markets, national laws, and the ecologies associated with the LR quadrant. There is also a cultural context that determines whether I associate “nursery” with an open-air market, a big shopping mall, or a small stall in an alley, as well as determining the various meanings and culturally appropriate interactions that occur between people at the nursery. These cultural aspects are associated with worldviews in the LL quadrant.

Thus to have a full understanding of and appreciation for the occurrence of the thought, “I’m going to the nursery,” one cannot explain it fully through just the terms of *either* psychology (UL), *or* neurobiology and physiology (UR), *or* social and economic dynamics (LR), *or* cultural meaning (LL). For the most complete view, as we will see, one should take into consideration all of these domains (and their respective levels of complexity). Why is this practical? Well if we tried to summarize this simple situation by leaving out one or more perspectives, a fundamental aspect of the integral whole would be lost and our ability to understand it and address it would be compromised. Thus, integral practitioners often use the quadrants as their first move to scan a situation or issue and bring multiple perspectives to bear on the inquiry or exploration at hand.

### *Quadrants and Quadri-views*

As noted above, there are at least two ways to depict and use the quadrant model: as *dimensions* or as *perspectives*. The first, a *quadratic* approach, depicts an individual situated in the center of the quadrants (see Fig. 3). The arrows point from the individual toward the various realities that he can perceive as a result of his own embodied awareness. Through his use of different aspects of his own awareness, or through formal methods based on these dimensions of awareness, he is able to encounter these different realities in a direct and knowable fashion. In brief, he has direct access to experiential, behavioral, cultural, and social/systemic aspects of reality because these are actual dimensions of his own existence. This is useful to him because it empowers him to notice, acknowledge, and interact more effectively with his world. In short, the more of these “channels” he has open the more information he will be obtaining about what is happening around him and he will be able to feel and act in ways that are timely and insightful. Notice right now how you are engaged in all three perspectives: first-person (e.g., noticing your own thoughts as you read this), second-person (e.g., reading my words and interpreting what I am trying to convey), and third-person (e.g., sitting there aware of the light, sounds, and air temperature around you). Do you see how you are

always experiencing the world from all four quadrants—right here, right now? It is that simple.

*Figure 3.* The four quadrants of an individual.

Another way to represent the quadrant model is as a *quadrivia*. *Quadrivia* refers to four ways of seeing (*quadrivium* is singular). In this approach the different perspectives associated with each quadrant are directed at a particular reality, which is placed in the center of the diagram. Let us say hundreds of fish are dying in a lake. The death of these fish become the focus or object of investigation and analysis, with expertise from each of the quadratic domains evaluating the situation. The arrows pointing toward the center indicate the methodologies that different experts (associated with each quadrant) use to study the dying fish. In an integral approach these include exploring the emotions, self-identities, and beliefs of individuals who live on the lake through psychological and experiential inquiry; exploring the empirical, chemical, and biological factors contributing to the dying fish through behavioral and physiological analyses; exploring the philosophical, ethical, and religious viewpoints of the community around the lake through cultural and worldview investigations; and exploring the environmental, political, educational, legal, and economic factors of the situation through ecological and social assessments (see Fig. 4).

*Figure 4.* The four quadrivia of a lake.

In sum, the quadrants highlight four irreducible dimensions that all individuals have and *quadrivia* refer to the four fundamental perspectives that can be taken on any phenomena. In either case, the four quadrants or *quadrivia* are co-nascent—literally “they are born together” and are mutually implicated in one another. In other words, they co-arise and tetra-mesh. This understanding is useful because it honors the complexity of reality in a way that allows the practitioner to address problems in a more skillful and nuanced way. Furthermore, the quadrants represent the native ways in which we experience reality in each moment and *quadrivia* represent the most common ways we can and often do look at reality to understand it.

### **All Levels: Depth and Complexity**

Within each quadrant there are levels of development. Within the interior, Left-Hand quadrants there are levels of *depth* and within the exterior, Right-Hand quadrants there are levels of *complexity*. The levels within each quadrant are best understood as probability waves that represent the dynamic nature of reality and the ways different realities show up under certain conditions. Additionally, each quadrant’s levels are correlated with levels in the other quadrants. For example, a goal-driven executive (UL) who has high blood pressure (UR) will most likely be found in a scientific-rational culture or subculture (LL), which usually occurs in industrial corporate organizations (LR). In this example, all of these aspects of the situation are occurring at the same level of complexity and depth within their respective quadrant and are therefore correlated at level five in Figure 5. The inclusion of levels is important because they allow us to appreciate and better interface with the realities associated with each quadrant. Each

quadrant serves as a map of different terrains of reality. The levels within each quadrant represent the topographical contour-lines of that terrain. This helps us to identify the unique features of that particular landscape, which enables us to travel through it more successfully and enjoy the amazing vistas along the way.

*Figure 5.* Some levels in the four quadrants.

Levels or *waves* in each quadrant demonstrate *holarchy*, which is a kind of hierarchy wherein each new level transcends the limits of the previous levels but includes the essential aspects of those same levels. Thus, each wave inherits the wave of the past and adds a new level of organization or capacity. As a result, each level of complexity or depth is both a part of a larger structure and a whole structure in and of itself. In the subjective realm, sensations are transcended and included in impulses, which are transcended and included in emotions, which are transcended and included in symbols, which are transcended and included in concepts. Likewise, in the intersubjective realm this dynamic occurs from archaic interpretations to magical explanations, to mythical stories, to rational views, to integral understandings. In the objective realm this movement occurs from atoms to molecules, to cells, to tissues, to organs. And in the interobjective realm this occurs in the movement from galaxies to planets, to ecosystems, to families, to villages (see Fig. 5 for another presentation of what is transcended and included in each quadrant).<sup>6</sup> Regardless of where different researchers might draw the line between levels, a general pattern of evolution or development occurs in each quadrant: depth enfolds (i.e., folds in on itself), complexity increases (i.e., expands out and includes more).

Levels of development are often represented by arrows bisecting each quadrant (as in Fig. 5). Integral theory uses the notion of general *altitude* as a content-free way of comparing and contrasting development across different domains either within or between quadrants. This is akin to using a thermometer to gauge temperature in a variety of settings—a centigrade thermometer works at the equator just as well as in the arctic, and as a result allows us to compare the weather in those distant places in a meaningful way. Integral theory uses the colors of the rainbow to represent each distinct level (e.g., red, amber, orange, green, teal, turquoise). This spectrum of color also represents the general movement of a widening identity: from “me” (egocentric) to “my group” (ethnocentric) to “my country” (sociocentric) to “all of us” (worldcentric) to “all beings” (planetcentric) to finally “all of reality” (Kosmoscentric) (see Fig. 6). This general trajectory of expanding awareness has correlates in each quadrant. Integral theory also uses the image of concentric circles (often overlaid on the quadrants) to highlight the nested quality of levels transcending and including each other (see Fig. 6).

*Figure 6.* Widening identity (*left*) and the nested quality of levels as they transcend and include each other (*right*).

The inclusion of levels in an integral approach is valuable because it recognizes the many potential layers of development within any domain of reality. Practitioners gain valuable traction by aiming their efforts at the appropriate scale and thereby finding the

key leverage point—like an acupuncturist hitting the right spot for optimal health and well-being. This conserves energy and resources and focuses efforts optimally. For example, imagine working with a group of teachers on developing a new mission statement for their educational program. Clearly, working with the realities of the LL quadrant will be paramount—articulating shared vision and meaning, exploring via dialogue various phrases that might be used in the document, and so on. But you are going to be more effective in facilitating this collaborative process if you have a sense of the levels of shared meaning that are operative in this group and what they are trying to communicate in their statement. Are they operating primarily out of modern values, postmodern values, or a combination of both? Knowing this will greatly inform your capacity to serve their effort. Thus, it often is not enough to just be aware of the quadrants—you must also work with the depth and complexity within each domain.

*Figure 7. A psychograph.*

*Figure 8. A sociograph.*

Just as we can locate each quadrant in our own awareness through the use of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives, so too can we locate levels of depth and complexity in our direct experience. To illustrate this, all you have to do is notice how you tend to go through your day with a predictable amount of depth and complexity. For example, on good days you feel more depth and can handle more complexity and on other days you seem to be tripping over everything (diminished capacity to handle complexity) and find yourself getting irritated at the smallest thing (diminished capacity to experience depth). Thus, you often go through your day primarily expressing one altitude or level more than others, although you have a felt sense of what it is like to be “up leveling your game” (a level above) or “misfiring with each step” (a level below).

### **All Lines: Various Developmental Capacities**

Lines of development are another way to describe the distinct capacities that develop through levels in each aspect of reality as represented by the quadrants. So if levels are contour-lines on a hiking map for reality, then lines of development represent the various trails you can take to transverse the vast wilderness of human potential. For example, in the individual-interior quadrant of experience, the lines that develop include, but are not limited to, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and moral capacities. These capacities are often thought of as the multiple intelligences that each person has. The idea being that each of us is more developed in some areas than others. Integral theory uses a *psychograph* to depict an individual’s unique assortment of development in various individual lines (Fig. 7).

Similarly, a *sociograph* is used to represent the various lines of development within a family, group, culture, or society (Fig. 8). The kinds of lines found in cultures include things like kinesthetic capacities, interpersonal maturity (e.g., absence of slaves, women’s rights, civil liberties), artistic expression (e.g., forms of music, government funding for the arts), cognitive or technological capacities, physical longevity (e.g., healthcare

systems, diet), and polyphasic maturity. *Polyphasic* refers to a culture's general access to different states of consciousness. For example, many indigenous cultures embrace access to and cultivation of different kinds of states of awareness while rational Western societies tend to emphasize rational waking consciousness at the exclusion of other modes of experiencing reality. An integral practitioner can use lines as a diagnostic tool to ensure these aspects of individuals or groups are acknowledged and effectively addressed. Below is an overview of the kinds of lines that can be included in an integral assessment.

Each line within a quadrant has correlates in the other quadrants. For example, as the cognitive line develops in the UL quadrant there are corresponding behavioral and neurophysiological developments in the UR quadrant, corresponding intersubjective capacities in the LL quadrant, and grammatical structures in the LR quadrant. In fact, there are a variety of lines in each quadrant. Above I listed some of the common lines associated with the UL. Lines associated with the UR include the developmental pathways of things like skeletal-muscular growth, brainwave patterns, the neuronal system, and other organic structures of the body. In the LL we find lines such as the sequence of worldviews and cultural values, various intersubjective dynamics, religious and philosophical viewpoints, and linguistic meaning. Lastly, in the LR specific lines include how ecosystems develop as well as evolutionary pathways of adaption, geopolitical structures, and forces of production (Fig. 9).

What distinguishes a line from other patterns such as states or types is that a line demonstrates sequential development with increasing levels of complexity or depth that transcend and include the previous level. In other words, there has to be an identifiable series of stages that unfold in a particular order and any given stage cannot be skipped. For example, within the LR line of forces of production we see a societal path starting with foraging (e.g., hunting and gathering) giving way to horticulture (e.g., using a hoe) giving way to agrarian methods (e.g., using a plow) and so forth—each new development is dependent on what came before and is in part a response to the limits of that previous level.

*Figure 9.* Some lines in the four quadrants.

The lines element especially demonstrates how integral theory includes the contributions of many existing fields and organizes them in a useful way. Also, lines are important to integral practitioners because they identify distinct aspects of each quadrant that demonstrate development and evolution. By being aware of the specific dynamics of growth and the typical trajectory of such transformation, a practitioner can better support and make use of these streams of development. Consequently, integral assessments will often identify which lines are strong and which ones are in need of attention, leveraging the more developed ones to assist in addressing the limits of the less developed ones. Knowing the level of development within various lines provides integral practitioners with valuable information about the realities of a given situation and helps the practitioner align those realities for optimal improvement.

As with the other elements of the AQAL model, we do not have to go far to discover



lines in our immediate awareness. Just recall a recent moment where you felt stretched or challenged, such as giving difficult feedback to a colleague or trying some new task that required a high level of hand-eye coordination. Now bring into your awareness an area where you are often more capable than your colleagues, such as seeing multiple perspectives at the same time on some complex situation or an ability to emotionally connect to your friends and describe—better than they can—what they are feeling. Drawing on personal examples of areas where you are less or more developed than people around you shows we all have a unique combination of lines at various levels of development. In fact, rarely a day goes by that we are not aware of the truth of this within ourselves and in our interactions with others. Besides, life would be significantly less interesting if everyone was equal in depth and complexity in most areas.

### All States: Temporary Expressions

In addition to levels and lines there are also various kinds of states associated with each quadrant. States are temporary occurrences of aspects of reality (lasting anywhere from a few seconds to days, and in some cases even months or years). They also tend to be incompatible with each other. For example, you cannot be drunk and sober at the same time, a town cannot experience a blizzard and a heat wave on the same day. Below are a few examples of the kinds of states associated with each quadrant (Fig. 10). Thus, to continue with our hiking metaphor, states can be likened to the momentary glimpses of nature you get as you walk along the trail. For example, how a breathtaking vista keeps “popping” through the trees as you hike or a bird that grabs your attention as it makes a unique *click-clack-clack* sound and then is gone. Before you know it, these attention-grabbing experiences recede into the background and you are back on the trail pounding dirt with your hiking boots.

*Figure 10.* Some states in the four quadrants.

In the UL quadrant there are *phenomenal states* such as elevated and depressed emotional states, insights, intuitions, and moment-to-moment feeling states. There are also the *natural states* of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep as well as the Witness (the pure observing awareness of all the other states) and even non-duality, where the Witness dissolves into everything that is witnessed. Various religious traditions provide us with rich and sophisticated descriptions of these states. In addition, there are *altered states* of consciousness that can be either externally induced (e.g., through the use of drugs, trauma, or a near-death experience) or internally induced or trained (e.g., meditative, holotropic, flow, lucid dreaming, peak experiences). When states are trained they often unfold and even stabilize in a sequential pattern, moving from gross to subtle to very subtle forms of experience and are thus referred to as *state-stages*. This is contrasted with the *structure-stages* of psychological development (discussed above in the levels and lines sections). Both states and structures of consciousness can occur in stages, with state-stages expanding horizontally and structure-stages growing vertically.

In the UR quadrant there are *brain states* (alpha, beta, theta, and delta) and *hormonal states* associated with the cycles of estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. There are also *behavioral states* such as crying and smiling. In fact, states are often used to describe

the ways natural phenomena morph from one thing into another (e.g., H<sub>2</sub>O turning from solid ice to liquid water to gaseous steam).

In the LL quadrant we find *group states* such as mob mentality or mass hysteria, crowd excitement, and group-think. There are also *intersubjective states* such as the somatic states that occur between infants and their mothers or shared resonance between two people in an engaging dialogue. Similar to altered states in individuals, there are *religious states* within groups such as shared ecstasy and bliss or a communal experience of the divine.

In the LR quadrant there are *weather states* (heat waves, blizzard, torrential rain) and fluctuating room temperature indoors. Our financial markets go through a variety of *economic states* such as bear and bull markets, bubbles, recessions, and so forth. We also talk about old-growth forests representing a climax community—a steady-state of equilibrium. This notion of equilibrium is illustrative of various *ecological states* such as entropy (increased disorder) or eutrophy (being well-nourished).

The inclusion of states is useful for practitioners because our realities both internally and externally are always shifting—all kinds of state changes occur throughout our day within ourselves and our environments. Including states allows us to understand many of the ways these shifts occur and why. This in turn allows us to be attentive to these shifts and place them in service of our efforts instead of being knocked off center by their occurrence. For example, when we are aware of the many states a group of people go through in a full-day workshop, we can design our curriculum to honor these shifting “moods” and to even make use of them to facilitate learning.

As far as locating this element in our direct awareness, we only have to notice how many different emotions we experience in a short period of time. Most of us are aware of how quickly we can shift from feeling “on cloud nine” due to some really good news to getting frustrated because some jerk just cut us off on the freeway to feeling anxiety about having to speak in front of a group at work to getting hungry and wondering what are you going to have for dinner. . . And to think that all of these states can occur within five minutes.

### **All Types: Various Patterns**

Types are the variety of consistent styles that arise in various domains and occur irrespective of developmental levels. Types can overlap or be incongruous. Drawing again on the hiking metaphor, we can think of types as the different kinds of hikers there are—those who like to go fast, those who meander, those who take lots of pictures, those who like to sing, and so on. These kinds of people tend to hike like this regardless of what kinds of trails they are on or terrains they are moving through; they bring their unique style wherever they go. As with the other elements, types have expressions in all four quadrants (see Fig. 11).

*Figure 11.* Some types in the four quadrants.

In the UL quadrant there are *personality types*. There are numerous systems that map the number of different personalities, including Keirsey (4 types), Enneagram (9 types), and Myers-Briggs (16 types). In this quadrant there are also the *gender types* of masculine and feminine. In general, individuals have access to both masculine and feminine qualities and thus tend to have a unique combination of traits associated with each type. In the UR quadrant there are *blood types* (A, B, AB, O) and William Sheldon's well-known *body types* (ectomorph, endomorph, mesomorph). In the LR quadrant there are ecological *biome types* (e.g., steppe, tundra, islands) and governmental *regime types* (e.g., communist, democracy, dictatorship, monarchy, republic). In the LL quadrant there are types of *religious systems* (e.g., monotheism, polytheism, pantheism) and different types of *kinship systems* (e.g., Eskimo, Hawaiian, Iroquois, Omaha, Sudanese).

The usefulness of types has been acknowledged in multiple contexts, such as designing nutritional diets or building effective work teams. Being aware of types allows integral practitioners to adjust their craft to accommodate some of the most common and consistent styles associated with various contexts. Types are very stable and resilient patterns—after all, they are horizontal structures or *type-structures* (in contrast to vertical structure-stages). So by becoming more aware of them and their role in whatever you are attempting to do, you are more able to infuse sustainability into your efforts by linking to existing enduring patterns.

Within our own awareness, types are most obvious when we consider masculine and feminine expressions. We each have access to both and know what it feels like to be solid and agentic—for example, going for the goal (one aspect of masculine) or enjoying the game for the game's sake (one aspect of feminine). We can even shift between these styles, although some of us are more identified with one side of this spectrum than others. You likely can think of men or women you consider more masculine or more feminine and what it feels like to be around them—do you find yourself being more masculine or feminine as a way of meeting them in that mode or by way of providing a contrast with their type? Another area where we have a direct experience of types is in terms of personality qualities like introversion and extroversion. Thus, we are often aware of type dynamics in our experience of ourselves and others.

### **All Zones: Different Ways of Knowing**

In addition to the five elements of integral theory, which comprise the basic foundation of the AQAL model, there is another more advanced aspect that is important to mention. This aspect is less of a new element and more of a complexification of the first one (the quadrants). Each of the perspectives associated with the four quadrants can be studied through two major methodological families, namely from either the inside (i.e., a first-person perspective) or the outside (i.e., a third-person perspective). This results in eight distinct *zones* of human inquiry and research. These eight zones comprise what integral theory calls *integral methodological pluralism* (IMP), which includes such approaches as phenomenology (an exploration of first-person subjective realities), ethnomethodology (an exploration of second-person intersubjective realities), and empiricism (an exploration of third-person empirical realities). Figure 12 includes all eight zones and their respective labels. IMP represents one of the most pragmatic and

inclusive theoretical formulations of any integral or meta-theoretical approach. It gives the integral practitioner assurance that they are using tried and true methods of investigation that human ingenuity has produced over the last 2000 years.

Integral methodological pluralism operates according to three principles: *inclusion* (consult multiple perspectives and methods impartially), *enfoldment* (prioritize the importance of findings generated from these perspectives), and *enactment* (recognize that phenomenon are disclosed to subjects through their activity of knowing it). As a result of these commitments, integral theory emphasizes the dynamic quality of realities as being enacted through a subject using a particular method to study an object. That object can be a first-, second-, or third-person reality. For example, we can study first-person psychological realities as an object of investigation just as easily as we can study third-person biological realities.

*Figure 12. Eight methodological zones.*

Because integral theory acknowledges and includes all the major insights from valid forms of research, it emphasizes the importance of including all zones in its efforts to understand anything in a comprehensive way. It uses the IMP framework as a way to marshal, coordinate, and assess pertinent perspectives and their research findings. To return to our integral hiker, IMP provides her with multiple ways of interacting with and knowing the landscape she is traveling through. Her compass, binoculars, book of edible plants, early morning meditations, and previous wildlife encounters all provide her with different ways of knowing the wilderness in ways that are meaningful and valuable to her as a hiker and nature lover.

Among the many important perspectives on reality, there are schools of thought that specialize in using the methods, practices, and techniques associated with each zone. Consequently, in addition to the five elements presented above, an integral approach must include all eight zones or it risks leaving out important aspects of reality that have a bearing on effective solutions to the problems facing our communities and our planet. In other words, the more of reality we acknowledge and include, the more sustainable our solutions will become, precisely because a project will respond more effectively to the complexity of that reality. We cannot exclude major dimensions of reality and expect comprehensive, sustainable results. Eventually those realities that have been excluded will demand recognition and incorporation as the design falters and is abandoned for more nuanced and comprehensive strategies. Hence the need for an integral approach.

An integral practitioner is constantly combining first-, second-, and third-person methods, practices, and techniques in an effort to research the many essential aspects of a given situation. Performing such integral research, either through informal or formal means, the practitioner is engaged in integral methodological pluralism. This kind of integral mixed methods orientation is extremely valuable because it allows practitioners to often discover surprising relationships between first-, second-, and third-person realities that later become essential links in their designs and solutions. Through IMP, integral practitioners are often able to identify valuable connections between distinct realities that have yet to be identified or leveraged in previous efforts. Thus, equipped with the eight

major forms of knowledge acquisition developed by humanity, the integral practitioner is well positioned to know the complexity and depth of reality and to place that insight into service for self, culture, and nature. The reason an integral practitioner can use this wide assortment of formal methods in the first place is that they are actively engaged in using all of these methods informally in their own embodied awareness. In fact, each major methodological family (e.g., empiricism or hermeneutics) is simply a formalized version of something we do naturally all the time. For example, our ability to take a third-person perspective on the world around us (e.g., looking at the flowers growing along the sidewalk) is the basis for empiricism and our ability to take a second-person perspective with our friends (e.g., talking to them about why they want to quit their job) is the basis for hermeneutics. Consequently, the eight zones of IMP is simply a reminder of the many ways we know ourselves, others, and the world around us. The integral framework allows us to coordinate these multiple ways of knowing and place them into orchestrated action in the world.

### **Integral Theory in Action**

As you can see by now, an all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states, all-types, *and* all-zones approach is pretty comprehensive. Of course, you do not have to use all of these distinctions all the time. In fact, even using two of these elements can make your approach to analysis or solution building more integral than many others. However, having all five of them in your “toolbox” allows you more capacity to respond to the complexity of our world and provides a place for including the essential aspects of any given situation. In addition, it helps us understand the relationships between the various facets of reality that we come across. In fact, this is what sets integral theory apart from all other integrative and comprehensive approaches to solution generation and change facilitation. Currently there is no meta-framework as inclusive and theoretically sound as integral theory, which is what has made it such a useful approach in so many contexts. The AQAL model is a dynamic framework that does more than just cover the basic elements of reality—it interrelates them in a way that allows us to ensure that we are leveraging our efforts in an functional, aesthetic, accurate, and just way. In other words, an integral approach allows for true, good, and beautiful solutions to the major problems we face as we travel into the 21st century.

In fact, the AQAL model is multi-variant and can be understood in a number of ways. AQAL is a *map* because it is a series of third-person symbols and abstractions that can guide a person through the contours of their own awareness, as well as through some of the most important aspects of any situation. It is a *framework* because it creates a mental space where one can organize and index their and others’ current activities in a clear and coherent manner. It is a *theory* because it offers an explanation for how the most time-tested methodologies and data they generate can fit together. It is a *practice* because it is not just a theory about inclusion but an actual series of practices of inclusion. It involves the meta-paradigm of correlating humanity’s most fundamental methodologies of knowledge generation. AQAL can also be practiced in a more personal setting, which results in what is called integral life practice (ILP). It is a set of *perspectives* because it brings together first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. It is a *catalyst* because it psychoactively scans your entire body-mind and activates or “lights up” any potentials

(quadrant, level, line, state, or type) that are presently not fully being used. Lastly, it is a *matrix* because it combines all quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types in a way that generates a space of potential out of which more of reality can manifest and be accounted for than any other model has ever included. In short, the AQAL model can be summarized as a third-person map of reality, a second-person framework for working within and across disciplines, and a first-person practice for engaging the development of our own embodied awareness. All three of these aspects of the AQAL model—map, framework, and practice—contribute to an increased experience of intimacy with reality by expanding and deepening our contact with more dimensions of ourselves, our communities, and our environments.

Now that you have a general overview of the AQAL model, I can highlight how these approaches are using integral principles successfully in the field: in the classroom, in the board room, in the political arena, and in home offices. In addition to disciplinary uses of the AQAL model (e.g., integral ecology or integral coaching), there have also been systematic efforts to advance integral theory as a specific field of meta-studies. Four main efforts currently contribute to this goal: 1) the peer-reviewed *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, which has published over 100 academic articles and case studies to date; 2) John F. Kennedy University's Department of Integral Theory, with its online master of arts program and one-year certificate in integral theory (this program is doing much to train the next wave of integral leadership in application of the AQAL model); 3) the Integral Research Center, which is supporting graduate level mixed methods research around the world that is informed by integral theory; and 4) the international biennial Integral Theory Conference, which recently brought together 500 academics and practitioners from all over the globe who are applying and refining integral theory.<sup>7</sup> This systemic effort is important because it allows discipline-specific practitioners (e.g., integral psychotherapists or integral educators) to know the model is sound, it educates integral practitioners to understand the model as a whole (independent of any discipline-specific application), and it creates a community of discourse and inquiry to further the development of the model in a way that invites critical thought and demonstrated practical efficacy.

In recent years a number of books have been published applying integral theory to various areas such as urban design (Marilyn Hamilton's *Integral City*), psychological assessment (Andre Marquis's *The Integral Intake*), organizational dynamics (Mark Edward's *Organizational Transformation for Sustainability*), health (Elliott Dacher's *Integral Health*), ecology and environmental studies (my and Michael Zimmerman's *Integral Ecology*), psychopharmacology (Elliott Ingersoll and Carl Rank's *Psychopharmacology for Helping Professionals*), business (Daryl Paulson's *Competitive Business, Caring Business*), and international community development (Gail Hochachka's *Developing Sustainability, Developing the Self*).<sup>8</sup> To date, the fields that have produced the largest amount of theoretical and applied material using integral theory include psychotherapy and psychology, education, mixed methods research, ecology and sustainability, international development, future studies, business, and organizational management.<sup>9</sup> Following are short descriptions of a number of current examples of integral theory in action.

### *Integral Education*

The Integral Research Center (IRC) is in the process of designing and launching an ambitious longitudinal study using methods from all eight zones of integral methodological pluralism to assess the transformative effects of integral education at John F. Kennedy University. The IRC is working with Theo Dawson of Developmental Testing Service and Susanne Cook-Greuter of Cook-Greuter and Associates to help with the research design, which includes the Lectical Assessment System (LAS) and the Sentence Completion Test (SCT). This study aims to discover, “In what ways do students transform within the online master of arts program in integral theory?” Do they, over the course of three years of coursework, demonstrate vertical stage development (e.g., exiting one level and beginning to stabilize the next one) and/or horizontal development (e.g., increased access to emotional content). If so, what aspects are developing? The results of this ongoing study will be used to improve the developmental potential of the curriculum, making it even more conducive to psychological transformation and growth.<sup>10</sup>

### *Integral International Development*

One Sky–Canadian Institute for Sustainable Living in partnership with Drishti–Centre for Integral Action recently received a \$500,000 grant from the Canadian International Development Agency for a three-year leadership development project entitled, “Integral Applications to Sustainability in the Niger Delta.” Building on previous work it had done in Nigeria, One Sky was aware of the value of interventions associated with the Right-Hand quadrants that focused on “development, financial management, improved communications, and policy influence.” While recognizing the essential role such efforts play, One Sky became increasingly aware of how these efforts could not be sustained without supportive interventions from the Left-Hand quadrants that focused on “personal leadership, self-awareness, moral intelligence, and interpersonal skills.” Consequently, their project will work with 30 young Nigerians from nearly a dozen organizations in the Cross River region of the Niger Delta on environmental and economic sustainability. “The project essentially involves engaging a personal development process (I), held in place with learning communities and a new social discourse (We), and enacted in breakthrough initiatives in their home organizations (It/Its).”<sup>11</sup> In addition, this program will be evaluated through a pre/post assessment based on the principles of integral research.

### *Integral Forestry*

Next Step Integral, an international non-profit, was established in 2003 by Stephan Martineau. Soon he joined forces with Lisa Farr, the director of a local watershed association, to begin the arduous task of establishing an integral approach to a community forest project in the Slocan Valley of British Columbia, Canada. This goal was particularly daunting given the historical tensions over a 35-year period between various worldviews within and outside of the community (e.g., loggers, miners, farmers, environmentalists, First Nations individuals, artists, practitioners of multiple religious

faiths, government workers, and a multinational corporation). Also, there had already been *nine* failed attempts by the B.C. government to establish a workable solution to the divisions within the community between stakeholders connected to the forest. The guiding principles of their initiative included: recognizing and honoring the diverse perspectives about the forest of Slocan Valley residents; recognizing that these perspectives were informed by lenses associated with each of the quadrants (e.g., behavioral, cultural, psychological, historical); and recognizing that any viable long-term solution would have to integrate the many conflicting views within the community. In addition, Martineau identified a number of “main capacities” explicitly grounded in the AQAL model but used implicitly to support their initiative: holding and inhabiting multiple perspectives; an awareness of and an ability to work with the multiple lines of individuals; a commitment to personal growth and shadow work; creating shared motivations; balancing empathy, engagement, and impartiality; and cultivating qualities, attitudes, and capacities that supported mutual understanding.

On January 14, 2007, Next Step Integral submitted an application for a Community Forest Agreement to allow the local community to manage 35,000 acres of contested forest. In July of that same year their proposal was approved! Thus three years of negotiations and grassroots work guided by the AQAL model resulted in the creation of a large-scale integral forestry cooperative—the first of its kind in the world. This community forest project has support of an impressive 95% of the inhabitants in the valley. Aptly named the Slocan Integral Forestry Cooperative (SIFCo), this project is a true testimony to the power of the integral model—even as an implicit guide—in working with diverse perspectives to achieve a common goal that other approaches failed to manifest. Now that SIFCo has been granted tenure over the land, the coming years shall be an important testing ground and source of clarification of the tenets of integral ecology in general and of integral forestry in particular.<sup>12</sup>

### *Integral Coaching*

Integral Coaching Canada (ICC), an Ottawa-based company, has developed an entire school and methodology for professional coaching based on the AQAL model. Over the past 10 years ICC has emerged as one of the premier schools in the world for professional coaching. They have a rigorous methodology that combines embodied perspective taking, presence, and powerful conceptual distinctions. Coaches use all five elements discussed above to support their own personal growth and to work with their client’s development. Typically it takes an individual two years to complete the certification process and become an Integral Coach®.<sup>13</sup> ICC has a strong reputation for demanding a great deal from their coaches-in-training, which includes each trainee committing to an integral life practice that includes meditation, body work, journaling, and reading. They are the only coaching school I am aware of that incorporates developmental psychology (e.g., Robert Kegan’s subject-object theory) as the spine of their methodology.<sup>14</sup> This alone gives ICC a tremendous advantage over other schools because their approach is built on extensive psychological research about how and why humans transform and integrate new capacities. In fact, ICC’s application of the integral framework is one of if not the most sophisticated uses of integral principles in any context or field.



### *Integral Politics*

The State of the World Forum (SOWF) was established in 1995 by Jim Garrison with Mikhail Gorbachev. SOWF began as a series of annual conferences that convened hundreds of international leaders (ranging from community organizers, Nobel Laureates, social activists, Heads of State, and business leaders) to explore key issues facing the globe. These gatherings established a Global Leadership Network committed to the guiding principle: “Transforming conversations that matter into actions that make a difference.” Over the years, SOWF sponsored a variety of gatherings and “strategic initiatives” that resulted in a number of projects and non-profit organizations.<sup>15</sup> In 2008, SOWF set its sights on the borderless problem of climate change and the global transition towards a “green economy,” and in November of 2009 will initiate a 10-year cycle of international annual gatherings. SOWF has adopted the AQAL model as the organizing framework for each event. Consequently, integral theory will be used for designing each conference and for guiding the development of policy recommendations to political leaders at all levels of government and civic responsibility. These gatherings will take place in different countries around the globe and build a coalition of multi-stake holders committed to developing innovative policy and effective action for confronting climate change and serving to guide the emergence of new sources of energy. Now this is *integral theory in action*—working across the globe with diverse leadership to address humanity’s first planetary crisis.

### **Conclusion**

The above examples are wonderfully far-ranging in their focus and scale. This variety of integral theory in action speaks directly to the flexibility and coherence of its theoretical foundation: the AQAL model. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of complex issues and problems, integral theory creates a space for multiple perspectives to contribute to the discovery of viable solutions. In our ever-evolving universe, integral theory issues to each of us a clarion call to strive towards inhabiting multiple perspectives—especially those that stand in contrast to our own habits of thinking and feeling. Only through developing such a worldcentric perspective can we adequately achieve the mutual understanding so desperately needed on a planet fragmented by conflicting worldviews and approaches. Practitioners of integral theory are committed to honoring and including the multidimensionality of reality as well as cultivating their own capacity for worldcentrism. It is this dual commitment of comprehensive acceptance and perspective-taking that allows the individuals and organizations in the above examples to be so successful in their respective integral endeavors—each one of them serving as an exemplar of what a more integral world looks and feels like. The world is an amazing, mysterious, and complex place. Integral theory’s all-inclusive framework is particularly well-suited for honoring the world in all its complexity and depth as well as shining a light on the path each of us can take to make a contribution and tackle the looming issues that will confront us in the 21st century.

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## NOTES

- 1 From Ken Wilber's "Foreword" in Frank Visser's book, *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion* (2003), pp.xii-xiii.
- 2 A complete listing of Ken Wilber's work can be found in Appendix 2 of Brad Reynolds' book, *Embracing Reality: The Integral Vision of Ken Wilber* (2004). Most of this material can be found in Wilber's *Collected Works*.
- 3 Frank Visser reports that 22 of Ken Wilber's books have been translated into over 25 languages, thus making Wilber the most translated academic author in the United States. Visser reports: "Up till now his books have been translated into German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Czech, Hungarian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Latvian, Estonian, Slovenian, Slovakian, Serbian, Greek, Hindi, Chinese (China and Taiwan), Korean, Swazi, Japanese, Polish, Danish, Swedish, and Latvian. In addition to these, some illegal editions have appeared in African and Indian dialects." For a chart of all these translations, see [www.integralworld.net/translations.html](http://www.integralworld.net/translations.html).
- 4 There is an important difference between integral studies and integral theory. Integral studies is the broader category and includes integral thinkers such as Jean Gebser, Sri Aurobindo, Ken Wilber, and Ervin Laszlo. In contrast, integral theory is a subset of integral studies, which focuses primarily on Ken Wilber's work and is committed to the critique, application, and theoretical development of the AQAL model. The field of meta-theory includes the work of individuals like Roy Bahskar and George Ritzer.
- 5 See the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* for articles in these and many other disciplines.
- 6 Note that the examples given for each quadrant are not correlated between themselves; they only represent single examples for each quadrant.
- 7 For further information on these efforts, consult their respective websites: 1) *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* ([www.integraljournal.org](http://www.integraljournal.org)); 2) John F. Kennedy University's Department of Integral Theory ([www.jfku.edu/integraltheory](http://www.jfku.edu/integraltheory)); 3) The Integral Research Center ([www.integralresearchcenter.org](http://www.integralresearchcenter.org)); and 4) the international biennial Integral Theory Conference ([www.integraltheoryconference.org](http://www.integraltheoryconference.org)).
- 8 In addition to these titles, it is worth mentioning that in 2009 two anthologies will be published by SUNY press, one on integral education and one on integral theory.
- 9 See the resource page at [www.integralresearchcenter.org](http://www.integralresearchcenter.org) for listings of all the published material in these areas.
- 10 A full description of this project can be found at [www.integralresearchcenter.org](http://www.integralresearchcenter.org).
- 11 All quotes in this paragraph come from [www.onesky.ca](http://www.onesky.ca), which can be visited for more information on this project.
- 12 Visit <http://www.sifco.ca> for more information on this project.
- 13 Integral Coach is a registered trademark in Canada and owned by Integral Coaching Canada, Inc. For information on their trainings see their website: [www.integralcoachingcanada.com](http://www.integralcoachingcanada.com).

14 For an extensive overview and introduction to Integral Coaching Canada's approach, see issue 4(1) of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, which is devoted entirely to their work.

15 Visit [www.truthisnotenough.com](http://www.truthisnotenough.com) for more information.

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