

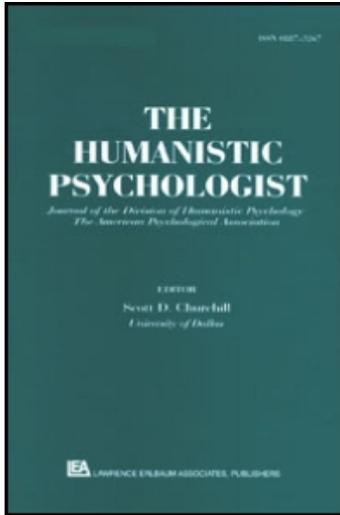
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## Universal Integralism: Ken Wilber's Integral Method in Context

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# Universal Integralism: Ken Wilber's Integral Method in Context

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This article is an inquiry into Ken Wilber's integral epistemology as applied to social systems, namely, through organizations and leadership. It explicates the constructionist component inherent in the universalist nature of AQAL theory (a framework covering all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types). The relationship between integral methodological pluralism and the AQAL model are explored in the context of a fundamental misunderstanding of phenomenology, transpersonal psychology, and the human sciences, not as a method among many but as an essential characteristic of Wilber's integral theory. This article aims to contribute to the further development of integral research and design methods through clarification and contextualization.

Investigating the intricate relationship between universal integral theory, transpersonal theory, and empirical application begs the question as to whether Ken Wilber's integral epistemology, otherwise known as *integral methodological pluralism* (IMP), is novel or merely a reframing of an old idea. The fundamental questions are: What are some of the underlying assumptions behind Wilber's methodology? Is his integral method refined enough for organizations to implement effectively? Can integral epistemology be applied to social change theory? Can it revolutionize the functioning and development of leadership, organizations, and social systems?

The prevalence of integral postmodern *constructionism* (although the terms "constructivism" and "constructionism" are generally interchangeable, I have preferred the term "constructionism" in this article due to its prevalence in the most recent publication of the *Handbook of Constructionist*

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*Research*; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008), in the context of social change theory and practice, from the perspective of Wilber's integral methodological pluralism, his integral epistemology (Murray, 2006; Reynolds, 2006; Stein, 2007; Wilber, 2006), is the issue of central concern. To answer the foregoing questions, the philosophical and theoretical dimensions of *universal integralism*, as a subcategory within transpersonal theory (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007) will be explicated, and its constructionist component will be revealed.

Murray (2006) proposed that the validity of a model or theoretical framework rests in its usefulness and usability. This article explores previous analyses of both process and product in integral (Hampson, 2007; Hartelius, 2007; Murray, 2006; Wilber, 2006), and by implication, transpersonal theory (Braud, 1998, 2006; Hartelius, 2007). This article also attempts to formulate a postmodern or a postpostmodern (Wilber, 2006) model (*postmodern* being understood to mean the social movement that recognizes the importance of intersubjectivity, cultural relativism, and the mediating/constructive nature of language and thought in creating how we see and interpret the world), and how we acquire and apply knowledge (Hampson, 2007; Wilber, 2000).

The current global turbulence of our times necessitates a greater emphasis on the search for meaning and the pursuit of a more effective, ethical, and spiritually informed leadership. The increased occurrence of competition and uncertainty; the acceleration of change and exponential innovations in technology, terrorism, and violence; and the extent of poverty and environmental decay today call for theoretical sophistication in the current body of integral leadership and social change research (Pauchant, 2004). Integral and transpersonal theory is revolutionary in both its potential and effect. It is the aim of this paper to advocate for both.

## PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Epistemology, Ontology, and Methodology

Epistemology is the study of or inquiry into theories of knowledge. It tries to elucidate ways of knowing and to develop methods based upon what is believed to be known or understood. The *Oxford American Dictionary of Current English* (2002) defines epistemology as "the theory of knowledge, esp. with regard to its methods and validation" (p. 262). As part of philosophical inquiry, epistemology is allied with (and inseparable from) ontology (DeQuincy, 2000), the latter being the study of the nature of being or existence (Collinson, 1992). Epistemology focuses more on the dynamics of how and why we know (or acquire knowledge), rather than questioning the essential nature of that which is known.

Asking, “What are the means by which we can know something?” is fundamental to any attempt to understand the world but, more specifically, to act in a manner that serves to better our (collective) lot in life (Gozdz, 1999; Murray, 2006; Torbert et al., 2004). In the never-ending attempt at meaning-making and the societal demand for applicability, the epistemological core of a model (in this case, the integral model), must be taken into account (Hampson, 2007; Murray, 2006; Pauchant, 2004; Saiter, 2005; Wilber, 2006).

Key characteristics of current epistemology are the notions of uncertainty, complexity, and intersubjectivity, or what Tom Murray (2006) calls *indeterminacy*. *Epistemological indeterminacy* is a term that specifically refers to “uncertainties, ambiguities, and paradoxes in knowledge and its communication and validation” (Murray, 2006, p. 212). The term thus acknowledges and reframes one of the most perplexing issues of the modern (and postmodern) world: that individuals may recognize the uncertain nature of information (e.g., knowledge) but not possess productive ways to *deal with* this uncertainty, and thus fail to recognize it in practical situations (Inglis & Steele, 2005; Kegan, 2002; Murray, 2006).

In an attempt to relate both terms (*epistemology* and *ontology*) to transpersonal psychology (as a field of study), William Braud proposed the idea of *radical ontology* based upon his interpretation of William James’s views “[that] the real is considered to be anything that we find ourselves obliged to take into account in any way (James, 1911) [sic]” (Braud, 2006, p. 141).

### IMP, Integral Epistemology, and the Myth of the Given

As a core assumption, integral epistemologies take into account IMP (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Murray, 2006; Reynolds, 2006; Stein, 2007; Wilber, 2006), where all points of view with *a set of core justifiable injunctions* are understood to be *true but partial*. The following descriptions of IMP (and the majority of current Wilberian theory) are based upon the oft-cited Four Quadrants model, where the upper left quadrant includes interior-individual domains; the lower left, interior-collective; the upper right, exterior-individual; and the lower right, exterior-collective (Wilber, 2000d, 2006).

Wilber’s (2006) own definition states that integral methodological pluralism “involves, among other things, at least eight fundamental and apparently irreducible methodologies, injunctions, or paradigms for gaining reproducible knowledge (or verifiably repeatable experiences)” (p. 33). The eight methodologies are structuralism, phenomenology, autopoiesis (Wilber equates this with cognitive science), empiricism, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, systems theory, and social autopoiesis. Similarly, Wilber

(2006) also includes what he calls “eight primordial perspectives” (pp. 34–36). Note that phenomenology is only one of eight methodologies that Wilber includes, and it is questionable to equate *autopoiesis* with cognitive science. Wilber provides little in the way of explaining his rationale concerning this.

A detailed examination of these methodologies and their relation to Wilber’s theory is not treated here. Rather, it is sufficient to stress that his version of an integral epistemology, IMP, takes all available truths “more or less” as they are found and “alters their claim to absoluteness” (Wilber, 2006, p. 49) by “plugging” them into an integral framework otherwise known as AQAL: all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types. As an epistemology that incorporates the essential insight of “transcending and including” and the use of “orienting generalizations” (Wilber, 2000d, p. 5) AQAL thus has much more in common with phenomenology than Wilber recognized.

IMP appears to be a narrower, more specific version of AQAL, e.g., all levels, all lines, all states, all types (Wilber, 2006); that is, IMP may be considered AQAL’s *method*. It is not clear where this distinction lies, as the literature about this is too new and Wilber, himself, does not make the differentiation transparent (Hampson, 2007). In fact, much of what exists on the subject of IMP has only been written within the last 3 or 4 years (Hampson, 2007; Murray 2006; Reynolds, 2006; Wilber, 2006).

What exactly makes IMP distinctive? It seems that IMP and the AQAL model are not so much a collection of new or novel material but an attempted synthesis in the tradition of Kant or Hegel. It is the approach and the strategy that is novel, not the ideas themselves. IMP, as a way to apply AQAL theory in the so-called “real world,” also has yet to be tested in the empirical arena, although attempts certainly are underway (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Edwards, 2005; Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006; Landrum & Gardner, 2005; Torbert et al., 2004; Volckmann, 2005).

If one is to apply AQAL theory in the real world, then one must be clear about what is being regarded as the basis for truth or validity. As this applies to IMP, Murray (2006) eloquently lays the groundwork for what he considers important in clarifying the validity criteria necessary for any integral theory. He proposes that:

The validity of an integral (or integrally informed) theory depends upon the degree to which it:

1. Addresses **all levels and quadrants** (i.e., science/morals/art, body/mind/spirit, nature/self/culture); and (for extra credit) does so in a balanced way; i.e., it has sufficient scope (depth and span) or agape;

2. Serves to **integrate** (synthesize) and/or **differentiate** (distinguish or refine) important concepts, sometimes creating new terms/concepts as it does; (and points out important and unacknowledged relationships and connections between fields or perspectives);
3. “**Transcends and includes**” rather than transcending and excluding, previous theories and ideas;
4. Offers a **simple, elegant**, parsimonious, and/or perspicuous way to conceptualize a large number of ideas (i.e., that the orienting generalizations orient rather than confound);
5. Optional (extra credit): Proposes **developmental/evolutionary** causal or teleological explanatory mechanisms.
6. Includes explicit knowledge about the model's **assumptions, limitations, fuzzy boundaries, biases, etc.**;
7. Is **understandable** (defines terms, is consistent with the use of terms);
8. Has internal **consistency** (in its claims and models);
9. Has external **coherence** (is consistent with other established theories and ideas; that its claims are implicated by a plurality of other models or perspectives);
10. Sites **legitimate sources** for data and theoretical coherence, and facilitates the reader in determining the legitimacy of these sources;
11. Grounds itself in **examples**; includes positive, negative, central, and peripheral examples; is resilient to counter-examples;
12. And finally [*sic*] is characterized by **appropriateness, sincerity, authenticity, and respectfulness**. (Murray, 2006, pp. 256–257)

If we accept these conditions, then we can see that epistemological indeterminacy has manifested in Wilber's recent work through what he has called *the myth of the given* (Wilber, 2000b, 2006). In *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (2006b) and *Integral Spirituality* (2006) Wilber describes this as the ignoring of intersubjectivity. By this observation he asserts that most forms of meaning-making (especially empirical endeavors) have not understood or taken into account the fundamental notion of postmodernism, which is that all truths are not only context-dependent but intersubjective, constructive, and aperspectival. In short, most of us are beset with the mistaken belief that reality is simply given (Wilber, 2006, p. 176). In the latest version of this conjecture, Wilber states that:

The myth of the given is essentially another name for phenomenology and mere empiricism in any of a hundred guises—whether regular empiricism, radical empiricism, interior empiricism, transpersonal empiricism, empirical

phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, radical phenomenology, and so forth. As important as they might be, what all of them have in common is the myth of the given, which includes [paraphrased]:

- *the belief that reality is simply given to me. . .*
- *the belief that the consciousness of an individual will deliver truth.*
- *a failure to understand that the truth that the subject delivers is constructed in part by intersubjective cultural networks.*
- *the belief that the mirror of nature, or the reflection paradigm, is an adequate methodology.* (2006, p. 176)

Although this point is a seemingly small aspect of Wilber's overall theory, the implications for such an insight, if true, are far-reaching:

In other words, many approaches, wishing to get spiritual realities acknowledged by the modern world, simply take empirical methodology and try to expand it, make it bigger, push it into areas such as meditation, Gaia, transpersonal consciousness, brain scans with meditation, empirical tests of cognitive capacity with contemplation, chaos and complexity science, holograms and holographic information, the akashic field, and so on. . . *—not a single one of these approaches addresses the more fundamental problem that the postmodernists are criticizing, namely, that all of those approaches are still caught in the myth of the given and the ignoring of intersubjectivity.* (Wilber, 2006, p. 177)

This is where the discussion becomes difficult. To understand the myth of the given is to accept that postmodern constructionism (or *constructive postmodernism* or *social constructionism*) claims that all meaning-making, all ways of knowing, are socially constructed by each member of that society (Küpers, 2005; Rothberg, 1997; Sexton, 1997) “where constructive postmodernism is the next holarchical level after deconstructive postmodernism” (Hampson, 2007, p. 129). Wilber considers this assumption quite accurate if not taken to an extreme, where everything becomes simply what he terms “*aperspectival madness*—the contradictory belief that no belief is better than any other—a total paralysis of thought, will, and action in the face of a million perspectives all given exactly the same depth, namely, zero” (Wilber, 2000b, p. 198). According to him, the *healthy* version of the postmodern assumption is this:

1. Reality is not in all ways pregiven, but in some significant ways is a construction, an interpretation (this view is often called “constructivism”); the belief that reality is simply given, and not also partly constructed, is referred to as “the myth of the given.”

2. Meaning is context-dependent, and contexts are boundless (this is often called "contextualism").
3. Cognition must therefore privilege no single perspective (this is called "integral-aperspectival"). (Wilber, 2000b, p. 186)

Again, Wilber (2006) claims that all methodologies, no matter how holistic or systemic, fail to take into account this fundamental insight.

With regard to meaning-making pursuits such as obtaining empirical evidence to support a claim, Wilber (2000b) states that "when many empiricists demand sensory evidence, they are actually demanding mental interpretations without realizing it" (p. 187). He then proclaims that the opposite extreme is idealism, where "*everything* we see is the product of mind" and postmodern poststructuralism where "the world given to us is not a perception but an interpretation, and thus there are no foundations, spiritual or otherwise, to ground anything" (p. 187), otherwise known as *extreme postmodernism*. Wilber suggests that it is between these two extremes that the path beyond lies, a path that could potentially change the way we (as individuals or groups) obtain reliable scientific information.

However, the question remains: Is this a novel concept? Is Wilber onto something that has been overlooked in our epistemological and ontological models? The answer to these questions is a firm "maybe." In philosophical terms, constructionism is often pitted against universalism (Rothberg, 1997), both of which Wilber champions, yet fails to adequately distinguish. There is a fair amount of ambiguity involved in integral methodological pluralism that is not only theoretical in nature, but also empirical (Hampson, 2007; Murray, 2006).

Some accounts equate constructionism with postmodernism (Sexton, 1997). In placing human history in historical contexts, there is often discussion about premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism (see Sexton, 1997; Wilber, 2000b, 2006). Using this division of worldviews, Sexton (1997) defines the third era, postmodernism, as synonymous with constructivism, and, furthermore, highlights human participation in the construction of knowledge. Similarly, Rothberg reflects this perspective when he states that much of the thinking since Kant has been strongly in the constructionist (and contextualist) camp. It is the view that direct, unmediated knowledge is not possible: "There is no direct, unmediated knowledge of reality; all knowledge and all human experience are structured by human categories and the forms of human sensibility, that is, time and space" (Rothberg, 1997, p. 172). Yet, Rothberg continues this explanation of the history of epistemological thought by emphasizing that:

Despite the radical shift from the classical model, the possibility of valid knowledge is saved. Kant assumes that the mediating categories and the

framework of space and time within which they are employed represent universal human ways of structuring experience. The fact of mediation renders impossible the project of knowing reality as it “truly” is, but not the project of gaining or at least moving toward universally valid knowledge. (p. 172)

This is an important point for understanding Wilber’s integral approach. Although his ideas may not be new, his innovation lies in the reframing itself. Furthermore, the cultural relativist (postmodern/contextualist/constructionist) position that grounds the essential insight behind the myth of the given would, at first, seem to be at odds with Wilber’s overall universal integral pluralist stance, where universalism is defined as being the belief that it is possible to identify human universals that function as the implicit meanings or rules behind language, human communication, and human development (Rothberg, 1997). Yet, it might just be that Wilber’s constructivist tendencies do not contradict his universal integralism. Rather, they form a part of his overall approach.

Concerning the notion of givenness, which Wilber discusses in length in many places (2000d, 2001, 2006), it can be argued that no other philosophical discipline is more concerned with the notion of the givenness than phenomenology (Embree, 2003; Gorner, 2000; Husserl, 1972, 1982; Roy, 2003; Smith & Smith, 1995; Welton, 2003; Zahavi, 2003a, 2003b). What Wilber’s critique of phenomenology omits (or fails to consider) is that what was *given* for him was the essential postmodern insight concerning intersubjectivity: Everything that Wilber includes in his AQAL model was *given* to his awareness regardless of how it was achieved or how difficult the inquiry may have been. Therefore, his AQAL model is not greater than, or necessarily more inclusive than, phenomenology. In fact, the AQAL model owes Husserl and the tradition(s) he inspired (existential, humanistic, transpersonal, social constructionism), a debt of gratitude.

The recognition of intersubjectivity may be more hidden on the horizon of our given experience (which tends to be experienced as solipsistic or egological) simply because we are so deeply embedded in the natural attitude of which Husserl went to great lengths to differentiate from the phenomenological attitude (Husserl, 1962; 1982; 1999; Kockelmans, 1994). Phenomenology never ignored the problems of intersubjectivity, as Wilber claims. In fact, in many ways, it is the origin of postmodernism in all of its healthy as well as its pathological forms (Embree, 2003; Marion, 1999; Moran, 2000; Sokolowski, 2000; see also Tymieniecka, 2002).

## Theory and Praxis: A Recap

Method is the meeting point between theoretical sophistication and practical, empirical (integral) application. Yet, for many, a theory is just a theory without some sort of practical application. It would seem that, in the context of integral and transpersonal theory, Wilber's contribution here is IMP. However, IMP is not dissimilar to most methodologies in their epistemological claims: "Thus, the epistemological claims of integral studies are, like any other valid knowledge claims, thoroughly grounded in experiment, data accumulation, and consensual justification" (Wilber, 2001).

Nonetheless, there are certain key differences between transpersonal integral theory and those theories that do not take into account the essential postmodern truths. In an earlier paper on integral theory, I outlined one of these key differences:

Not only does it seek to correct, integrate, and expand upon the existing understanding of our world in an intellectual, vision-logic sense but it also seeks to put the needed emphasis upon *direct revelation* of said truths, especially where it concerns transpersonal and trans-mental understanding. According to the great wisdom traditions and to transpersonal theory there will always be a limit to how far logic and reason alone will take an individual. Aside from correcting that type of understanding through experiment, data accumulation, and consensual justification, the individual must be willing to take up what Michael Murphy and his colleagues call "integral transformative practice" (Murphy, 1992). (Saiter, 2005, p. 28)

Because there is a fundamental and irrevocable dynamic relationship between the researcher and that being researched; the researcher must be willing to recognize and develop methods that honor this. However, the further implications and analyses surrounding such an ontological and epistemological truth-claim are not addressed here. Rather, the exploration of bridging the gap between theoretical considerations and practical application through the examination of the available literature on IMP, in the context of social processes, is the focus.

## EMPIRICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Transpersonal Methodologies and IMP

No explication of integral epistemologies would be complete without some understanding of the relation between transpersonal approaches to data acquisition and the view represented by IMP. Specific transpersonally-informed methods such as appreciative inquiry, organic inquiry, and transpersonal

heuristic inquiry (Braud & Anderson, 1998) have much in common with the fundamental drive behind IMP (Hartelius et al., 2007). That is, they serve to create a *truly inclusive, dynamic, and holistic applied methodology*. For example, William Braud (2006), in his article detailing the educational approach of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, states: “One aims to confront the whole of what one is researching with the whole of one’s being, in order to acquire descriptions and understandings of one’s topic that are as rich, deep, ‘thick,’ and complete as possible” (p. 141).

There seems to be a difference in the style and approach of transpersonal methodologies and the available interpretations of IMP. Braud (2006) again:

The transpersonal researcher is concerned not only with the acquiring of new *information* (what Clements, 2004, has called “changes of mind”) for the researcher and for expanding the knowledge base of the discipline, but also with the potential *transformation* (which Clements has called “changes of heart”) of everyone involved in the research enterprise. (p. 141)

Although this approach sounds similar to the goals of IMP, the latter (which insists upon the myth of the given) attempts to honor postmodern intersubjectivity (Wilber, 2006). The difference can be seen in the approach. Transpersonal research methods developed from the need to be more inclusive and the drive to bring the researcher and that being researched closer together (roots that are founded in human science). IMP and AQAL were born out of a similar drive: to recognize the inherent limitations of assuming an objective stance (2000b, 2006). However, both IMP and AQAL emphasize perspective (or aperspective), in deference to both scientific empiricism and personal transformation (the latter being highly significant in transpersonal psychology).

The qualitative difference between transpersonal research methods and IMP is that the former tends to focus more on the *substance* of the interaction between the researcher and the subject, i.e., a *transformative*, as well as an *informational* focus. By contrast, the latter tends to focus on the (normative) *perspective* of the research. Zachary Stein (2007) calls this characteristic of IMP a type of “critical theory” and goes on to state that the “integral vision” and IMP “offer a *regulative epistemic ideal* in light of which less than integral approaches can be criticized” (p. 106). Stein concludes: “Similarly, I see Integral Methodological Pluralism as a *normative meta-disciplinary inquiry catalyst* that can be unpacked at any level of competency to insure a healthy manifestation of interdisciplinary energies” (p. 106).

Such a qualitative difference is arguably subtle. Nonetheless, it seems that transpersonal methods, if employed, risk overlooking Wilber’s crucial insight

of the myth of the given. In an attempt to honor the diversity of experience and the holistic nature of research using a “radical ontology” (Braud, 2006, p. 141), there still exists the threat of succumbing to the fallacy that “reality is simply given to me” (Wilber, 2006, p. 176). If so, then the current state of transpersonal research methods, being highly influenced by Jamesian radical ontology, may not adequately recognize the subtleties of postmodern intersubjectivity and contextuality, and thus be hopelessly outdated.

Similarly, Hampson (2007) posits that integral theory has a preoccupation with “objects” of inquiry, rather than “modes” of inquiry. He states, in terms of developmental theory, that although “Wilber’s Integral Methodological Pluralism (Eight Narrative Perspectives) differentiates epistemologies or methodologies *horizontally*—according to zones or quadrants—it remains unclear which *vertical* developmental lines or waves these perspectives operate from” (p. 112).

### Social Change

What effect have IMP and transpersonal research methods had on the social change literature? Although undoubtedly broad and somewhat vague, the term *social change* means (specifically in this context of organizations, leadership, and academia), an inquiry into ways of changing social systems and their dynamical interactions. Its underlying assumption, I believe, is an attempt to analyze and implement strategies to create a *better* or *healthier* society. Maslow called it the “good society,” or “Eupsychia” (Maslow, 1969, p. 45). Moreover, *social change* is used here to refer not only to the social (outer-collective) sphere but also to the cultural (intercollective) sphere. Finally, social change points to the holonic levels of organization not only in the human sphere, but also in the whole biosphere of the planet and, ultimately, the cosmos. This investigation, although honoring this greater connection, seeks only to address a specific part of this greater vision, namely, the human realm of social societies.

Among the seemingly infinite array of forms that social societies manifest (such as nation-states, provinces, counties, cities, neighborhoods, and families), there are systems organized by specific interests, needs, or actions. For example, these include levels such as school districts, neighborhood alliances, and corporate organizations. The latter, in particular, is a form of social organization that is often at the center of interest within the literature surrounding organization and leadership studies.

### Organizations and Leadership

How has integral theory infiltrated the realm of organizations? Has the essential insight behind the myth of the given been addressed by businesses,

leadership, and the academy? Where it *has* penetrated, how effective have the results been?

This investigation has revealed that, of the newly formed institutions and organizations that seek to address the insights behind IMP and the myth of the given, the majority are either business-related or education-related. As it currently stands, Wilber's theory has made considerable headway in both arenas. In *One Taste* (2000c), a year's worth of personal journal writings, Wilber mentions the interest he had garnered by that time: "Ever since the publication of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*—and particularly *A Brief History of Everything*—there has been increasing interest in my work in very conventional and orthodox areas, particularly politics, business, and education" (pp. 512–513). He then goes on to describe how he was "increasingly getting mail from business and organizational people" (p. 514).

There are a handful of small organizational and executive coaching firms that employ overt, as well as subtle, attempts at applying the AQAL model (mainly the four-quadrant framework) to their business. Similarly, a growing number of educational organizations have adopted considerably from integrally-informed (namely, Wilberian) models (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006; Hampson, 2007; Pauchant, 2004; Reams, 2005; Subbiondo, 2005; Wexler, 2005; Wilber, 2006).

A first look at the literature in administrative and managerial sciences shows two main categorical foci: organizational (e.g., organizational change, organizational development, strategic change) and leadership (organizational leadership, executive leadership, organizational management). The former focuses on the broad array of issues and overlapping definitions concerning groups of individuals who have come together for a specific purpose, ideal, or goal. In corporations, the operational purpose centers on the delivery of a product and/or making financial capital, whereas in nonprofit and governmental organizations it is often around providing humanitarian service or an institutional/societal function or need that is not profit driven (Ferrell, Hirt, & Ferrell, 2006).

While searching for the application and usefulness of AQAL theory in this context, I discovered a plethora of writing. Among the most popular and readily accessible *working* models are Bill Torbert's *action inquiry* (Torbert et al., 2004), Peter Senge's *learning organization* (Senge, 2006; Senge, Klierer, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004), Beck and Cowan's (2003) *spiral dynamics*, and Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan's developmental model (Kegan, 2002; Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

Many, if not all, of these models have enjoyed considerable popularity. For example, Thierry Pauchant, the current holder of the Chair in Ethical Management at the HEC in Montreal, one of Canada's most prestigious business schools, mentions that

outside the U.S., the Spiral Dynamics group, for example, has been very active in offering integral seminars in Australia, Brazil, the U.K., France, Germany, Mexico, Sweden, and many other countries, and in October 2002 co-sponsored the first 'Integral Leadership Conference' in London. (Pauchant, 2004, p. 4)

Relevant scholar-practitioners include Daryl Paulson (1999), a graduate of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and the founder of BioScience Laboratories (Wilber, 2000c); Ron Cacioppe, a business expert and scholar in Australia; Mark Edwards at the University of Western Australia; and Fred Kofman (among many others; Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005).

Similarly, Notre Dame University's Mendoza College of Business has developed the Executive Integral Leadership Circle (Pauchant, 2004; Reams, 2005); Pacific Integral in Seattle, a small boutique firm, solely relies on AQAL theory (Hampson, 2007); and JMJ Associates, an integral consulting firm based in Austin, Texas, and London, UK, overtly uses the four-quadrant model, as do other boutique firms, such as Integral Development Associates and Integral Coaching Canada.

There are also efforts by the Adizes Graduate School in Santa Barbara; Fielding Graduate University (also in Santa Barbara); and the HEC in Montreal, where Thierry Pauchant, is doing in-depth research into the characteristics of integral leadership (Pauchant, 2004). Other integrally-informed (but not necessarily Wilberian) models include Barrett's *corporate transformation*, multiparadigm analysis, and various approaches to organizational spirituality (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005).

Thierry Pauchant (2004) reflects this growing impact of AQAL theory in business settings:

For example, many universities, research institutes and consulting firms in the world are presently using this framework and offer seminars in "integral leadership." This includes, in the U.S., the Adizes Institute, Axialent, the Center for Creative Leadership, Diverse Solutions, Eluminate, the Global Value Network, Integral Development, the Integral Institute, LeadCoach, as well as Antioch University, the Fielding Graduate Institute and the University of Notre Dame, among others. (p. 4)

Despite the ubiquity of AQAL theory, it seems that there has been no comprehensive quantitative data analysis of its efficacy (or of other "integrally-informed" approaches) in organizational and leadership settings. Moreover, establishing whether the essential postmodern insight behind the myth of the given has been addressed by these same individuals and organizations is much more difficult to ascertain. Among the few places where this issue is discussed at length is in the *Integral Review*, *Integral*

*Leadership Review*, and in the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. Yet, even here, analysis of such issues is in an embryonic stage (Ross et al., 2005).

A survey of the articles in all three journals concludes that, although philosophical debate is alive and well, empirical studies concerning the effectiveness of AQAL theory in organizational and leadership practice is lacking (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Edwards, 2005; Landrum & Gardner, 2005; Murray, 2006; Reams, 2005; Stein, 2007; Volckmann, 2005; Wilber, 2006). One of the exceptions is Thierry Pauchant's (2004) in-depth research study into the characteristics of integral leadership, a study that is still being carried out.

Many, if not all, of the issues brought up here (integral epistemology, transpersonal epistemology, etc.) mirror similar attempts to incorporate them into the classroom (after all, the classroom is a social phenomenon as much as the boardroom is, and is an environment to observe and produce social change). For example, among the more recent experiments in the educational domain are the pioneering efforts of John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California (JFKU). JFKU has recently added a Master of Arts in Integral Psychology, a Master of Arts in Integral Theory, and a certificate in Integral Theory (see Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006).

The newly founded Integral Research Center based at JFKU is currently one of the most promising developments in recent years. Among the projects currently underway as of this writing include the development of an Integral Transformative Education Assessment for Curriculum Research, Developmental Testing Service, Pacific Integral, and a handful of individual scholars and researchers.

Although there has been a growing, but modest, body of literature on the subject of integral education (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006; Subbiondo, 2005; Wexler, 2005), JFKU's integral programs base their curriculum on Wilber-approved theory (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006; the only other AQAL-approved program is offered through Fielding Graduate University).

Whether endorsement by Wilber himself is important remains a sensitive issue reserved for another article. Regardless, it would be wise to bear in mind the difference between Wilber's AQAL theory and integral theory in general, which is not limited to Wilber's work, e.g., the work of Sri Aurobindo and Jean Gebser, in particular, are historical predecessors in this area (see Hampson, 2007).

Because AQAL and IMP come directly from Wilber himself, the fact that JFKU's integral offerings are AQAL to the core is an important distinction. Similar institutions such as the California Institute of Integral Studies (inspired by Aurobindo's integral yoga), and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (founded on many of the same principles), have incorporated

integral theories into their pedagogy. However, they do not exclusively follow Wilber's model (instead, Wilber is considered to be an important voice among many; Rothberg, 1986; Subbiondo, 2005; Wexler, 2005).

### The Myth of the Given Revisited

The myth of the given is a constructionist argument. It is also a postmodern one. It honors the way in which all experience is mediated and constructed through cultural, social, and interpretive means. Yet, Wilber's theory, taken as one dynamic, interconnected framework, strongly champions a form of universalism (universal integralism), which posits the ability to know human universals beyond constructed reality.

This distinction between Wilber's universal stance and IMP's recognition of the myth of the given is somewhat ambiguous, yet not contradictory. Rothberg's interpretation of this matter seems to make this point clear:

Although most of these universalists criticize the classical epistemological model and agree that knowledge and experience are to a significant extent culturally mediated or constructed, they emphasize the limits to the constructivist model and the extent to which there may be both "surface" (constructed) as well as "deep" cognitive, moral, and spiritual structures. It is the deep structures that are universal, nonrelative, and not arbitrarily constructed. Hence, constructivist themes, even if limited, appear across the board in both naturalistic and interpretive accounts and in both more relativist and more universalist varieties of interpretive theory. (Rothberg, 1997, p. 178)

Given this explanation, it would seem that the myth of the given, although not novel, is a reframing of this philosophical marriage between the recognition of a constructivist position *within* a larger, integrative universalism.

## CONCLUSION

This brief analysis has concluded that, although there currently is an explosion of scholarly research on the application of an integral/transpersonally-informed epistemology (otherwise known as IMP in this article), to date there is little veridical empirical evidence proving the efficacy of the theory. This is especially true in organizational, leadership, and educational contexts. Although there are a number of empirical studies that directly *relate* to IMP, this inquiry found no systematic studies that have used IMP as their method. Transpersonal approaches, however, are numerous (Beauchamp, 1982; Braud, 1998; Gozdz, 1995, 1999, 2000; Pyle, 1988;

Reams, 2002; Veltrop, 1999). Yet, as has been shown, there still exist problematic differences in the methods harnessed by transpersonal psychology and those proposed by AQAL theory, despite their operational and philosophical similarities.

This investigation has also revealed the intricate philosophical assumptions that underlie integral and transpersonal theory and research methods. The complex relationship between Wilber's AQAL theory and postmodern theory remains thorny (although Wilber would have us believe otherwise). Phenomenology (and, by extension, transpersonal theory) cannot be easily characterized or marginalized as specialized perspectives within AQAL theory. Rather, they represent a long tradition of disciplined inquiry that describes a fundamental attitude or transformation of consciousness that not only grounds AQAL theory, but is also a key feature of it.

Regarding IMP and its injunction to be a useful methodology, very little evidence exists to suggest that the impact of IMP on organizations within the framework of social change is cogent enough to espouse. The fact is, although it is currently being used by a few individuals and organizations, we still do not know what the long-term results of this method are, as promising and inspiring as they seem. These questions remain: Does the evolution of integral theory require further maturity and enhanced lucidity before integral methods can become truly pragmatic? Do we now need to test integral methodological pluralism for empirical usefulness? If an integral vision of social change is to progress, continuing to do both seems to be the wisest choice.

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