

MOVEMENT BUILDING THROUGH METANARRATIVE

An Integral Ideological Response to Climate Change

Jordan Luftig

ABSTRACT The State of the World Forum has chosen the AQAL model as its framework and operating system for its 10-year plan to address climate change. This article proposes that tackling climate change head-on is imperative yet insufficient, and the Forum's 2020 vision to green the world economy should be framed in terms of a global integral movement. I use the conceptual lens of ideology as a heuristic device to explore the AQAL model and mine it for ideas that can be converted into levers to grow the integral movement and contribute to the transformation of society. I present narrative as an essential lever for movement building and explore it in depth through consideration of Ken Wilber's "beyond flatland" metanarrative and the public narrative approach used by Barack Obama's campaign for President of the United States.

KEY WORDS: climate change; ideology; metanarrative; public narrative; social movements

In the face of a heating planet, in the midst of collapsing economic systems, in the face of an approaching catastrophe 'far outside human experience,' we need more than rhetoric. We need a plan. We need a campaign that brings people together—that mobilizes action in ways that make common sense and offer all sectors of society a common good. We need a vision that provides a more viable basis for society's relationship with the Earth. The extremity of our crisis makes it paradoxically possible to create a new world.

– *State of the World Forum*¹

A plan? A campaign that unites people and mobilizes action? A vision for creating a new world? In the modern age, this has been the stuff of political ideologies. At the outset, let me suggest the following: the State of the World Forum could benefit from exploring its 10-year plan to address climate change both within the general context of ideology and through inquiry into one ideology in particular. The question I will answer shortly is: which ideology? Not to mention, for whom is this ideology intended?

For many, the words ideology, ideologue, and ideological connote an uncritical, unreflective, dogmatic approach to reality; conjure Marx's concept of false ideas that mask the self-interests of the ruling class; call to mind atrocious acts of violence and horrible means justified by utopian dreams—basically, ideology as a system of thought used as a weapon by one group against another, to either perpetuate the status quo or attempt an overthrow and transformation of the social order.

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This negative view of ideology is understandable in light of history. But it is also partial, and it is important to mention that not just disasters but a great many dignities have come from ideological movements. Furthermore, it is possible to arrive at a neutral definition of political ideology to guide this exploration; for example, “an emotion-laden, myth-saturated, action-related system of beliefs and values about people and society, legitimacy and authority, that is acquired to a large extent as a matter of faith and habit” (Rejai, 1991, p. 11); or, “a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action” (Ball & Dagger, 1991, p. 8).

These definitions highlight that ideologies are principally concerned with translating ideas into action, through such measures as telling a compelling story, tapping into emotion, setting standards of conduct, providing individuals with a sense of identity and cultural solidarity, and generally mobilizing the masses (Mannheim, 1936; Bell, 1960; Seliger, 1976; Garner, 1996; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Zald, 2000). Not incidentally, these features and functions of ideology coincide with the central focus of the 2010 State of the World Forum, which is “how to galvanize the public support necessary for the kind of political action required [to address climate change].”

But just *what is* required to mitigate and adapt to climate change?

The website of the State of the World Forum (hereafter called “Forum”) answers variedly, with its 2020 vision to “green the world economy in 10 years,” which, in turn, “requires a complete shift in thinking, values, actions and intentions.” The Forum website also cites the need for planetary integration, calling it “our next industrial revolution,” and remarks:

The Forum will be distinctive in that we will investigate how other crucial domains besides government action, business transformation and reducing carbon emissions will be needed in order to accomplish our goals. To deal effectively with climate change and the collapse of financial systems, our entire societies need transformation. In order to generate the political will for what so urgently needs to be done we must be prepared to change our personal and cultural lives as dramatically as we green our economic and political structures. Only then will we attain the solutions we all seek. (State of the World Forum, n.d.)

All told, these responses speak volumes for the wide-ranging approach the Forum deems necessary to address climate change. I will simply note that environmentalism is arguably too provincial an ideology to meet the challenge we face, inasmuch as dominant factions of the green movement have tended to take a phenomenon (e.g., global warming), define it narrowly as an “environmental” problem, devise a technical solution (e.g., cap-and-trade), and pursue a legislative agenda to effect change (Shellenberger & Nordhaus, 2004).

Likewise, the cognitive frame of *addressing climate change* is itself too narrow-minded to meet the world-changing challenge and opportunity catalyzed by the climate crisis. On the one hand, the threats posed by climate change are “far outside human experience” indeed, and as Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger (2009) observe, polling in the United States consistently reveals a public that is more concerned with other

issues than with global warming. Moreover, the authors note the remarkable stability and inelasticity of U.S. public opinion on global warming despite attempts to raise its salience, even with greater media attention on and scientific understanding of the issue. On the other, more fortunate, hand, Karen O'Brien (2009) observes, "many of the actions and responses needed to avoid dangerous climate change make good sense for other motivations, and thus can appeal to people with diverse and often conflicting perspectives" (p. 6). These characteristics suggest that we would be ill advised to tackle climate change without framing our efforts to green the world economy in terms of something larger, yet paradoxically more approachable, and truly world changing.² That something, I believe, is a *global integral movement*.

Ken Wilber's AQAL-Integralism as Ideology

What I mean to invoke by the phrase "global integral movement" is the broad sweep of psychological, behavioral, cultural, and social phenomena that invite planetary integration and constitute the growing edge of human evolution—what Ken Wilber calls "an integral age at the leading edge" (and discusses at length in an essay by the same title [Wilber, 2002a]). Wilber's AQAL model is unrivaled in its influence on the integral movement at large, and the Forum has adopted AQAL as its framework, or "operating system," in recognition of the framework's ability to help us "change the process by which we approach climate change itself" (State of the World Forum, n.d.). Thus the following inquiry into AQAL, which I will carry out by viewing it through the conceptual lens of ideology (i.e., AQAL as *AQAL-Integralism*).

To be clear, what follows is not an application of the AQAL model per se, nor is it an integral approach to climate change. O'Brien (2009) and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman (2009), among others (see this issue), have already argued for and to a greater or lesser extent articulated such an approach. Rather, I am using the concept of ideology as a heuristic device to undertake a critical and appreciative inquiry of the AQAL model, mining it for ideas we can convert into levers to grow the global integral movement.³

This tack has the potential to be a most fruitful path forward, because rather than taking direct aim at climate change through an integral approach, it seeks leverage points that might change the cultural climate that prevents integral approaches from being legitimated and adopted in the first place.

A Plan

This article is divided into four main sections. The first section lays the foundation for exploring the AQAL model through the lens of ideology. The second section takes up the topic of movement building through the lever of story or narrative, with consideration given to Wilber's "beyond flatland" metanarrative. The third section presents "Camp Obama" as an example of using narrative as a lever for social change and proposes a *public narrative* approach as a model for Forum participants, community activists, and integral leaders to emulate in their climate change initiatives. In the fourth section I conclude by clarifying and contextualizing the main points of the presentation.

This article is an outgrowth of my own nearly decade-long engagement with the AQAL model and integral approaches, which I have engaged primarily through the roles of graduate student in the Integral Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University (JFKU); adjunct professor in the Integral Theory Department at JFKU; professional Integral Coach™ certified by Integral Coaching Canada (ICC); associate organizer of