THE STATE OF THE INTEGRAL ENTERPRISE
Part II: Key Ideas for a World at Risk

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ABSTRACT Given the extraordinary threats facing the world, this article explores the question, "How can integral studies and integral practitioners contribute most effectively to help resolve the great challenges of our time?" This article first explores integral ideas that might be particularly helpful, and then investigates ways in which individual integral practitioners can identify and optimize their own contributions.

KEY WORDS: awakening service; Integral Theory; global threats; karma yoga; perspectives

> Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.
>
> *– General Omar Bradley*

Those of us in the integral movement assume that integral ideas can make significant contributions to the culture, and that part of our work is to implement these ideas and to make them better known.[1] Of course, each of us prioritizes these ideas differently. Let me encourage you to stop for a moment to do an experiential exercise. Take a moment to relax, breathe, or meditate. Then ask yourself, "What integral ideas would most benefit our culture and our world?" Allow your mind to bring to awareness those ideas that you feel are most important to communicate to the larger culture. What follows are seven ideas, actually hypotheses, that seem especially important:

An integral vision is possible, applicable, and valuable. Much could be said about this idea. However, since everyone actively involved in the integral movement bases a significant part of their life on this assumption, we can probably take it as a common tenet of the community.

All perceptions reflect perspectives, and all perspectives are partial and selective. Perception both reveals and conceals, clarifies and obscures. What is crucial to recognize is that all perceptions reflect perspectives, and all perspectives are selective. When this goes unrecognized, problems ensue. For example, to the extent that any perception is not recognized as perspectival—and therefore as partial, selective, and relative—it produces a corresponding experience, worldview, and self-sense that will be assumed to be accurate and correct, and therefore will likely:

- Go unquestioned
- Result in self-deception and delusion

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- Create suffering
- Reinforce one's current belief system and worldview
- Serve a defensive "legitimizing" function (Wilber, 2005) (i.e., it will serve to defend and preserve the current self-sense and developmental level rather than foster further development)

Integral practitioners therefore seek to:

- Recognize unhelpful, partial perspectives, in both themselves and others
- Release and integrate these limited, harmful perspectives into more encompassing (contextually wider and developmentally deeper) metaperspectives and integral-aperspectivalism
- Beyond this, integral practitioners will eventually aim to dissolve all perspectives into pure awareness. From this pure awareness, perspectives can then reemerge. As they reemerge, helpful metaperspectives can be intuitively selected, with their partial perspectival nature recognized, their integral-aperspectival potentials realized, and their spiritual ground remembered (Walsh, 2006)

Integral disciplines therefore can be seen as "perspectival therapies" and integral practitioners as "perspectival therapists." Since understanding and working with perspectives are so central to integral practices (Walsh, 2006; Wilber, 2006a), some key concepts are listed below:

- *Perspectival fixation* is the inability to disidentify from a specific perspective and to assume other perspectives
- *Reframing* is the conscious choice of alternate perspectives. This is a technique used in psychotherapy, and the release from the straightjacket of a fixed, pathogenic perspective by movement to a healthier perspective can be extremely therapeutic (Katz, 2005)
- *Metareframing* is the conscious choice of a metaperspective
- *Metaperspective*—a higher order perspective
- *Perspectival range* is an index of the number of perspectives available
- *Perspectival fluidity* is an index of the capacity to move between perspectives
- *Perspectival skillfulness* is an index of the capacity to recognize and select beneficial perspectives

Adult development is possible. This, too, is an axiom of the integral community. However, it is far from axiomatic in the larger culture. In fact, it is rarely recognized, and the costs are enormous. If the possibility of adult development becomes widely appreciated, it could transform the culture. Its implications are remarkable, and three in particular stand out.

1. *Normality is not the ceiling of human possibilities.* What we have taken to be normality is looking more and more like an unnecessary form of collective developmental arrest. Almost half a century ago, Abraham Maslow wrote, "What

we call normal in psychology is really a psychopathology of the average, so un-dramatic and so widely spread that we don't even recognize it ordinarily" (1968, p. 16). Our psychological maturation has been stunted, yet we do not recognize this stunting. Worse, our psychological maturation has been stunted in part *be-cause* we do not recognize this stunting.

2. *Further levels of development are possible.* In our culture, higher reaches of mental maturation remain almost entirely unrecognized. This means that our highest possibilities, our greatest potentials, our possible powers, go unrecog-nized and unrealized.This has always been a tragedy for individuals. However, at the present time it is also a social and global tragedy. Obviously we need all the maturity we can muster to deal with our contemporary social and global crises. In addition, it is painfully clear that the mental demands of modern life are increasing, and that consequently we often find ourselves "in over our own heads," as the developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1994) titled one of his books. Clearly, we need all our inner resources if we are to ensure the preserva-tion of our species and our planet. The fact that we do not recognize some of the most valuable of these resources puts us all at risk.

3. *Many contemporary cultural conflicts appear to reflect clashes between different developmental levels.* Examples are painfully easy to find. We need only think of the clashes between, for example, red and blue states in the United States, and between fundamentalism and contemporary Western culture in the world at large. In part, these appear to represent clashes between conventional and postconventional communities and their premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews. However, the double tragedy is that these cross-level clashes are not recognized for what they are. Yet when the differing developmental levels underlying culture clashes go unrecognized, then effective communication, rec-onciliation, and healing are extremely difficult (Wilber, 2001).

Spiritual disciplines can catalyze development. A fourth key idea to communicate to the wider culture—that spiritual disciplines can catalyze development—is one of the central claims and aims of contemplative disciplines. Authentic disciplines aim to cultivate those qualities of heart and mind that are most valued by spiritual communities in particular, and by people of good will in general. Traditionally, these were known, of course, as the "virtues." Preliminary research on meditation supports the idea that it can foster certain kinds of development (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). However, two great research projects await us:

1. The first project is to identify precisely which qualities of heart and mind—or more technically, which specific capacities, states, and developmental lines—are enhanced by contemplative practices? Of course, this project will eventually turn out to be far more complex. Eventually the question will become: "Which specific capacities and developmental lines are enhanced by which practices in which people under what conditions?"

2. A second crucial research project will be to discern how to optimize healing and development. In other words, what combination of contemplative, therapeutic,

lifestyle, pharmacological, and other interventions will optimize healing, development, and well-being (Walsh et al., 2009)?

There are two very different kinds of religion. It is rarely recognized that there are two crucially different kinds of religion: *conventional narrative religion* and *transconventional psychotechnologies*. Of course, precise developmental analysis suggests that there are multiple stage-specific varieties of religion (Wilber, 2006b). However, these two kinds are particularly important for us to recognize:

1. *Conventional narrative religion* centers on a story, technically a narrative, that is to be believed. The primary means of salvation is thought to be through belief in this story. Those who believe are saved, and are our brothers and sisters. Those who don't believe are damned, and are heathens to be converted. "Salvation comes from faith" is a central theme of this kind of religion. Integral practitioners recognize this conventional narrative religion as an expression of James Fowler's (1981) stages of "mythic-literal" and "synthetic-conventional" faith. Tragically, this is the only kind of religion that mainstream culture and media usually recognize. Consequently, the second kind of religion is therefore either overlooked, or confused with conventional narrative religion.

2. *Transconventional psychotechnologies*. This second kind of religion focuses on psychotechnologies (i.e., ways of training the mind). The central theme of this kind of religion is that it is possible and necessary to train the mind (and metaphorically the heart) in order to foster mental and spiritual maturation and well-being.

Spiritual disciplines are psychotechnologies. Authentic spiritual disciplines are psychotechnologies (practices) designed to train, tame, transform, and eventually transcend the mind. Their goals are to generate the higher states and stages discovered by the religious founders and exemplars. These higher states and stages are the portals by which we can access higher (or more profound, depending on one's metaphor) qualities of heart and mind. These qualities include unconditional love, transcendental wisdom, and purity of heart—qualities that are among the most valued expressions of human maturity. These qualities of heart and mind are the wellsprings from which flow care and concern for others, and compassionate action in the world.

Notice that these spiritual disciplines or psychotechnologies do not center on belief. When you take up these practices there is no need for blind belief because it is now possible to test spiritual claims for yourself. The laboratory for doing so is the mind: "To see if this be true, look within your own mind." In other words, look to your own experience rather than someone else's dogma.

Authentic spiritual disciplines share common goals and practices. Ours is a new era in many ways. One such way is that for the first time in history, all the world's religious and spiritual traditions are available to us. This means that we can begin to compare and contrast them, and to perform "common factors analyses."

Common factors analyses allow us to distill from diverse traditions the common factors that are central to them all. For example, if we examine the spiritual practices of the so-called "great religions"—the Western

monotheisms, Chinese Taoism and neo-Confucianism, and Buddhism and Hinduism—we can identify common mental qualities and capacities that they aim to foster, as well as common practices that they use to do so. And what we find is that there seem to be seven qualities or capacities of heart and mind that are valued across traditions. Around the world, authentic spiritual traditions regard these seven qualities as central and essential for a life well-lived, for growth to the fullness of human potentials, and for awakening to our true nature (Walsh, 1999).

Moreover, each of the world's great spiritual traditions not only values these seven qualities of heart and mind. It also offers seven families of practices to cultivate them:

1. Transforming motivation
2. Living ethically
3. Strengthening concentration
4. Fostering emotional maturity
5. Refining awareness
6. Cultivating wisdom
7. Offering service

A detailed discussion of these qualities and practices, as well as exercises by which they can be cultivated in daily life, is available in my book, *Essential Spirituality*: *The Seven Central Practices* (2000). Therefore, here I simply offer brief summaries of two practices, transforming motivation and cultivating wisdom, to give a taste of the possibilities.

Transforming Motivation

This practice involves two key components: reducing craving (addiction) and redirecting desires.

Reducing Craving

Each of the world's great religious traditions and their correlative spiritual traditions emphasizes the importance of reducing craving. This is probably best summarized in the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, so I will focus on this tradition here. These truths, which constitute the foundation of Buddhism, argue that:

1. Suffering or dissatisfaction is an inevitable aspect of unenlightened living
2. The cause of this suffering is craving
3. Suffering ends with the end of craving
4. The way to end craving, and therefore suffering, is to follow the Buddhist path of spiritual discipline

Other examples could be given from each of the great religions. However, given space limitations, the following quotation from the great neo-Confucian sage Wang Yang-ming (1969) will have to suffice:

> Thus the learning of the great [person] consists entirely of getting rid of the obscuration of selfish desires…so as to restore the condition of forming one body with

> Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, a condition that is originally so, that is all. (p. 660)

Of course, the central presupposition here runs exactly counter to one of our culture's prime beliefs. This is the belief that more things produce more happiness, a belief carefully nurtured by diverse economic and advertising agencies. Actually, one of the great secrets of life is that no *thing* will ever make you fully and permanently happy. It is the nature of all things that they are transitory, and incapable of offering the deep, enduring sense of satisfaction, that only an experience of our true identity can provide.

Redirecting Desire

The second aspect of transforming motivation is redirecting desire. This redirection is analogous to moving up the yogic chakras or Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The goal is twofold. First, to reduce focus and fixation on lower-order goals (e.g., the "physical five" of money, sex, sensuality, power, and prestige). Second, to replace these with higher-order goals, eventually culminating in desires for self-actualization, self-transcendence, and selfless-service. In Ken Wilber's (1999) terms, all stage-specific goals are actually only "substitute gratifications" that fuel the "Atman project" (i.e., the hopeless attempt to find fulfillment) by seeking stage-specific pleasures. Yet such pleasures never fully satisfy, and are merely stage-specific substitutes for that which alone will fully and enduringly satisfy: our true nature. Spiritual traditions aim to redirect our motivation towards this true nature, which Alan Watts has called our "supreme identity."

It is vital to recognize that this transformation of motivation is not a sacrifice. In fact, the recurrent recognition that the demands of spiritual practices are not, as they first seem, sacrifices, is crucial for spiritual progress. The further one progresses, the further one realizes that spiritual practices such as transforming motivation, living ethically, serving others, and other spiritual practices are not, as we first feared, self-sacrifice. Rather, they are expressions of enlightened self-interest. In the West, the best known expression of this recognition is that of Jesus, "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew, 6:33).

Cultivating Wisdom

> Happy are those who find wisdom…
> She is more previous than jewels,
> And nothing you desire can compare with her…
> Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
> And all her paths are peace…
> Get wisdom, get insight: do not forget.
>
> *– Jewish Torah (Proverbs 3:13, 17, 4:5)*

What is wisdom? This is an ancient and much-debated question, but my personal definition is this: "Wisdom is deep understanding of, and practical skill in responding to, the central, especially existential, issues of life." Whereas knowledge is something you have, wisdom is something you must become. Whereas knowledge comes from acquiring facts, wisdom comes from reflecting on experience, and different kinds of reflection yield different kinds and levels of wisdom. *Life wisdom* comes from reflecting on life experience. *Existential*

wisdom comes from reflecting on the great challenges and mysteries of existence. Theses include the challenges of sickness, suffering and death; the mysteries of the mind, life's meaning and purpose; and questions such as, "What is a good life?" and "How can I live without regrets?" *Transcendental wisdom* comes not primarily from rational reflection, but rather from direct transrational intuition of the Great Mystery—the transcendental Source. This is Judaism's *hokmah*, Buddhism's *prajna*, yoga's *jnana*, Islam's *mar'ifah,* and Christianity's *gnosis*.

One of the most effective methods for cultivating all seven central qualities was, for me, one of the most surprising. I spent three years researching the world's spiritual disciplines and writing *Essential Spirituality: The Seven Central Practices* (2000)*.* During those three years the biggest surprise of all was finding that every tradition agreed that every one of these seven essential qualities could be cultivated by relationships with people who had these qualities. In other words, if you want to develop these qualities, then seek out people who already have them. This is the power of relationships, sangha, and community.

Responding to Global Crises

Our global problems are well known: ecological disruption, population explosion, poverty, weapons, wars, and more. What is crucial to recognize about these contemporary problems is that, for the first time in history, most of them are human caused—they stem in large part from our individual and collective behavior. This means that in significant ways they therefore reflect psychological forces and factors within us and between us (i.e., the disturbed state of the world reflects a disturbed state of mind). What this means is that our global problems are actually global symptoms. That is, they are symptoms of our individual and collective immaturities and pathologies, putting us in a race between consciousness and catastrophe.

Clearly, we need to feed the hungry, care for the environment, and reduce nuclear stockpiles. Yet at the same time we need to address the underlying factors that created these problems in the first place. To date, however, most large-scale responses have been political, economic, or military. These are often essential, but by themselves, likely to be insufficient. We obviously need to address multiple causative factors. That means we need to address both internal and external, individual and collective factors. In short, we need an integral approach. How can we do this?

The Crucial Question

The longer we reflect on the question of how best to respond to contemporary crises, the more it dawns on us that the really crucial question is, "What can I do?" Yet there is a still deeper question below. That deeper question is, "What is the most strategic thing I can do?" In other words, given my unique talents and circumstances, what is the optimal contribution I can make? How can I most effectively leverage my knowledge, skills, and situation to be of most help? To answer this question effectively, we must first recognize that there are actually two very different kinds of questions. There are what we might call *knowledge questions* and *wisdom questions*. Knowledge questions have a one-time answer. For example, "What is the temperature today?" As soon as you have the answer, that is the end of the question. Wisdom questions are potentially bottomless, and function more like koans. Each time a wisdom question is asked, it can potentially lead deeper into the self and into reality, and can unveil new levels of understanding, no one of which is final. The question, "What is the most strategic contribution I can make?" is a wisdom question. Each time we ask it, further kinds of un-

derstanding and guidance can be revealed. As such it will be with us for a long time, perhaps for a lifetime.

Ideally, service will feel rewarding, and there are certain general principles that make any kind of service more rewarding. First, it should draw and attract us; second, it makes use of our unique talents and capacities; and third, it brings satisfaction. As integral practitioners, our challenge is to recognize and heal partial perspectives in both ourselves and others by bringing more encompassing, developmentally deeper, and ever more integral perspectives to bear on the issues of our time. However, one's capacity to apply more integral perspectives depends on one's developmental maturity. Therefore, a crucial requirement for integral practitioners is—and this is clearly a central and recurrent theme—to foster our own psychological and spiritual maturation. Our goal is to optimize health, as best we can, at our current level (healthy translation), while fostering development to higher levels (healthy transformation). This means, once again, that we need to engage in effective transformative disciplines as fully as we can. But how do we do this while working and contributing?

Karma Yoga and Awakening Service

Fortunately, there is a millennia old discipline designed to do just this, and it is the discipline of karma yoga. This is the yoga of transforming one's work in the world into spiritual practice. When this work is service oriented, we might call this the practice of "awakening service." According to Sri Aurobindo (1922), karma yoga is the art of transforming "the whole act of living into an uninterrupted Yoga..." (p. 283). How is this done? There are three key elements:

1. Before beginning any action, the activity is offered with the understanding that it will be done in the service of a higher goal. Traditionally, the activity was offered to God. However, it can also be done for other higher-order goals and goods such as the welfare and awakening of all. The key to this first step is aspiring or praying that the activity be done for a transegoic purpose that transcends the gratification and reinforcement of one's own ego.
2. One then attempts to do the activity as impeccably as possible, while adhering to the transcendental goal.
3. The third element adds a paradoxical twist, and makes karma yoga or awakening service such a powerful practice. In this third step, while working as fully and wholeheartedly as possible for the goal, one simultaneously attempts to release attachment to the outcome. That is, one attempts to release any egocentric craving that the outcome should match one's personal goals. (Walsh, 1999)

Karma yoga or awakening service is a powerful way of transforming one's work and contributions in the world into deep spiritual practice. In doing karma yoga, we go into ourselves to go more effectively out into the world, and we go out into the world in order to go deeper into ourselves, until inner exploration and outer service become one.

Conclusion

We live in a time of unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Never before have we had the power to

imperil our species and our planet. And never before have we had the power to heal our species, and to bring people to new levels of prosperity, well-being, health, and maturity. The choices our generation makes will determine whether we leave behind us an evolving civilization and a fertile earth, or a failed species and a plundered planet. We have the power to do both. Part of the power available to us is the integral vision. It is our remarkable privilege to be able to realize this vision ourselves, to embody and express it in our lives, to use it to better understand the world, and to let it use us as willing instruments to help heal our world. What greater privilege could there be than to use this profound vision to play our role to serve, help, heal, and awaken all beings?

Acknowledgements

N O T E S

[1] I have tried to preserve the conversational nature of my keynote presentation at the Integral Theory Conference (August 7-10, 2008, Pleasant Hill, CA), upon which this article is based. Details and citations have been added where appropriate.

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