INTEGRAL SERVICE
Part 1: A Central Discipline for All Integral Practitioners

Roger Walsh

ABSTRACT Self-actualization and service are core motives for integral practitioners and probably, though often unrecognized, for all people. How to best use integral ideas to optimize this actualization of self and service of others is therefore a central life question for all integral practitioners. This article provides one answer by identifying principles for skillful application of integral ideas. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of performing an integral analysis on problematic issues, of recognizing underlying assumptions, of offering helpful alternative perspectives and meta-perspectives, and providing a vision of potentials and possibilities. As a specific example, the article examines how we can expand views of love from superficial cultural myths to a more mature, life- and love-enhancing transpersonal vision.

KEY WORDS integral , love, self-actualization, service, perspective

At the beginning of the What Next Conference, something very beautiful happened.[1] On the first evening our conference facilitator, Diane Hamilton, asked us to form small groups and to explore what we shared in common. Our group concluded that what we shared was an aspiration to actualize and to serve. When Diane asked the audience how many other people shared that aspiration, all 400 people stood up. It was an exquisite moment of mutual recognition, and it forms the foundation for this article, which is based on a presentation at that conference.

I was invited to look at "what's next" for the integral movement and community. Clearly, one thing that is next for us is to explore the question: How can we use the Integral framework to actualize ourselves as fully as possible so as to serve as effectively as possible? This is a contemporary integral version of the timeless Buddhist Bodhisattva aspiration.

Of course, there is no one correct or final answer to this question because it is a particular kind of question: a wisdom question. It is important to recognize there are two distinct kinds of questions: those that seek knowledge and those that seek wisdom.

- *Knowledge questions* seek information and have a one time answer (e.g., What's the temperature? Look at the thermometer and the question is answered).
- *Wisdom questions*, however, are more like koans. Rather than simple information, they seek insight and understanding. Moreover, they can be asked repeatedly, because every repetition can unveil deeper insights and understandings of the question, ourselves, and reality.

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[1] The What Next Conference took place December 28, 2012, to January 1, 2013, in Denver, Colorado.

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The question of how we can use the Integral framework to actualize ourselves as fully as possible so as to serve as effectively as possible is a profound wisdom question, and one we will probably be asking for the rest of our lives.

What I would like to do in this article is to help ponder this question. To do this, we need to map some of the many integral projects and possibilities on the horizon, and then use them to identify the common activities that all of us as integral practitioners are involved in. This will allow us to explore our common work.

What Next?
Integral Possibilities

The many integral possibilities and emerging projects can be divided into practical and theoretical projects. *Practical projects* will consist primarily of applications, such as the application of integral perspectives to fields such as medicine, politics, ecology, and third-world development. *Theoretical possibilities* are especially of two types: the elaboration of Integral Theory, and the meeting with other theories. When different theories meet, there are four possible outcomes:

1. Mutual enrichment (which will hopefully always occur).
2. Identification of common factors (what ideas, dimensions, levels, etc., do the theories hold in common?)
3. Assimilative integration: Here elements of one theory are assimilated and integrated into another theory. Encompassing metatheories do this routinely, and thereby enrich and enlarge themselves.
4. The formation of new integral fields and disciplines. When an integral framework enriches a pre-existing discipline sufficiently we see the birth of new integral disciplines, such as Integral Ecology, Integral Diversity Theory, and Integral Philosophy (Gregory & Raffanti, 2009; Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009; Schwartz & Esbjörn-Hargens, 2013).

The meeting of theories sounds like an utterly abstract intellectual enterprise. However, it can actually be an intensely emotional confrontation. Think of the emotional reactions that people have to Integral Theory—how excited we get, and how angry and defensive some other people get. It's therefore important for integralists to know why people react so strongly to theories, since all of us teach Integral Theory, either explicitly or implicitly. To understand these reactions we need to understand how we construct and relate to our theories and beliefs.

The Power of Theories and Beliefs

Each of constructs a network of theories about ourselves, other people, and the world. Together these constitute our worldview, or what the philosopher Willard Quine called our "web of belief." When we do not recognize a theory as simply a theory, then we assume it to be true and it becomes our belief system.

Our personal worldview and beliefs have enormous creative power (Hedlund-de Witt, 2013). They create what existentialists call our "fundamental meaning structure" through which we view and give meaning to ourselves, other people, and all phenomena. They also determine our values, priorities, and what Jean-Paul Sartre called our "fundamental project." Then, too, our beliefs also constitute our identity and self-concept (i.e., who and what we believe we are). Finally, they tend to act as self-fulfilling prophecies.

With this background, we can now explore four ideas that in my experience are very important to know about what happens when people holding different theories and belief systems interact.

1. It is not possible to *not* teach your belief system. In each interaction you are implicitly communicating and teaching who and what you believe you are, who and what you believe the other person is, and your understanding of reality.
2. When you do not share someone's belief system, you weaken it.
3. People's belief systems center on who and what they think they are (i.e., on their self-concept). Therefore, weakening a person's belief system is experienced as a survival threat because you've threatened the survival of the person's self-concept. The best summary of these principles that I know comes from the curiously titled but profound Christian text, *A Course in Miracles*, which states: "What you must recognize is that when you do not share a thought system, you are weakening it. Those who believe in it therefore perceive this as an attack on them. This is because everyone identifies himself with his thought system, and every thought system centers on what you believe you are" (Anonymous, 1992, p. 106).
4. People will fight to the death to preserve their self-concept. Not so long ago men fought "duals of honor" in which they would kill and die to defend their self-image as an honorable man. Likewise, "a good captain goes down with his ship."

How amazing! People will die to preserve their self-concept because that is what they assume their self to be. This assumptive conceptual identity remains largely unquestioned until people mature to transpersonal stages, such as Susanne Cook-Greuter's (2010) Concept-Aware and Ego-Aware stages, when they begin to disidentify from their belief systems and self-concept.

The above ideas are important because they come into play whenever people with different theories meet, and the meeting of Integral Theory with other theories is clearly going to be a major part of "what's next." Therefore, we need to interact with people invested in other theories very sensitively, skillfully, and humbly, always remembering three things:

1. We might be wrong.
2. There is always something we can learn from other theories.
3. Theories matter personally, interpersonally, and culturally. As the psychologist Gordon Allport (1964) observed: "By their own theories of human nature psychologists have the power of elevating or degrading that same nature. Debasing assumptions debase human beings; generous assumptions exalt them" (p. 36).

When We Apply Integral Theory, What are We Actually Doing?

I want to suggest that we will usually do five things when we apply integral theory in order to help, heal or teach (i.e., when we do integral service). These five are: 1) integral analysis and diagnosis; 2) providing information; 3) identifying assumptions; 4) offering alternative perspectives; and 5) offering a vision of potentials and possibilities. Let's explore these five elements of integral service in more detail.

1. *Integral Analysis and Diagnosis*

In any situation, one of our first steps will be to apply the Integral framework, or Integral Operating System, to perform an integral analysis. The goal is to determine which methods, quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types are being recognized and employed, and which are being inappropriately overlooked. This will provide an "integral diagnosis" that will inform subsequent contributions.

2. Providing Information

A second contribution is to provide missing information and ideas. Sometimes, but not always, this will include explicit information about Integral Theory.

3. Identifying Assumptions

Our assumptions are enormously important. When they go unrecognized they become beliefs that form the foundations and set the limits of our self-concept, belief system, and worldview. Very importantly, assumptive beliefs tend to operate as self-fulfilling prophecies. As the famous car maker Henry Ford put it, "Whether you think you can or think you can't—you're right." Therefore, we need to identify underlying assumptions, especially limiting assumptions, both in us and in the people, organizations, and cultures with which we work.

How do we identify assumptions? We do what Ken Wilber calls "preduction." Whereas *deduction* uses assumptions to identify conclusions, *preduction* uses conclusions to identify assumptions and make them conscious. Then, and only then, is it possible to disidentify *from* them, and then look *at* them rather than look *through* them. In other words, they become the object of awareness rather than the subject of awareness. Only then can we examine, evaluate, and transform them. In psychotherapy, this process of identifying, evaluating, and transforming assumptions is the basis of cognitive therapy.

Without recognizing and transforming underlying assumptions one ends up dealing only with surface symptoms rather than with underlying causes. Yet addressing only symptoms leads to resistance and ineffectiveness. For example, suppose you are consulting to an organization where a CEO seems to be creating endless rules to try to deal with virtually all possible situations. Simply arguing against having so many rules will likely be ineffective because the underlying assumptions which led to the rules remain unaddressed. However, a little preductive analysis might uncover assumptions that people cannot be trusted: assumptions that will likely poison the CEO's interpersonal relationships and organizational culture. Transforming these assumptions may therefore have widespread benefits.

4. Shifting Perspectives: Perspectival Therapy

The fourth element of integral service centers on one of the most important emerging ideas in Integral Theory: the appreciation of the enormous power of perspectives (Fuhs, 2010; Walsh, 2009). Our perspectives determine what we perceive and what we overlook and, like the beliefs in which they are grounded, tend to operate as self-fulfilling prophecies. Appreciation of the power of perspective quickly reveals that many of our individual, social, and global problems are largely caused by limited and limiting perspectives. In short, our perspectives enact our world.

Recognizing and adopting more skillful perspectives—which we might call *perspectival therapy*—lies at the heart of integral practice and service. It involves helping each other recognize and adopt more helpful, healthful, and mature perspectives because "the root developmental achievement that underlies every domain of social cognitive development is perspective taking" (Lapsley, 2006, p. 58). From his research on faith development, James Fowler (2000) concluded, "We have seen in the description of people's development from one stage to another that each new stage brings a qualitative expansion in perspective taking" (p. 55).

Adopting more helpful, healthful, and mature perspectives involves recognizing *perspectival fixation* (i.e., fixed limiting perspectives, and ultimately all perspectival fixation is limiting) and reframing, which is the conscious choice of an alternative and more helpful perspective. The most dramatic example of perspectival reframing in my clinical experience was of a "bad trip," specifically an anxiety attack after ingesting LSD. A skillful therapist said to the patient, "You say you are feeling anxious. Yet you are in a safe environment in a nice room with supportive people. Is there any possibility that you're actually experiencing excite-

ment?" The result was immediate and dramatic. Almost instantaneously, the patient's mood transformed from anxiety to intense excitement.

Meta-reframing can be even more helpful. This is the conscious choice, not just of a helpful alternative perspective, but of a helpful higher-order perspective. This higher-order perspective looks at and reframes not just the original experience, but also the original perspective. For example, consider a dialogue with someone at a green altitude who says, "All viewpoints are equally valuable." A valuable meta-reframe might be, "Well, that's one viewpoint. It's a viewpoint that arises at a specific stage of development, and there are developmental stages and viewpoints beyond that."

In doing perspectival therapy we are aiming to foster new perspectival capacities in both ourselves and others. These capacities include especially reframing and meta-reframing, which in turn depend on *perspectival fluidity* (i.e., the ability to move easily among different perspectives and to see things from different viewpoints). This is analogous to the Buddhist psychology mental quality of "agility," which is the opposite of perspectival fixation, and is a function of nonattachment to a specific viewpoint. They also depend on *perspectival skillfulness*, which I define as the ability to recognize, select, and adopt helpful perspectives (Walsh, 2009). Sri Aurobindo's biographer gave a beautiful account of perspectival maturation as follows:

> And yet if we only knew how each loss of one's viewpoint is a progress and how life changes when one passes from the stage of the closed truth to the stage of the open truth—a truth like life itself, too great to be trapped by points of view, because it embraces every point of view…a truth great enough to deny itself and pass endlessly into a higher truth. (Satprem, 1968, p. 84)

What is the end point of perspectival maturation? One idea, beautifully enunciated by Satprem, is that there is no end point. Rather, perspectival maturation allows a neverending openness to ever more rich and integral perspectives. A complementary idea, offered by the Buddhist philosopher Stephen Batchelor (2000), is that "what characterizes an awakened perspective is the awareness that any dogmatic position is incompatible with freedom" (p. 67). I would reword this and say that one characteristic of mature perspectives is the recognition that any perspectival fixation limits freedom.

But beyond even perspectival flexibility and openness is the possibility of becoming transperspectival. Deep contemplative practice will eventually allow all perspectives to dissolve into pure awareness. As perspectives (and practitioners) reemerge from pure awareness, helpful meta-perspectives can be intuitively selected, their partial perspectival focus can be recognized, and their spiritual ground remembered.

5. *Offer a Vision of Potentials and Possibilities*

In the words of Oliver Markley (1976), "The underlying images held by a culture or person have an enormous influence on the fate of the holder" (p. 214). So, the fifth thing we want to offer when performing integral service is a vision of potentials and possibilities, because a positive vision of possibilities can be enormously attractive and pull people toward their actualization. Therefore, it is valuable to point not just to problems and their limitations—a recurrent trap in many relationships and psychotherapies—but to also offer a vision of possibilities and ways in which this vision might be realized. Integral Theory offers us a large framework with which to envision and enact unusually positive and comprehensive possibilities.

The above are five general principles and practices that all of us are likely to use as we do integral services and attempt to bring an integral vision to the world. So far, this discussion has been rather abstract. Let's ground it now in a practical example of how we might respond to one of the most neglected issues of our time: the nature and cultivation of virtues such as ethics, wisdom, and particularly love.

Transforming Cultural Views of Love

Our culture suffers from tragically constricted and superficial views of love, so an obvious question is, "How can we help heal these views?" I want to suggest that one of the quickest ways of effecting cultural change is to look for strategic ideas: ideas that have the potential for producing significant beneficial change. Of course, exactly what makes an idea strategic and "sticky," to use Malcolm Gladwell's (2000) term, is a complex four-quadrant question (Wilber, 2000, pp. 146-147). Fortunately, for the purpose of our example, it is best to keep things simple.

What follows are six key ideas and understandings that could transform common cultural understandings of love, and thereby transform culture itself. Notice that these ideas are stated very simply: there are no technical integral terms and no sophisticated logic. Rather, they are stated in a way that anyone can understand so as to reach the widest possible audience. However, you will recognize the integral ideas and educational processes underlying each, such as preductive and assumptive analysis, providing information, reframing and perspectival therapy, and offering a vision of further possibilities.

1. *Our contemporary cultural understanding of love is tragically superficial and constricted*.

This understanding is largely a Hollywood-fueled fantasy that focuses primarily on romantic infatuation and its attendant drama, to the exclusion of virtually all other varieties, depths, and possibilities of love. If you turn on the radio and listen to a "love song," you will quickly get a lesson in the pathos and pathology of romantic infatuation. You will hear such mournful lines as "I can't stop thinking about you. I feel terrible when I can't have you. All I want to do is be with you. I break out in goose bumps thinking about you." These are the symptoms of heroin addiction! Our culture has conflated love and addiction. Worse, it often assumes that this is all that love can be. Clearly, one crucial goal is to foster the awareness that there is far more to love than this.

2. *There are many varieties of love*.

Two thousand years ago the Greeks distinguished between *eros* (romantic love), *philia* (benevolent love between friends), and *agape* (a pure love that transcends egocentric needs). Other cultures make similar distinctions, such as the Buddhist distinction between *metta* (a beneficent love that centers on the well-being of the beloved) and *metta's* "near enemy" of "passion," which at first glance can look like *metta*, but is actually more egocentric and need-driven.

3. *Love can be far deeper and more profound than is usually appreciated*.

Love can extend and deepen beyond egocentric and ethnocentric limits into a boundless spiritual love that embraces all people and even all life, unconditionally and unreservedly.

4. *Love is a skill; in fact, it is one of life's greatest skills*.

The conventional view sees love as passive, as something that happens to you under specific circumstances. If someone looks the right way, says the right things, treats you appropriately, and loves you, then and only then you can feel love. Such love is circumstantial, conditional, passive, and specific. This is a tragically passive view of love. Our culture has not yet learned that love is a capacity, a skill that can be practiced, developed, deepened, and matured. This is a far more active and empowering

view which acknowledges our potentials for loving more actively, fully, effectively, and choicefully.

5. *There exist specific practices to cultivate love.*
The great religions are untapped goldmines of techniques and practices to cultivate love. These practices not only foster the capacity for love, but can ultimately lead to the recognition of nondual love as our true nature. For the first time in history we now have available to us all the world's spiritual traditions and all their practices for the cultivation of love. As yet this priceless heritage remains virtually unexplored in the West. However, it is possible to discern the general kinds and principles of practices. In general, they fall into three main classes of practices (Walsh, 1999).

- The reduction of obstacles to love: For example, the reduction of obstacles such as greed, fear, anger, and jealousy through practices such as forgiveness.
- Fostering supportive qualities of heart and mind: For example, fostering qualities such as gratitude, empathy, and happiness through practices such as saying grace.
- The direct cultivation of love: For example, visualizing or focusing on loving people.

6. *There is a vision of mature love.*
This is a vision of what love can be and of the changes that occur as people mature in their capacity to love. In general, as people grow in their capacity to love, then love seems to become:

- Stronger and more frequent
- More enduring: Love gradually shifts from a transient state to an enduring trait, from a brief epiphany to part of personality, or as Huston Smith so eloquently put it, "from flashes of illumination to abiding light."
- Spontaneous: Love becomes increasingly independent of situations and circumstances and instead arises spontaneously.
- Expanding scope: Gradually love becomes more encompassing until eventually it becomes boundless and all embracing.
- More pure (i.e., less contaminated by conflicting motives and emotions such as greed, need, anger, or jealousy).
- Stable: This is the enduring unconditional love such as parents may feel for children, and saints for humankind.
- Recognition: Mature stages may come to the recognition that love is actually an aspect and expression of our True Identity, and an appropriate way of responding to the True Identity of others. This transpersonal love then becomes a natural, spontaneous, and utterly appropriate way of being, and of responding to all people. This is the Christian *agape,* Hindu *bhakti,* Confucian *ren*, and Buddhist *metta*. Just how profound spiritual love can become is suggested by Hinduism, where *bhakti* culminates in "*para-bhakti*, the supreme love of God, wherein nothing exists save God and the consciousness of unity with God" (Schumacher & Woerner, 1989, p. 32).

What an extraordinary gift it would be for us all if integral practitioners brought this awareness of love and the means to accomplish it to the world.

Acknowledgements

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