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ASSUMPTIONS VERSUS ASSERTIONS *Separating Hypotheses from Truth in the Integral Community*

Susanne Cook-Greuter

ABSTRACT This article raises some fundamental concerns about the current integral movement and its assertions about what we know and what is going to happen in the future. Many integral adherents seem to be attracted to the “good news” aspects of the integral message. The idea that more of every kind is better pervades recent writings: more cognitive complexity, more beauty, more goodness, more truth. This overlooks the fact that access to more complexity and interpretive power has just as much potential for self-delusion, ego inflation, and large-scale disregard for people as it has the potential for benefitting and uplifting humanity. Furthermore, a challenge is issued regarding the idea that humanity is on the verge of a major shift in human consciousness, and that, as a group, the integral community is going to “change the world.”

KEY WORDS cognition; consciousness; linguistics; human development; integral studies

Recently, I have felt a clear shift away from the inquiry mode that originally attracted me to integral ideas to many of its current pronouncements and certainty. As an elder in the integral community, I feel called to share my observation about the integral field and its currents at the risk of being labeled demoralizing pessimist. I tend to see myself instead as a seasoned realist. As a researcher, I want to be clear about the difference between what we can know and assert and what is mere conjecture about the future as extrapolated in a linear way from what we know so far. For the current purpose, I take on a decidedly Western, rational perspective. This does not mean that I do not also have access to post-rational and transcendent experiences and perspectives. As a researcher in ego development, I am keenly aware of all the ways we can fool ourselves. I thus want to address some concepts rarely mentioned in integral circles, namely the role of *language* and of *polar opposites* in meaning-making.

I will postulate that much of the “certainty” expressed and the “pride” that some people feel by identifying as integral practitioners may be an expression of ego’s central function to tell a coherent story and to make us the heroes in it. I appreciate the youthful, upbeat, and forward-moving energy that animates much of the integral endeavor while I wonder about its unconscious and inherent anthropocentric perspective. So let’s take a deep breath and dive into these choppy waters.

Introduction

Let me start with a deep bow to Ken Wilber. I prize the AQAL model as an elegant, robust, and useful framework. I definitely use it at least implicitly as a powerful means to do cleaner and more inclusive reflection and research (Cook-Greuter, 2005). The worldwide integral community continues to inspire me with its conscious and heartfelt applications of Integral Theory to alleviate human suffering.

I also understand that holding a statistically rarer, postconventional perspective affirms one’s specialness. Yet I cannot imagine that I am the only one who feels a sense of concern around the current proclama-

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tions of our “greatness” and the attending drive for raising the consciousness of all. Not all of this seems to come from a genuine compassion for all sentient beings in the way the Bodhisattva vow calls for. Therefore, my remarks will try and elucidate some aspects of Integral Theory that may be either excluded or hidden from view or favored and put in the foreground. I do this with an invitation to all of us to keep expanding our compassion and to become aware of how easily we can get attached to noble ideals.

I speak to you as someone who grew up in a bilingual family in multilingual Switzerland. There, my first academic training was in *semantics*—that branch of linguistics that explores how word meanings get constructed and change over time. This early training has influenced my fascination with meaning-making ever since. I am curious about what drives our need for meaning and how this need to understand relates to adult development theory and our expanding sense of self. My 30 years of research has shown just how readily the ego, in its identification as a separate self, will usurp any content in order to boost itself and make itself feel more potent and indispensable (Trungpa, 1987). This includes a tendency to adopt any ideology that a) resonates with our own ideals and yearnings, b) gives us a sense of power and belonging, and c) promises us a sense of immortality.

Finally, I speak to you as someone whose signature strengths have been courage, curiosity, and skepticism.¹ In this paper you will mainly hear my critical voice in order to draw attention to what is not often named in integral discourse. The more certain representatives of any “ism” are of having found the final answer, the more I react with apprehension. Certainty and knowing are regularly signs of a less seasoned ego at play, while embracing ambiguity and mystery are generally signs of more mature self-awareness. Language awareness, familiarity with ego development, and a questioning attitude toward certainty will thus be my guides in the following remarks.

The Centrality of Language In Meaning-Making

First, let me reflect on language and its role in the reification of human experience. When we recognize how language acts as a main force in socializing and civilizing us, we may come to see our basic assumptions about reality in a more sober light. As language I include all symbolic representations in whatever shape and form. All systems of notation or representation are shorthand for transmitting knowledge and experiences among people. Without such symbolic representations, today’s global commerce and instant information exchange could not exist.

Natural language seems to be the universal means by which we humans learn, communicate, and transmit accumulated knowledge to each other from generation to generation. As far as we know, there is no society that does not have a language and a concomitant set of explanations or stories for where we come from, why we exist, how we fit into nature, and what our purpose is as human beings.

According to current linguistic theory, each culture and each speech community divides the original, unstructured experiential continuum in different ways according to its specific traditions, beliefs, needs, and imagination as well as its context. Each group uses its particular language to induct new members into the reality view that it embodies. At the most basic level, each discourse community transmits its accepted answers to our fundamental questions about life. It provides an orientation map by channeling our attention to what is important and thus conceptualized and labeled and, by omission, what is outside its radar.

Children are molded to become members of their relative speech community from the day they are born.² Through relentless modeling of culturally specific behaviors and language, children learn to differentiate and categorize their surroundings into specific, labeled objects. All distinctions and words one acquires become part of one’s reality—a culture-specific way of parsing the otherwise buzzing confusion of sensual perceptions. By about age 3, most children use language as their primary means of communication and learning. They also know what is valued in their family and what is considered appropriate behavior, thinking, and feeling, and what is not. For most of us such knowledge becomes tacit. We generally cannot remember our

own preverbal existence or how we acquired our native tongue. Most people cannot remember how they were socialized into a particular view of reality and how they came to value what is to be considered significant in life. Very few people develop an insight into how we form, sometimes reform, and even transform our self-identities over time, that is, what stories we tell about who we are as individuals, as members of various groups, and finally as members of the human race. Even rarer is the discovery that all such explanations are stories about ourselves, not actually true selves.

By using a shared vocabulary, metaphors, and stories we assure ourselves that we matter, while at the same time affirming the cohesiveness and viability of our group. Having such mental orientation maps seems indispensable because they provide us with rules and scripts for action, and because they help us to navigate the straights of human experience.

It seems reasonable to conclude that in order to grow into adults it is not sufficient to have what Steven Pinker (1994) describes as the language instinct. There is every indication that human beings are essentially social beings. We only grow in the company of other human beings who transmit to us the culturally given definitions of who we are, who we can become, and what does and does not count as “real.”

Once we have absorbed a specific view of reality, it tends to become the only reality for us as it filters out rivaling possibilities. As Howard Rheingold (1988) put it: “Although it is rarely visible to us, we carry around in our heads a conceptual map of the world, a guidebook to rightness and wrongness, ugliness and beauty, value and worthlessness” (p. 72). Most people, especially monolingual speakers, are unaware of what I like to call the language habit and the culture-specific framing of reality that comes with it (Cook-Greuter, 1995).

In the West, constructivist developmental theories have proven to be especially powerful in chronicling how people can differ in the capacity to understand themselves and reality by gaining an ever-greater perspective on the process of meaning-making itself. Each stage in ego development theory describes a different orientation map, a different story about what to pay attention to and how to make sense of experience. Nonetheless, no matter how comprehensive our personal orientation maps may become, they are deeply flavored by the cultural, geographic, and historical contexts we live in along with our personal history, physical and mental constitution, and life conditions.

Being able to use specific terms correctly and to agree on their meaning creates a sense of empowerment and belonging. There are many adult contexts that have their own unique take on reality, which is reflected in the professional jargon that accompany them. The integral setting and various spiritual communities are no different in this regard. Having access to their shared terminology subtly, and often not so subtly, excludes those who do not know the special lingo. Phrases such as “multiperspectival,” “post-metaphysical,” and “tetra-arise” signal to us and to outsiders that we are familiar with Wilber’s philosophy and/or that we are members of the integral movement who are in the know.

Before I continue, let me reiterate: By using a shared vocabulary we continuously assure ourselves and each other of what makes sense. With every word uttered, we reinforce the shared conceptual map of our world. We use language to identify the concrete objects and events around us and to tell the stories of our group and of ourselves. I suggest that the propensity to be conditioned by the available interpretations in our environment remains active throughout our lives and in all realms of experience.

Alfred Korzybsky (1948) first referred to reality as the underlying “territory” existing prior to the human mapping of it. He warned us not to confuse the territory with the maps we are making of it. In my observation, to become conscious of reality as an undifferentiated whole beyond separating it into named object is a conscious aspect of late-stage insight. For many, this unity is most often tasted during meditation or in transcendent states and peak experiences.

Herb Koplowitz (1984) explained the territory-map distinction and the difference between the immediate, underlying unity and the language-mediated human descriptions of it as follows: “...reality is undifferentiated. It is the process of naming or measuring that pulls that which is named out of reality, which itself is

not nameable or measurable” (p. 282).

Thus we deal with abstractions in language. *Abstrahere* literally means “pulled out from” and definition, from *de-finis*, means putting a boundary where there was none before. Thus it is possible to recognize the fundamental unity of the underlying territory and the arbitrariness of all definitions and maps about it.³ Wilber too has made this argument in *No Boundaries* (1985). Beauty and ugliness, good and evil are interdependent concepts, two sides of the same coin only existing as abstractions from the seamless ground. We cannot reasonably refer to one without awareness of its opposite. Many of the world’s spiritual traditions seem to agree that the privileging of one side of any polarity creates much of the very suffering that permeates human experience.

Any object is formed by segmenting the undivided continuum into separate entities: the object itself (what it is), and the background against which it has been differentiated (what it is not). That also applies to self-identity, to what I consider to be “me” and “not me.” Recognizing that the boundary is constructed is a first step in questioning the distinctions we have assumed to be natural and objective throughout most of our lives. Once we are aware of the constructed nature of the boundaries we can explore and develop a more open relationship to them. In ego development research we observe that what once was distinct and “other” can become a conscious part of ourselves with increasing maturity and integration.

The discovery of the constructed nature of reality can be gained in several ways: One of them emerges naturally as a consequence of our capacity to watch our own minds and our meaning-making. I named this level of understanding *Construct-aware* because of its characteristic preoccupation with language as a filter of reality and its focus on map making. Language is also the main means by which we develop and communicate the paradoxical aspects of human existence. I will get back to the topic of ego and its story-telling function in a last section of this talk.

Language as an Expression of the Human Spirit

In the context of the Integral Theory Conference, the language of communication is English. We all use it more or less fluently to communicate with each other. English has become the de facto world language, the lingua franca of the 21st century. It is rapidly spreading and colonizing worldwide trade and exchange. What concerns me is that there is an abundance of vital human experience and wisdom out in the world we are not privy to because we do not have access to the reality conceptions formed and the knowledge accumulated over centuries of oral transmission in some areas of the world.

Just think of the fact that almost everyone hearing this traffics in one of the languages belonging to the Indo-European language family that originates in Sanskrit. According to Wikipedia estimates, more than 40% of the world’s people speak an Indo-European language from Hindi to Russian.⁴ Although not visible to most native English speakers, each language that was developed in remote areas of the world may see very different realities from ours and articulate its conception of life in powerfully different ways.

Wade Davis (2009), in his eye-opening book *The Wayfinders*, describes the richness of the human language pool as follows:

Together the myriad cultures and languages make up an intellectual and spiritual web of life that envelops the planet and is every bit as important to the well-being of it as the biosphere. You might think of this social web of life as the “ethnosphere.” This term is best defined as a the sum total of all thoughts and intuitions, myths and beliefs, ideas and inspirations brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness. (p. 2)

Davis goes on to deplore the rapid loss of languages and with them the loss of culturally diverse stories about

what it means to be a human being. As speakers of rare languages die out and more and more people share information via English, a vast treasure of past human answers to why and how we exist is being permanently lost. You may ask why the loss of diverse languages and the richness of human expression they embody should be mourned. I paraphrase Davis: A language is not merely a set of grammatical rules or a vocabulary. It is a flash of the human spirit, the vehicle by which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Each language is a watershed of thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities.

For those of you curious about these alternative views of reality, there is a whole literature out there attempting to communicate just how different a conception some cultures have of what it means to be a human being. No longer do we dismiss such alternative interpretation of reality as necessarily “primitive,” as once was the custom in Western anthropology.⁵ But in many cases, our interest comes too late.

I ask you therefore: Are we not amiss in perspective-taking if we do not also pay attention to these very different conceptions of life as they too are genuine forms of spirit and its variety of expression in human beings? I do wonder to what degree the integral community is aware of these wider possibilities of our rich interpretive heritage.

I wonder further what we lose by focusing merely on Anglo-Saxon conceptions of reality. Several of the originators of integral thought in the United States appear to be monolingual. Like fish in water, they are not even aware of how the linear structure of English may itself influence how they parse experience and how they think and express their theories.⁶ The AQAL model, for example, separates human experience into four distinct quadrants with exteriors and interiors. It is true that the quadrants are said to co-arise and influence each other. Yet overall the model is taught with its components treated as separate entities. To wit, it is now possible to become a certified AQAL expert, someone who holds the correct and only legitimate view of the theory and its concepts. AQAL too—an originally dynamic and fecund theory—is herewith in danger of becoming ossified.

As speakers of English, our thought is generally characterized by linearity, as the word order is inflexible. We rely on an analytical process of differentiation, and on clear subject-object divisions. We tend to define the growth of the mind by its capacity to make ever finer distinctions and by categorizing the information into ever more complex, logically organized ways. In addition, in English we talk about the world in terms of objects more often than in dynamic terms. Just try this little experiment. Make a “fist” and look at this thing. Now open it. Where has the “fist” gone?

The view of language presented here assumes that all named abstract objects are human constructs. Hence, notions such as quadrants, types, and lines are invented concepts to describe phenomena that some group of people agrees upon makes sense in describing their experience. They are not to be taken, however, as the only way one can understand and respond to life. If any such abstract definitions are taken as absolutes and true representations of reality, we have a case of confusing the map with the territory.⁷

The evolutionary conception of reality in the current integral movement is unfortunately touted by many as the only true way we should look at human existence as it best explains who we are and where we are headed. Although it is worldcentric in its care, it is anthropocentric in its overall message and in the role it assigns integralists in the universe. More than a mere belief, this view prides itself to be a comprehensive model of consciousness. It puts second-tier people and spiritual evolutionaries at the center of shaping the future. Not only that, it calls us to leave earlier views and ways of being behind. Even more astonishing, we are invited to see ourselves as co-creators with God of an emerging order of consciousness that will lead to a better and saner world and more.

Do some of you also hear the potential for hubris in this framing of who we are and what our place is in the universe? What this view does not demonstrate is a perspective on its own, deep-seated assumptions. Edward O. Wilson (1997) once famously said “the evolutionary epic is probably one of the best myths of all.” Unlike evolutionary integralism, Wilson does have an explicit perspective on his own field of inquiry as

a grand myth, a meaningful and powerful story rather than the truth.

As more and more people share information via English and computers, a vast treasure of past human answers to who we are and how we can meaningfully be in the world is at risk of being permanently forgotten. Would it not be a travesty of its multi-perspectival principle to assume that evolutionary Integral Theory provides the final answer to the human predicament and our innate striving for meaning?

Linear View of Time

There are other aspects of evolutionary Integral Theory that signal a limited perspective. For example, it has a distinctly linear view of time that begins with the Big Bang. It feels justified in equating the rise of civilizations and our expanding individual consciousness with what it observed in nature. Evolutionary Integral Theory relies for its arguments on the evidence gathered with the best of the current arsenal of scientific measuring tools, all of which were invented to extend our limited senses. Yet it ignores that the human participant observer and interpreter remains at the center of what is seen, heard, and discerned at all scales of inquiry from the subatomic to the astrophysical.

The best minds in current astronomy seem to agree that overall we deal with a profound mystery. We do not understand phenomena such as dark matter at all, a concept that was invented as a placeholder for the 95% as-of-yet inexplicable forces in the known universe. And what do we as integralists do in typical conventional-scientific fashion? We rely on irrefutable evidence so far accumulated and declare the Big Bang as the beginning of time. Now we are predicting what is going to happen next based on the patterns we observed as we extrapolate them into the future and apply them to consciousness. If we are honest with ourselves, the mysteries of the cosmos may far outweigh what we can ever scientifically ascertain from our peculiar human position and limitations.

Granted, an imminent tipping point for a second-tier transformation in consciousness is a fascinating and hopeful postulate, but where is the evidence for it? Are we open right now to consider that there could be future events that require different explanations of what the cosmos is, how it functions, and what our place in it is? In contrast to the linear evolutionary time frame, we can visualize a conception of time that sees the 13.5 billion years of the expansion of the universe as only a small part of a much longer, wave-like, or cyclical motion, or any number of other possibilities. There are cultures that do imagine such infinite cycles of time. Are we not hasty if we do not also give those very different conceptions of time at least some attention, as they might offer alternative hypotheses of how we fit in the grand scheme of things?

Can we really predict from past patterns what the future will hold? Back in 1958, Heisenberg postulated his now widely accepted uncertainty principle.⁸ More recently, research in decision-making as well as brain studies seems to seriously challenge the sense we have of ourselves as rational beings who can figure things out from past experience and purposefully create a more ideal future. There are numerous well-known biases that we all fall prey to even when we are aware of their existence.⁹ Optical illusions are but one familiar example of how our senses continuously fool us. I ask you this: To what degree does the integral movement today give the necessary space in its arguments to the well-known human propensity for biases of all kinds? As beings conscious of our mortality, most of us are afraid of not-knowing, uncertainty, and death. We need to begin to consider that projecting ourselves into the future is a standard way our “separate” selves try to assure themselves of some sense of permanence and impact. Spiritual paths are often so attractive because they offer us a sense of extension beyond the brief lifespan and the promise of a conscious homecoming into a unity experience.

A particularly American flavor in evolutionary thinking is its linear, upward and onward message as well as its youthful energy and belief in having the solution to what ails humanity. Its message is fundamentally evangelical—preaching the good news of the integral evolutionary perspective. Moreover, it claims that humanity is close to the 10% tipping point to transform into a mature, second-tier, truly integral con-

sciousness.¹⁰ Not every cultural observer agrees. Duane Elgin (2012) mused in a *Huffington Post* blog that the United States is perhaps finally entering early adulthood after having spent most of its brief history in an adolescent mindset. Characteristics of adolescence are a) its forward and upward-looking mode, b) its youthful enthusiasm and sense of entitlement, c) its sense of immortality, and d) its privileging of action over being, and change over stability.

In ego development terms, the spiritual evolutionary message thus looks more like a representation of the shift from early conventional meaning-making to a late conventional, more adult mindset with many “self-authoring” undertones—a far cry from a second-tier realization.

In addition, there is equal evidence that there are also opposite and less benign developments occurring concomitantly with the growth of consciousness that integralists are so fond of pointing out. As mentioned earlier, we cannot have any conception of growth without its counterpoint of decline, as both are aspects of the same underlying unity. I therefore submit that the privileging of a particular kind of change and transformation to the neglect of an appreciation for alternative ways of conceiving of human nature shows a crack in an otherwise elegant theory.

I wonder whether the integral movement actually lacks a basic perspective on its own American-flavored assumptions. It seems to privilege a linear, future-oriented, and anthropocentric view despite its claim of being multiperspectival, transdisciplinary, and inclusive. Is it possible that we are letting ourselves be hijacked by the integral evangelical promise? A positive bias seems to me just as potentially blinding as a negative one. Because most everyone in the current integral movement celebrates the benefits of an evolutionary view of reality, I feel I need to raise the issue of the possible costs and limitations of this view to invite more balance and reflection.

There is actually as much evidence for negative trends in the world as there is for positive ones. To name just a random few, the indicators range from the still unsolved issue of nuclear waste, the decline of habitat and loss of biodiversity, new diseases like the one causing the decimation of pollinating bees, global climate change and violent weather events, as well as our complete ignorance of the state and dynamics of the earth’s core. In addition, we realize that many communicable diseases caused by microbes once considered treatable are now developing dangerous, antibiotic-resistant strains. Finally, there is the documented rapid increase in hate groups in the United States and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor across the globe.¹¹ As human beings our understanding seems to be simply too limited to anticipate the consequences of our choices and our best intentions regularly have unintended adverse effects.

Ego as Process and Ego as Self-Representation

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, my long-time exploration of ego development theory may offer some insight into the role of the ego in all of this. It is clear to me that there is no such thing as “ego” as it, too, is an intangible, abstract concept. And yet ego as a shared concept serves a useful purpose for us. It seems helpful to understand ourselves, our need for meaning and to communicate our lived experience to each other. In contrast, the concept of ego would have been utterly meaningless to an aboriginal denizen of the Australian outback living along song lines in dream time.

Following Herbert Fingarette’s (1963) view, I like to define the ego as that aspect of us that strives for coherent meaning. Let me paraphrase his definition of ego: “The organization or synthetic function is not just another thing the ego does, it is what the ego is. The failure of ego to integrate experience results in anxiety and meaninglessness.” I do thus propose that existential anxiety, that is a fundamental fear of death and non-being, is inevitable in the language-mediated realm of experience and that it epitomizes an essential aspect of being a conscious and thinking-feeling creature.

Ego as process tirelessly metabolizes, organizes, integrates, and interprets experience from both external and internal sources in order to create a sense of meaning and permanence. Ego creates a map of reality,

an evolving narrative of who I am and what I believe about the world. When we are unable to manufacture a viable story, we can become cynical, go crazy, or despair so deeply that we give up on life. In contrast, *ego as representation* refers to our self-identity. Ego development theory describes an invariant sequence of qualitatively different and coherent stories or self-representations along a developmental trajectory. The difficulty with the term *ego* is that it is often used in everyday talk to denote egocentricity as in the phrase: “leave your ego at the door.” In the latter case, ego refers to the exclusive identification and deep attachment to a defended, encapsulated self-sense, not to the meaning-giving, synthesizing function of ego or the abstract definitions of the sequence of self-identifications that constitute ego development theory.

Let me remind you of the discoveries about the nature of ego and meaning-making at the hypothesized two most mature stages we chart in ordinary human development. Unlike cultural relativism, which assumes that there are many interpretations of the same reality, later stage development embraces a far deeper uncertainty. Construct-aware persons question what we deem to be reality as based on our consensual maps of the underlying territory. They become aware that language marks an essential aspect of being human beings and, at the same time, that it can become a strait-jacket from which we cannot intentionally free ourselves, as all discursive thought is, by definition, filtered through language and thus separates us from the actual experience. Construct-aware folks become intellectually aware of how they create ever more complex and comprehensive maps or stories about reality and about themselves. They realize that all their maps are anthropocentric and stage-specific approximations of what cannot otherwise be described and shared. They start to fathom the profound underlying human need for permanence and significance that drives meaning-making.

At the Unitive stage, people come to experience the instability and the illusion of the permanent object world as created by abstraction even more fully and with greater equanimity. There is little need left to have a set identity or to be any particular way. Individuals at the Unitive stage are also less prone to inflate their self-sense as they now realize the function of the ego to provide stability and certainty in order to defend against meaninglessness. They develop an ever-greater compassion towards the nature of being an embodied, vulnerable creature with a consciousness of its own fragility and its desire to leave an imprint of its existence beyond the grave.

I wonder to which degree the hopeful predictions about an evolving consciousness and a second-tier future may well be touched by that very human need of ours for purpose, meaning, and significance. The certainty expressed by the “evolutionaries” in the integral movement is more reminiscent of a modern scientific approach to knowing than of later stage conceptions of how we know and what we can know. I suggest that a more complex view of reality must include notions of fundamental “uncertainty,” existential paradox, and the nature of interdependent polar opposites as a basis for making any claims.

In terms of its understanding of humans, integral evolutionary assertions sound more as coming from a formal operational, self-authoring, analytical, and future-focused mindset than a truly second-tier one despite “postconventional” content and worldcentric values. Ego development theory is distinct from many other theories precisely because it pays more attention to the development of meaning-making and thus looks more at how tightly or lightly a theory is held than what ideas it espouses.

How can we tell whether advocates of a particular map of reality are aware of its constructed nature? We tend to know when they have a perspective on their own theory as a belief system and when they can see its benefits and its limitations in individual psychological terms as well as from an historical, global, and cross-cultural point of view.

I invite all of us in the integral movement to remain open and to inquire into our own motivations, needs, and preferences. Let’s be alert when we are attracted to an interpretation of reality because it makes us feel more secure, special, and important. Let’s be vigilant about not confusing the map with the territory, or our favored interpretations with the seamless underlying and felt sense of experiencing life as it unfolds. We better be skeptical when someone asserts a specific view of reality as the discovery of all discoveries rather

than as a useful hypothesis, a tentative new map, and a basis from which to continue to explore the mystery of being.

Conclusion

I will end my reflections on what we might want to pay more attention to by posing a list of questions that are framed in polarities:

- Can we keep exploring our integral assumptions about being humans, as these too may be culturally limited, and yet value the very modern, Western legacy within which we try to offer the most life-affirming message we can?
- Can we appreciate the necessity and wisdom of the ego as a storyteller while being alert to its relentless scheming to cement itself and to affirm its separateness?
- Can we pause and let ourselves deeply experience our yearning to transcend our earthly form while accepting that we are also mortal?
- Can we passionately support the integral dream and participate in it while we remain in inquiry?
- Can we permit ourselves to assess how attached we may be to the integral ideal because of its feel-good, ego-boosting offer of conscious collective empowerment and its evangelical promise of a new world order that will save us from our human folly and yet remain realistic and open to an undetermined future?

Many of the world's spiritual traditions as well as psychology say that the first step to both growing up and waking up is to simply "see what is" with open, non-judgmental eyes. So let's be tender-hearted *and* tough-minded. Let's be hopeful *and* cautious, curious *and* skeptical. Let's seek transcendence *and* also fully appreciate our current embodiment as imperfect meaning-seeking mortals.

I thank the reader for offering me this opportunity to express my thoughts and concerns. I am grateful to all of you for having shared a precious slice of life with me as we continue to explore the human quest for meaning both as an organization and as individuals.

NOTES

¹ To find out your own signature strengths, go to <http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires.aspx>. A variety of the tests available on the site are free and fairly reliable.

² Some cultural patterns clearly influence children even *in utero*, such as what the mother eats, how she moves during pregnancy, and what sounds and sound patterns the growing fetus is exposed to, for instance.

³ The abstract synonyms for the act of definition ("define, delineate, delimit, demarcate, determine, circumscribe, frame") all contain the notion of boundary. A concept can only be formed by segmenting a previously undivided continuum into several interdependent entities (Cook-Greuter, 1995).

⁴ This figure does not include the millions worldwide that use English as a second language.

⁵ In July 2012, for example, *National Geographic* published a long article on vanishing voices. In it you can find examples of several of the world's rare or dying-out languages. The article also includes examples of how these cultures parse and label their experience differently than we do in English.

⁶ The right-angled box representations of knowledge in the AQAL model and the Wilber–Combs Lattice are just two obvious examples of this automatic framing of knowledge in the Western mind.

⁷ This is especially evident in purely cognitive-oriented developmental models. Their proponents do not seem to experience and present their mathematically and statistically based models as abstractions from lived experience.

⁸ See also Gödel (1931) regarding mathematical models of reality.

⁹ Wikipedia lists over 170 biases in just three areas of human meaning making: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases.

¹⁰ We have to be skeptical when we begin to believe in numeric predictions about the future. Ego likes numbers and grand generalizations and the illusion of certainty that comes from them.

¹¹ See the Southern Poverty Law Center's Spring 2013 report (<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2013/spring>), which lists the increase of hate groups, militia, and "patriot groups."

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