



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Futures

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/futures

Introduction

Epistemological pluralism in futures studies: The CLA–Integral debates[☆]

This issue is a response to the March 2008 Special Issue of *Futures* titled *Integral Futures*.¹ A response is necessary to correct theoretical misrepresentations and factual errors.

I present short summaries of authors' contributions in this special issue. Some of the contributors are well versed in Integral or Integral futures (Judge, Ramos, Gidley, Barber and Hampson, for example), while others are users of the four quadrant approach as one of their foresight methods. In this introduction, no overarching narrative is used, rather, through extensive quotes, the voices of the contributing authors speak.²

1. Resistance is not futile

Marcus Bussey, in his essay, "Resistance is not futile: escaping the integral trap", writes. "For me the noun [integral] forecloses on alternatives: 'This is whole; complete!', one might also add kaput! The adjective has similar connotations, carrying implicit within it a sense of singularity, unit as whole, linearity (the terminus of an evolutionary cycle), centre-periphery (the whole heart—the incomplete inchoate periphery), distance (the integral gaze is not unlike the panopticon), and monotheism (you're either integral or incomplete). Furthermore, the word seduces, drawing its proponents into an integral end game that can, for the rigid convert, lead to a kind of integral fundamentalism underwritten by a sense that there cannot be many (alternatives) when there is only one Way. It achieves this through a universal gaze that assesses all else as less than, incomplete, partial and unfinished. This epistemic absolutism (nothing exists outside of it) is driven by its power of definition which colonizes past and future inner/outer space. I say this with all due respect to my friends and colleagues enamoured of the integral. The word should come with a large red sticker clearly visible: Buyer Beware!"

It is this trap that Bussey asserts he will resist.

My own approach challenges Integral futures generally and defends CLA from the claims made in the *Integral Futures* special issue. I argue that "Riedy's piece in particular [1] makes a strange series of errors in that it: 1. confuses Vedanta with Tantra; 2. misreads subjectivity—arguing that subjectivity does not exist for the poststructural, instead of seeing how the self is contextualized with structure and genealogy (as in Foucault's work, among many others); 3. misses the entire work around Inner CLA; 4. adopts the Orientalist discourse of constructing CLA as cultural (instead of noting that it seeks to move up and down layers of data, systems, worldviews and myths); and that 5. it is not grounded in the practice of conducting layered analysis with varied groups." My essay concludes by arguing that there is no need for this battle. "We do not need to be either for or against Integral or CLA. We can live in multiple spaces, use different theories and methodologies, each having its purpose, each useful depending on the person, time and particular space we inhabit. The strength of futures studies is its epistemological pluralism."

[☆] With thanks to Patricia Kelly, Susan Leggett, Jan Lee Martin, Rob Burke and contributing authors for editorial comments on this opening essay.

¹ Vol. 40, No. 2, March 2008. Edited by Richard Slaughter. There is some confusion over editorship as the table of contents lists Slaughter as the sole editor while the front cover includes Peter Hayward and Joseph Voros.

² Unless specified, all quotes from this *Futures* issue: *Epistemological pluralism in futures studies: The CLA–Integral Debates*.

2. Wilberism

As one of the developers of Integral Futures, Jose Ramos notes that while Integral has made important contributions to Futures studies, he is wary of ‘Wilber-ism’, what Ramos calls “an ideological orientation to the Wilber version of holism”, and indeed to politics.³

Writes Ramos, “Of course, ideology can be said to be a persistent human problem that emerges in many traditions and cultures, of which ‘Wilber-ism’ is just one manifestation. As well ‘indicators’ of these dangers and pitfalls do not appear across all uses of Wilber, but in certain cases. Yet these cases, or examples, have led me to see an overall pattern that needs to be addressed. Simply put the potential danger and pitfall in the use of Wilber is the tendency to marginalise alternative conceptions of holism, by subordinating them into its developmental hierarchy (in the guise of ‘refreshing’), appropriating alternative conceptions into its model as less complete theories or approaches, which are purely defined in Wilberian terms. And thus, within this Wilber-ism, alternative conceptions of what holism mean are not accepted *on their own terms and language*. From a non-western view, Wilber-ism remains foundationally Western, continuing the orientalist tradition of appropriating non-western categories a-contextually and a-historically.”⁴ Adds Ramos, “The chief problem here is that in Wilber’s terms, Integral does not seem to be a discourse, but rather amazingly ‘a-perspectival’, meaning that it somehow sits above discourses and the flux of the perspectival world.”

Ramos argues that we need to appreciate the various genealogies (discourses) and ontogenies (manifestations) in the movements towards holism in futures inquiry. By appreciating this diversity, and fostering dialogue across these context specific manifestations in the movement towards holism, we can validate the impulse towards coherence while protecting each from intellectual colonization, appropriation and ‘integration’ by any other. He writes “It is not in the integration of a diversity of elements into a single model where we will find holism, but rather I believe it is to be found in an ongoing relational process of dialogue across diversities, where holisms can emerge as aspects of our ongoing journeys.”

3. Integralism

Jennifer Gidley also challenges the particularity of Integral Futures. Originally inspired by the notion of linking Integral and Futures thinking, she was dismayed when she noted “the tendency in the Special Issue is to privilege and promote a particular *brand of integral futures*, i.e. via Wilber’s integral model—while not exploring other integral approaches—is more akin in my view to a business/marketing approach than a scholarly engagement. This may reflect an alignment with the “corporate turn” in Wilber’s approach to promoting his own model over the last couple of years. However, such a one-sided approach does not nurture the breadth and depth of potential of *integral futures* (broadly defined)—nor indeed, even its current embodiment.”

Gidley, in contrast, seeks to enliven Integral through a genealogical summary; she brings back Gebser, Aurobindo and Steiner, to begin with. Thus, the Anglo-American bias is to some extent expanded as other integrals are brought in. Indeed, Gidley wishes to integrate the integrals. She seeks theoretic openings instead of the closings presented in the Special Issue. Writes Gidley, “by consistently attending to the kindred theories that rub up against our cherished theories and methodologies, we keep them soft and alive, rather than hard, rigid and mechanistic.”

But it is the hardness that is the problem. Hampson in his work, while attempting to move to a redemptive space, first step by step, reference by reference, challenges some of the claims made in the Integral Futures Special Issue in particular those of Richard Slaughter.

Writes Hampson, “Slaughter states: ‘I will here cover three key issues based on claims for the method that have been put forward’. They are: (1) the claim that CLA is systematic, (2) the claim that it adequately represents depth, and (3) the claim that it ‘unpacks individual perspectives’ [2].

Within this quotation, Slaughter cites one reference as evidence to support his assertion regarding these three claims. Somewhat incongruently, the reference he cites is authored neither by Inayatullah nor by any other CLA-oriented scholar but by himself, namely, the article “Mapping the Future: Creating a Structural Overview of the Next 20 Years” [3].

Even more startlingly, this reference does not address these three claims; indeed, it does not address CLA in any way. As his ensuing analysis of CLA is based on these three claims, it would be difficult to argue that Slaughter’s errancy in this matter is insignificant.

³ Writes Michel Bauwens, “Ken Wilber hails Tony Blair as the ultimate representative of Integral leadership, associating himself (and hailing) with the worst contemporary spiritual abusers: first Da Free John, now Andrew Cohen. Now, there is nothing wrong by itself in being a neoconservative (that is, until you go about invading other countries on false pretenses), but it becomes manipulative when you start cloaking that particular political vision under a false scientific cloak, feeling yourself a superior being in ‘consciousness’. Doesn’t sound much different from the scientific justifications of a Leninist vanguard party, and we all know where that led us” (personal communications, 21 July 2008). Bauwens is a former colleague of Wilber. See Michel Bauwens, “The cult of Ken Wilber: what has gone wrong with Ken Wilber.” http://www.kheper.net/topics/Wilber/Cult_of_Ken_Wilber.html, accessed 25 July 2008.

⁴ Richard Carlson provides this cautionary advise. “An integral theory which valorizes its own epistemology by denying other traditions, theories . . . or by simply mis-characterizing them segregates rather than integrates. Any theory which asserts itself ideologically by cannibalizing other traditions and appropriating the voice of alterity as a function of its integral model while discarding the ten thousand nuances, subtleties, traces of culture which are essential to indigenous identity, fails at the level of integration itself. Such theoretical practices are not integral but imperialist, such discourses do not achieve cultural hybridity but rather cultural hegemony. Such an integral theory is colonialist at its worst and patronizing at its best.” See Richard Carlson, “Integral Ideology: an ideological genealogy of integral theory and practice.” <http://www.integralworld.net/carlson.html>. Accessed 16 October 2009.

Concludes Hampson: “Slaughter’s position is that, ‘at best the CLA is a part of a *preparation* for post-conventional inspiration and work’ [40, p. 134]⁵ (original italics) and that ‘CLA has little to say about the human interiors’” [40, p. 133].⁶ This position is inaccurate. Rather, CLA can be identified as a postconventional approach which addresses human interiors. In contrast, Slaughter’s analysis insufficiently foregrounds the postconventionality of integral approaches; indeed, aspects of it bespeak unhelpful modernistic tendencies.

Slaughter might himself wish to attend to the following in relation to possible enactments of integral methodology: “one of the central insights to emerge from IF, in fact, is that it is the level of development of the practitioner that determines how well or badly any particular method will be used” [4]. He might also wish to problematise such a totalizing perspective regarding the evaluation of an entire person by way of a singular development level. Redefining Integral itself, David Turnbull’s “Rethinking Moral Futures” continues this vein of thought, indeed, redefining integrality. He writes, “Integrality is not about assimilating another person, an outsider, into a particular field of practice. It involves changing the field of practice to allow for the unique contributions of the person”. Turnbull locates the tension between critical futures studies (CFS) qua the CLA approach and some approaches within Integral futures as between an opening and closing of the future. One constructs the world textually, as an open and interpretive space. The other constructs the world as The Book, one lens, one way of seeing the world. Certainly, the one-wayness can lead to dramatic change and move a particular field forward. At the same time, in a field like Futures Studies, with its main strength that of textual openness, The Book closes the future, leading to conceptual dead-ends.

At heart it is the epistemological framework behind one’s ontological commitments. Writes Turnbull, “[The] poststructural/Tantric approach to CFS is about opening up the future to influences from beyond ‘the dominant paradigm’ . . . [it] opens up ways (albeit fragile) to help address deep-seated dislocations and frustrations within the contemporary social/cultural world. And for some, it provides ways of transferring hope into the future, whilst at the same time working actively towards it, without actually *defining* what ‘it’ is. Contrary to futures approaches that are concerned to define, to concretise, to grasp as a whole, the poststructuralist version of CFS is partly to undefine, to lessen the tight hold on the future that some crave.”

In contrast, argues Turnbull, “Integral seeks to provide a grand program based on a particular view of human nature. But is this even possible? Against this proclamation one may well be reminded that ‘human nature’ is not something that can be tested and analysed under research conditions no matter how grand or comprehensive the program. Such an entity remains forever elusive for describing it would require, as Hannah Arendt put it poetically, ‘jumping over our own shadows.’ [19]”.⁷ That is, we—I—are complicit in the worlds we create; we inhabit the theoretical frameworks we employ to make the world intelligible to us.

Anthony Judge, as well, brings in epistemological complexity. He questions Wilber’s attempt to write a theory of everything . . . “to what extent does Wilber’s model imply that those who disagree with it are necessarily less aware—namely that agreement with it is an indicator of a subtler state of awareness?”

As with Gidley, Judge is concerned about the corporatist turn in Wilber’s Integral. “Integral futures is necessarily challenged by the difficulty of Ken Wilber in having positioned himself and his ventures in a style to be caricatured as the Craig Venter of memetics (rather than genetics)! One is concerned with mapping and “cracking” the human psychosocial “genome” and the other with mapping and “cracking” the human genome—and then exploiting any exclusive patents to the full.”

The way forward for Judge, in contrast, begins with doubt. In a theory of everything can there be evolution without doubt? asks Judge, “Does the absence of doubt preclude dialogue of a quality from which mutual learning can emerge? No doubt, no dialogue?”

This relates to the shadow of Wilber . . . Are Wilber and his Integral shadow free, or is it, as Judge suggests, through the gaze of the shadow that meaningful dialogue becomes possible. Indeed, it is via the shadow that Integral can grow and learn about itself—what it disowns, what it fragments, what it excludes. Along with the formal garden of knowledge that Wilber offers, Judge suggested we need the charm of disorder. Without it, imperfection will not be engaged in, and knowledge will flow merely in one-way.

4. Methodology and practice

For Colin Russo the shadow is a desire to frame CLA within the Integral framework. Russo refocuses the discussion on methodology, arguing that methodologies need to be able to bolt and unbolt from each other. Poststructuralism/CLA cannibalizing Integral or Integral assimilating CLA would be a methodological mistake—innovation, emancipation and enrichment would be the losers. To avoid this strategic error, Russo suggests the vinculum, where methods meet and unmeet, moving in and out of their own spaces and creating ever moving third spaces. Each theory and methodology needs

⁵ [40, in Hampson, this issue] R. Slaughter, What difference does ‘Integral’ make?, *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies* 40 (2) (2008) 120–137.

⁶ [40, in Hampson, this issue] R. Slaughter, What difference does ‘Integral’ make?, *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies* 40 (2) (2008) 120–137.

⁷ [19, in Turnbull, this issue] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second ed., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, p. 10.

the self-reflexivity to see itself from the authentic viewpoint of others and of course be loyal to itself. Moreover, Russo—and others—suggests that “refreshing” comes best from learning via practice and not from experts armed with theoretical knowledge that has not been tested in the world.

Marcus Barber, while equally critical of the claims of Integral, focuses the discussion on futurists, themselves, ourselves. He writes: “I appreciate Riedy’s passion for the model and enthusiasm for assessing CLA to see how it might be developed further. But replacing structurally sound, relatively straight forward methods with highly complex, iterative and exclusionary approaches [Integral Futures] is not in my opinion, a way for the futures community to endear itself to those in arguably in greatest need of assistance—us.”

Thus, it is the “they” he seeks to unpack. Who is the “they” that futurists seek to provide salvation for? It is not the short term nature of markets that explains why certain brands of futures studies have not taken off, but rather, suggests Barber, “the critical failure has been an unwillingness or inability of futures practitioners to play in the same sandbox as their key clients. By and large, the deep thinking and prognostication has been theoretical and non pragmatic and it is for this reason that the ‘short term, extremely powerful’ paradigm of market forces has remained unchallenged.” The interiors of futurists, themselves, has remained un-reflective. We are fine, they—the short-termists—need to change! It is they that must change, while we continue our theorizing.

In Wendy Schultz’ essay, “Models and methods in motion: Declining the dogma dance”, she challenges futurists to be sensitive to context, to what the audience can absorb and use futures methods effectively to create new spaces for alternative futures. She writes: “It is intellectual bigotry to demand that everyone master the tools you choose to use”. Most important for her, it is the mash-up which creates novelty. She writes: “But you know what I love most? . . . Mashing them all up: use them all at once: pick’n’mix. Collisions generate creativity; chaotic, turbulent waters where the ocean slams into the continents are home to the most life. Categories and their boundaries are useful to tidy our desktops and our mental landscapes, but we must be wary of their ability to hobble both imagination and insight.”

Her argument is that the use of frameworks and methods is situational—dependent on the person, the particular task at hand and the cultural context. Adds Schultz, “An insistence that everyone adopt the integral framework for every futures study does a disservice not only to the innate gifts of individuals, but also to the integral approach itself: not every single researcher can encompass it—or CLA—and it *can* be applied badly.”

5. Conclusion

One reading of the difference in approaches developed by the authors above and the Special Issue of *Futures* on Integral is—as Ashis Nandy has noted—the difference between the text and the book [5]. The text is open, it can be critiqued, read differently, it embodies and allows for multiple metaphors and frameworks. Different ways of knowing can change the text—the text invites alternatives even as it may make claims for a particular truth. This is in contrast to the book . . . one future, one reading, few openings, and often little or no self-reflection. The particular truth overwhelms alternatives. A book may even try to come off as a text, but as Jose Ramos writes, it is in the practice that we can discover the difference.

However, as all the contributing authors to the CLA–Integral debates suggest, Integral and Integral futures can be a textual resource. It can potentially be rescued from the claims and worldviews made by some of the contributors to the Integral Futures Special Issue. Doing so, of course, begins with our selves—the stories we tell and the behaviors we practice, as well as with the external world and the myths and worldviews that support it. And, of course, it does not matter by which door we enter or exit. We can take, for example, the CLA door through which we can ask which of my inner and outer litanies am I recreating and what new systems of self and world need to change. Along with changes in self and system, we can ask which of my dominant and alternative selves and worldviews need to transform, and which of my inner stories and our mythologies can aid in this process. And there are many other doors, many ways of knowing (including those that challenge the metaphor of the door and the built environment narrative that is hidden in this image) as Joseph Voros alerts us [6].

The beauty of futures studies is that all these doors are possible—there are many alternative entrances and exits—and many ways to create openings and closings.

References

- [1] C. Riedy, An integral extension of causal layered analysis, *Futures* 40 (2) (2008) 150–159.
- [2] R. Slaughter, What difference does ‘integral’ make? *Futures* 40 (2) (2008) 120–137 (quote from page 131).
- [3] R. Slaughter, Mapping the future: creating a structural overview of the next 20 years, *Journal of Futures Studies* 1 (1) (1996) 5–26.
- [4] R. Slaughter, What difference does ‘integral’ make? *Futures* 40 (2) (2008) 133.
- [5] A. Nandy, *Time Treks: The Uncertain Future of Old and New Despotisms*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, India, 2007.
- [6] J. Voros, Integral Futures: an approach to futures inquiry, *Futures* 40 (2) (2008) 198.

Sohail Inayatullah
29 Meta Street, Mooloolaba, Queensland 4557, Australia
E-mail address: s.inayatullah@qut.edu.au

Available online 30 September 2009