

Born in the Middle: The Soteriological Streams of Integral Theory and Meta-Reality

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Introduction

At the 2011 Integral Theory-Critical Realism symposium convened at JFK University, Roy Bhaskar noted that both his philosophy of meta-Reality and Ken Wilber's Integral Theory, were both "serious" in that their concerns were to facilitate personal liberation and realize social emancipation. While both philosophers agree that the personal and social domains are inextricably interwoven, the cosmological narratives which underlay their views differ quite dramatically.

Throughout his later works, *From Science to Emancipation*, *From East to West*, and *Reflections on Meta-Reality*, Bhaskar is clear that he believes that the natural state of humans, their ground state (which is co-present with the ground state of all beings and entities as the cosmic envelope) is an ever-present reality which is occluded by error, illusion, and structures of un-freedom, and that the way back to freedom, to the alethic truth, and to one's ground state is through the shedding of obstructions. For Bhaskar, the ground state is ever-present and the alethic truth is always operating, but humans have been disenchanting from their god-li-ness, by the nature of human self-consciousness, which has been separated from the ground of its being (from its own god-li-ness) by the occasion of its self-awaring.

Wilber's cosmology rests on the perennial philosophy's notion of enfolded levels of Spirit, unfolding as discrete levels of being through the cosmological force which simultaneously transcends (eros) and includes (agape) prior forms creating a richly textured holarchy of perspectives which arise under 4 simultaneous aspects: subjective interiors, objective exteriors, singular wholes, and plural parts. For Wilber, the ground state of being, is the ever-present primordial perspective, I-I, or original face, which has been "forgotten" so that Spirit can self-accompany in exquisite cosmological play, the impulse of which culminates in Spirit's becoming

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self-aware in the highest states and stages of human consciousness. Is it possible to see these as streams in a wider cosmological river where the imperative of the one stream to clear away obstructions, and the impulse of the other to ignite the clear light of awareness can be viewed as a generative system of awakening?

Integrating Structures

The states and stages transcend and include each other, which is to say that each higher level of both states and stages build upon the lower levels developmentally. Lower levels are related to higher levels as parts of greater wholes; and all parts are themselves wholes to smaller parts. Growth-to-goodness is interrupted, obstructed, or pathologized when eros and agape are not balanced or integrated. This can happen in two ways: 1) in the process of developing to a new stage or transcending to a higher state, some portions of the lower level are excluded, shunned, denied, or repressed, or 2) in the attempt toward transcendence, the developmental trajectory is stunted, denied, or oppressed. Because state transformation and stage transitions are de-coupled, it is crucial to nurture both state and stage growth to achieve healthy development. For example, spiritual practices which emphasize and accelerate access to higher states often produce "grossly deformed individuals" due to the lack of adequate nurturing of the other lines, levels and capacities which comprise the stage-structures of the developed self.

Because all development must occur within the quadrant matrix, many models of development that have come from integral theory suggest that the upward trajectory of development is actually more like a spiraling process due to the effect of the dipolar structuration of the elemental categories or deep quadratic structure. For example, ego development is construed to be driven in general by the dialectic between individual agency (UL quadrant) and collective communion (LL quadrant), and in specific, by the dialectic between emergent polarities that arise at different stages.² Likewise, psychological self-development (in the individual case) and social development (in the collective case) are both construed as being driven through a dialectic between interior dimensions of growth (intentionality, communicative action) and external dimensions (bio-neural-physical aspects of self, political-economic aspects of society). Integral theory therefore, embraces the dualistic structuration of reality, as essential components of development through states as well as through stages, where the dipolar vectors (or drivers) are eros and agape in the macrocosmic story, and the 4-quadrant matrix structure in the microcosmic story.

Shedding Structures

In contrast to integral theory's developmental "growth-to-goodness" model, critical realism considers growth, development and progress in the conventional sense primarily as obstacles, errors, and illusions accumulated in the fragmented, stratified and dualistic world. Whereas integral theory formulates salvation as additive or multiplicative (freedom + fullness, depth x span), for critical realism, the path to salvation is primarily a process of subtraction or absencing conditions or structures that occlude, hide, distort, or otherwise prevent us from accessing our innate and always-present state of original grace.

² See www.cook-greuter.com

I think it is important to say here very specifically what we have to lose to become enlightened or realized. First we have to lose our ego, because, being in our ground state, we would see that our freedoms were indivisible. Secondly, we need to be intellectually more generally mentally clear, that is have no fixations, no prejudices, no preconceptions; in a way everything that we know in-built into our being, so that our minds are as free, clear, empty, flexible and creative as possible. Thirdly, we have to be emotionally clear...; So no ego, a clear mind, a pure heart, and then fourthly, a healthy and energized body; that is, we need to be as healthy and energized as we can. But there's a fifth condition, we need our "psychic being" to be clear too, that is, free of all traces and residues of the past, which includes karma from our past in this life and, if we believe in them, our past lives; but also our past in the form of the residues or scars of our experience buried in our unconscious--we need to transform our unconsciousness into consciousness, and, like our karma, clear it, release it, let go of it, get totally free of our past. (Bhaskar, 2002b, p.263)

According to the philosophy of meta-Reality, reality is stratified and fragmented on the macroscopic scale – and dualism and other modes of fragmentation are responsible for the enculturated, indoctrinated and karmically inherited conditions of unfreedom that comprise the realm of the actual. Conventionally, we go about our lives confined to the world of the actual, unaware of our deeper nature (our ground state) and unknowing of deeper, more total and holistic truths. Spiritual intuition, existential angst, and scientific inquiry are all activities which bring us to the edges of a greater understanding through the force of the alethic truth which is always pointing us towards our ground state of being. Human beings experience the "pulse of freedom" as the dialectic between this realm of the actual, and our primary state or natural state of freedom as beings participating in the realm of the real by virtue of being rooted in the cosmic envelope through our individualized ground states.

What does Development Look Like?

For integral theory, development happens in both stage and state processes. Stage development occurs throughout one's lifetime, and is progressive. State changes are transitional and occur as temporary episodes of deep transformative experiences here and there over the course of one's life. There are several neo-Piagetian theories of stage development that fit into the AQAL model. Integral theory's primary focus is on the levels of ego-development that trace the progression of psycho-cognitive development and the set of work, life-style, semantic, and behavioral values that together compose a values system or world-view. Integral theory commonly refers these levels as "colors in the spiral of development."

Individual development entails the accumulation of increasing capacities for navigating an increasingly complex world, including the ability to take multiple perspectives, capacities for double and triple loop thinking, development from concrete to abstract operations, to systems of abstractions and then to meta-systems (or systems of systems) of abstractions, to paradigmatic and then cross-paradigmatic thinking; from pre-dialectical to trans-dialectical (paradoxical) reasoning; from tribal identification to institutional identification to autonomy, and then onto post-autonomous identities; from the rule-based self-identity, to narrative, constructed and/or relativized versions; from ego-centric to ethno-centric to world-centric to eco-centric concerns.

Contrast this with the sequence of "improvements" that matter most to meta-Reality:

When you do all the negations, when you say no system, no organization, no leaders, no fixed dogma, no fixed thought, no papal thought, no priestly thought, no spiritual authorities, no fixed emotional make-up, nothing, then what do you get when you have stripped all those things away, what do you get? It is not nothing; it is not only just nothing. When you strip away everything that we impose, everything that, heteronomously, we impose on human beings, we get free, creative, loving, spontaneous, energetic, intelligent, right-acting human beings – left to ourselves in what I would call our innermost nature. Technically what I would call our ground state. We are free, creative, loving. We are also right-acting, we will do the right thing and we will love it when we allow it. (Bhaskar, 2002b, 322)

This brings us to two important questions:

1. For integral theory: What drives the need for increasing complexity?
2. For meta-Reality: What gets in the way?

1. On the macrocosmic level for integral theory, the forces Eros and Agape work together as two divine hands of creation, driving the forms toward transcendence by way of inclusion, which is responsible for the complexity we see throughout the cosmos. According to this formula, forms "move forward" (evolve) toward increasing complexity because they "take along" with them all the prior forms as parts in an ever-enlarging whole. On the microcosmic level, development "moves forward" through the prior stages and therefore already conditioned by the prior structures, such that present (present self) is always in relation to both the past (self) as well as the future (self) – an additive, accretionary, iterative and fractal relation wherein the prior forms are enfolded as parts in the present form which will itself be enfolded as a partial whole within the next future, complexified whole.

2. With respect to meta-Reality, thought, a certain aberration of thinking, gets in the way. Bhaskar writes:

Thinking, naming, judging impedes creativity, loving, right-acting human nature. They drain our energy and they set up repetitive patterns of behavior. They bind our energy. ... We cannot even think by thought. Similarly, when we think about doing something loving, we are already taking the love away. When we are being loving, we just love. Thinking about loving is putting a condition on it. For if we do not pay attention to our thoughts, and we do not understand the limits of thought itself, then we will get stuck into this ideology of thought. (Bhaskar, 2002b, pp. 324-326)

Thought, is thinking turned onto itself, by quitting the activity of thinking and mis-taking it as an object. On a macrocosmic scale, this is the underlying mis-take, what Whitehead calls misplaced concreteness, which fragments the world of the actual (what Heidegger would call the ontic representation) from within the realm of the real (the ontological, processural continuum). On the microcosmic scale, this is the error which is called the epistemic fallacy – confusing what we construe to be true for what is really true.

For Integral Theory, epistemic sophistication, which grows through stages of differentiation, complexification and integration, represents a kind of spiritual *progress* because it fills (fulfills) fullness. This is precisely *not the case* with meta-Reality where, under the conditions of the master-slave relationship, people are driven to higher and higher levels of epistemic sophistication as they creatively feed the very mechanisms of oppression they are in pain to escape. Therefore it would be no surprise, in the information age of the era of late-stage capitalism, where *cognitive and conceptual complexity* proves to be the most powerful means of mass indoctrination, domestication and force over others (human and non-human), and where social, political, legal economic, and technological complexity offers the first-ever possibility of *global* control, that meta-Realists would critique Integral Theory's "fullness as epistemic sophistication" as a kind of spiritual sophistry.

On the other hand, meta-Reality has to account for the origin of dualism, and its products – separation and oppression. Dualism may be a product of "captured thinking" – the *thought* that separates consciousness from its ground state, and we, in turn, may be "captivated by thoughts" through a process of forgetfulness or amnesia, and thereafter go about confusing the solidified matrix of opposing perspectives for the fluid ground of becoming – but this merely begs the question: *Where does the ontogeny of "thought-filled forgetfulness" flow forth from in the first place, if not from the non-dual ground where Spirit abides?*³

Born in the Middle

We are born *in the middle* – unaware of our own beginnings and endings. By the time a child has learned to name herself, her reality has already been deeply conditioned by the ways of her parents and the language she was born into. The different levels of agency she experiences in her world – from the ability to move her body, the ability to affect her parents' behavior, the ability to manipulate other objects, including small animals and smaller siblings – demonstrate to her that the world is a rigidly stratified place. Objects persist long after their appearances are gone, and people compete for having things the way *they* want them to be. The process of naming things and using language to make sharper distinctions and shape new realities, exaggerates the thing-like nature of reality and weakens the sense of interconnectedness and inter-being. Events and happenings – the feelings of participation – slowly give way to things and their causes. The conventions of life become a matter of utility and instrumentality.

By the time we are old enough to begin to ask questions about our own beginnings and the nature of reality outside of conventional discourse (post-conventional inquiry), our way of reasoning and going about inquiring are already encumbered by layers of pre-conditioned meaning and the pre-constituted self. These include 1) a metaphysical framework primarily fixated with static things, 2) a permanent use of figure-ground contrast to organize reality, 3) conceptual metaphors that are constrained by the rules which govern the physical and gross embodied experience, 4) the implicit laws of reality that are transmitted by the structure of language, especially the subject-object (noun-verb) construction 5) cognitive biases of all types, including the split mind, 6) a privileged perspective based on a limited life experience 7) a

³ Wilber addresses this question with a kind of parable that Spirit creates form because it is lonely all by itself; and then "plays by forgetting."

diminished perspective based on repression of cultural bias and stereotype, 8) the effects of shadow material at the levels of self, culture, species, and biotic community, 9) primacy of operations in 3-dimensional rather than n-dimensional space and 10) an inflexible apperception of time.

Only the post-conventional mind can begin to deconstruct all these implicit biases and blind spots. Slowly through inquiry and practices such as mindfulness training, we begin to receive insights. Peeking through some of the biases and releasing some of the conditioned structures of ordinary experience, we begin to experience non-ordinary states. We are shown that the subject-object or mind-body quality of experience can drop away; or that the sense of spatial separation can disappear; or how the mind, starved of stimulus, can manufacture its own hallucinogenic reality. We begin to experience expansions and contractions of time, and space spreads out and becomes self-luminous. We begin to notice and take note of the conditioned pattern that *is the self* participating in a patterned-upon-patterned world at scales all the way up and all the way down. In other words, we begin to experience the sense of our own beginnings through the deconstruction of the apparatus of existence into the deep phenomenon of pattern. When we are ready to begin again, *from that place we interpret as origin*, the place of elemental principles and primitives out of which we are born – something curious happens. We find we will need to become more and more sophisticated, cognitively, to sufficiently de-couple ourselves from all those conditioned patterns in order to witness them as objects in awareness. We find that we need to create higher and higher levels of abstractions and meta-abstractions to get at the deeper and deeper kernels of reality. In the process we may discover an underlying rule of the dialectically reasoning mind – the deeper the ontological immanence, the higher the epistemological transcendence.⁴ By making this distinction, we can see that while meta-Reality is reaching downward, toward an ultimate ontological immanence, Integral Theory is primarily concerned with tracking upward toward increasing epistemological transcendence. Having been born in the middle—we are at risk of splitting apart!

Stratified Reality

In order to make sense of all this, we need to take a look at how Wilber and Bhaskar think about what is real, and how we gain access to truth.

Both Wilber and Bhaskar see “reality” as being stratified or divided among different types of worldviews which have ontological and epistemological components. Both philosophers remind us “the real” is not something “out there” waiting to be known, nor is it something that can be contained inside human perspectives – rather, “the real” is a complex *process* of mutual unfolding of knower and known; and that it is important to see both reality as well as the knower as agents in this unfolding.

Wilber’s AQAL theory says the ontological and epistemological components arise mutually and simultaneously to form a single “Kosmic address” which locates both the subject and the world that is disclosed. For Wilber, the real is an enactment. He consistently argues against an ontological dimension that exists independent of an epistemological perspective. Certainly

⁴ This is one of Bhaskar’s insights.

Wilber is not saying that there is no aspect of reality that is independent of human perspective. What he is saying is that there is no aspect of reality that is *independent of perspective*. In other words, there are perspectival worlds that are independent of humans – fish worlds, frog worlds, horse worlds, dog worlds, lion worlds, spider & butterfly worlds, amoeba worlds, plant, algae, plankton and coral worlds, molecule worlds, and atom worlds – Umwelts, as Jacob von Uexküll called them – entire worlds composed from the semiosphere of subjective and proto-subjective en-actors in the center of a semiotic enactment triad of mutual agency: the signifier (perspectival agent), the sign (meaning-bearing agent) and the signified (world-bearing agent).⁵ Interwoven this way, Wilber’s theory says *what is real and what is true* are derived together, and are relative to other *reality-truths* in a hierarchically structured developmental process whereby lower or more primitive *reality-truths* are transcended and include by higher or more evolutionary complex *reality-truths*. Furthermore, because for Wilber, “truth” entails a hermeneutic circle or a nexus of shared signs and signifiers, *reality-truths* become more true and hence more real, through the process of becoming more sharable and more shared. Because the process is never-ending, all *reality-truths* are partial. But the “missing pieces” that make them partial cannot be found except through the enactment process described above. Therefore, we can assume that *what drives the evolution of new, more encompassing reality truths, is the partiality itself—what Bhaskar would call “absence.”* In other words, because any given *reality-truth* cannot itself be in relation to “missing pieces outside itself”, then “partialness” itself must be an evolutionary driver. Early on, Wilber used the phrase “IOU to the universe” as an expression of this dynamic instability of all *reality-truths*.⁶

In order to make sense of Bhaskar’s way of thinking, I have drawn the following which illustrates the various ways Bhaskar distinguishes between different types of realities.

⁵ Over the past 18 months Wilber and people close to him have intimated that he will soon publish a complete semiotic model of his work. For more than 20 years I have been following the progression of his writings. I see Wilber as continuing to move from Pierce to Whitehead and now back to Pierce (which resonates more with a Habermasian view) without incorporating the important revisions of Hartshorne and Kakol. Whether I have given an adequate account of what might be forthcoming, or not, remains to be seen.

⁶ This phrase “IOU to the universe” always reminded me of the kind of radiation that Stephen Hawkins discovered coming from black holes. Nothing can escape a black hole, so it is paradoxical that radiation of any kind would emanate from them. It is as if when a particle enters a black hole, it enters another universe, demonstrating the partiality of this universe, and hence, the need to issue an IOU. My own interpretation of this “coincidence” is not that the universe works in the way that Wilber’s theory works, but that the existing physics—the epistemological framework of the existing physics—that we use to explain black hole radiation is true, but partial. Hence, it has this same key feature of Wilber’s theory. In other words, I am suggesting that this is not so much a key feature of the universe, but a key feature of our epistemic tools at this stage in human consciousness. Wilber himself, of course, does not need to make this distinction, since he relies on the argument that what is *most real about the universe* is what is *true for our human consciousness* since humans represent the leading edge of evolution.

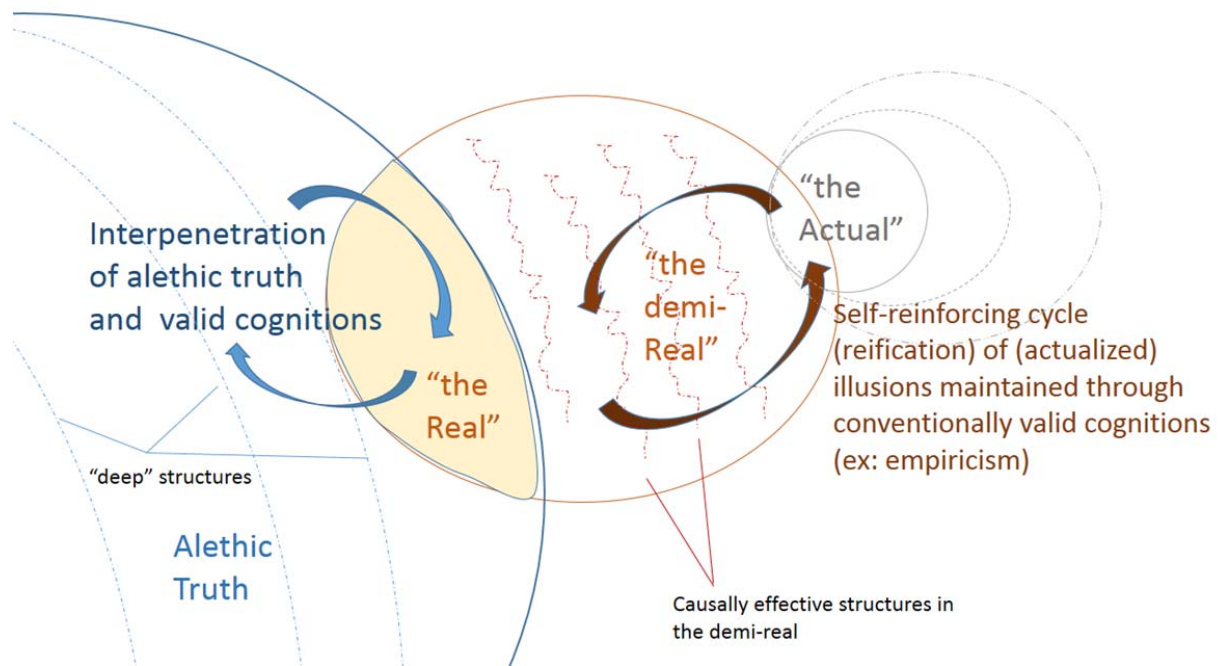


Figure 1: An illustrative interpretation of Bashkar's stratified reality.

In the ontological realm, Bhaskar distinguishes the domain of the Alethic Truth from the domain of “the Real.” The Alethic Truth does not depend upon human systems or human knowing. It can only be inferred because, although unknown, it is causally effective. We experience the effects of the alethic truth in the many ways our theories go wrong and our predictions fail. We experience it in the deep unsolved mysteries of science and the profound unpredictability of human systems.⁷

The next part of the illustration labelled “the Real” is that part of reality which unfolds through the mutual interpenetration of the ontological realm and human processes of inquiry and knowing. This domain of “the Real” most closely represents Wilber’s notion of the mutual dependence of the ontological and the epistemological domains. But for Wilber, it is human development which constantly adjudicates and improves the adequacy or accuracy of “the Real” and therefore every perspective (every “real world that arises) is true, but partial. On the other hand, for Bhaskar, it is the Alethic Truth which exerts a continuous evolutionary pressure on human knowledge systems toward more adequate or accurate understanding, and so “the Real evolves the capacity to express more and more of the Alethic Truth.

Moving to the right, the diagram illustrates the domain that Bhaskar calls “the demi-Real.” The demi-real is the world of confusion, illusion, error and make-believe. The demi-Real is maintained by human social convention, habits of language, unexamined assumptions,

⁷ There is no place for this realm in AQAL theory. In fact Wilber has described the realm of Alethic Truth as “a particular Turquoise perspective” – demonstrating once again his insistence that there is no reality that is not coupled with human epistemes. For Wilber, humans are always subject of worlds, never subject to them.

institutionalized processes of reification, propaganda, advertising, mechanisms of domination and control, narratives and ideologies of all sorts, mythological thinking, wives tales, and cognitive biases of all sorts. The “demi-Real” is the world of consensual pretense. One of Bhaskar’s significant insights is that the realm of the demi-real *is also causally effective!* When we mistake the rope for a snake – we jump back! Human illusions become self-fulfilled prophecies over time.⁸ When, as the Buddhist say “on the path we mistake the rope for a snake” and then maintain that illusion through stories which are made demi-real by conventional social behaviors, we begin to live in the demi-real:

The path to the rope is taboo, because a snake lives there.

We prove that there is a snake at the end of the path because no one goes there.

By the time we send an expedition to go there, we discover the snake has gone elsewhere.

We look for “elsewhere” the snake has gone.

Each one of these “translations”⁹ contribute to establish a *known* world Bhaskar calls “the actual.” The “actual” is divided into a proper realm and an “improper” realm. The proper realm builds knowledge through the scientific methods which continually expand the contexts upon which knowledge is built—by revealing the conditions of partiality, for example, or by making explicit the boundary conditions under which the derived facts are “true.” Proper knowledge is derived by assigning manifest facts to their ever widening contexts. The improper realm is the realm of methods such as empiricism, and what Bhaskar calls “actualism” where systems are founded on error, illusion, falsehood or pretense.¹⁰ These systems can *actually* be confirmed through certain scientific and quasi-scientific methods or community-specific practices such that the experimental set up (or injunctions) are interpreted through methodologies that are validated by hermeneutic circles, to enact (bring forth, maintain) “their actual” world.¹¹ Still, “this improper actual” world is a false world, and the role of philosophy, is to identify the structures in the “demi-Real” and the improper methodologies that are responsible. For example, at one point in history we could “prove” that boys are innately smarter than girls, by random testing of boys and girls, men and women. Of course, this leaves out the structures of society that privileged the schooling of boys over girls.

Now we can see the basis of meta-Reality’s critique of AQAL theory. When the foundations for the perspectives are maintained by methods of inquiry that are steeped in structures of the demi-real, or derived from empirical methods, those perspectives or worldviews are not “merely partial” but rather, *mostly if not entirely false*. Even still, these false views can be maintained by, complexified, and reified into “actual worlds” through human knowledge building processes. A worldview based on apartheid, is a human system that self-maintains a human construction that is false. For meta-Reality, perspectives and worldviews, are *falsifiable*. And therefore we can establish ethical criteria (values) based on factual ones.

⁸ There are too many examples to list. One being, the belief that boys are born smarter than girls sets up a system of causes and effects in society where boys are educated differently and grow up to be smarter than girls.

⁹ As Bruno Latour would call them.

¹⁰ Students of Buddhist scholastics will recognize this partition as between conventionally valid and conventionally invalid truths.

¹¹ You can see that Wilber’s enactment theory is subject to a strong critique from Critical Realist theory.

What makes this “actual” world “demi-real” is that all the “realness” is constrained within the human semiosphere and not in “the world” where the Alethic truth lives. Founded on human error or confusion, realized by human-to-human injunction, enacted through knowledge-building structures and institutions that are anthropocentric and culturally conditioned, and sustained by power structures that are deeply vested in the existing interpretations of reality – the realm of the “actual” becomes increasingly divergent from the real and the true, and therefore, Bhaskar would argue, increasingly distanced from the good.¹²

The Soteriological Streams

I started this paper by introducing the *soteriological streams* of AQAL theory and meta-Reality. A soteriological approach must have something significant to say about *the good*. AQAL theory separates “the big three” – the True, the Beautiful and the Good—in a way that makes them individual and irreducible. The often used tenet in integral circles “you can’t derive values from facts” points to the paradoxical kind of exclusivity of the domains, wherein values (derived from upper left-hand conditions and methodologies) and facts (derived from right-hand conditions and methodologies) do not relate. For meta-Reality however, the deepest “facts” are Alethic truths, and Alethic truths are universal “goods.” When science and philosophy mine the deepest truths, they move us toward the greater goods. For meta-Reality, this is the ultimate validation of pairing philosophy as the handmaiden of science – where the role of philosophy is to “underlabor” for science, by examining and revealing the errors, illusions, mistakes, limiting assumptions, implicit ontologies and hidden metaphysics of the scientific frame(s) of mind, in order to “steer” the scientific enterprise toward the deeper truths and greater goods. But how does this underlaboring happen? What are the key features of practicing this way of philosophy?

In a surprising way, Bhaskar’s Critical Realism sparked a new generation of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) just as Bhaskar himself was turning toward the more spiritual concerns of meta-Reality.¹³ By reducing the notion of “truth” to that of “fact” OOO philosophers mistake the map (of facts) that science makes for the territory that “resides” in or “abides as” Alethic Truth. As a result they create a world of demi-real which says “truth” and “goodness” reside “in the objects themselves.” This is clearly a step backwards.

¹² A strong critical realist critique sees the developmental stages popularized as colors in Spiral Dynamics and AQAL theory, not as deep evolutionary structures of “the real” but as a taxonomy of “actual” structures derived from the “demi-real” structures of late-stage capitalism. This strong critique would argue that the competitive and rivalous nature of capitalist economy “drives” the complex adaptive system “human” through higher and higher levels of complexity – a process Bhaskar refers to as “the continual creativity of the slaves.” Therefore, for critical realists, the only way “out” is not “further up the spiral,” as Wilber claims, but starts with the complete deconstruction of capitalist ideology and the complete decomposition its socio-cultural structures.

¹³ Bhaskar’s move toward a spiritually informed Critical Realism caused a major rift in the Critical Realist community worldwide, where much of his work on meta-Reality has been outright rejected, including Bhaskar’s interest in integral theory.

A Gnostic Revival

A way forward would be to reclaim the notion of *alethic truth* from the dialectics of philosophical meta-discourse, and situate it inside a kind of revival of Gnosticism. In philosophical discourse we are confronted with the categories “epistemology” and “ontology” – which relate to knowledge and reality. These are the kind of categories that the synthesizing mind of Aristotle was comfortable with. Valid knowledge is simply “truth,” and valid realities are simply, “real.” Yet the Greeks made the distinction between these kinds of categories which appeal to the dialectically reasoning mind, and the gnostic terms which the dialectically reasoning mind cannot capture.

From this view we realize that *alethic truth* is neither an ontological term nor an epistemological term in the philosophical sense. Similarly, the Greek word *gnosis*, which is usually translated as “knowledge” is neither an epistemological term nor an ontological term. Gnosticism is a kind of knowing that does not depend on the relation of epistemological and ontological categories, nor their mutual dependence, nor their interpenetration. Similarly from a Gnostic view, *alethic truth* is a kind of truth that does not depend on the relation of epistemological and ontological categories, nor their mutual dependence, nor their interpenetration. As long as the soteriological program sticks with the meta-discourse of dualistic, dialectical mind, our theories will continue to drive us apart.

Looking, Seeing

John Whitney Petit’s (2002) book *Mipham’s Beacon of Certainty*, stands out as one of the most important and clearest exegesis of the complex map-territory (epistemology-ontology) problem. Petit is clearly immersed in philosophy’s soteriological streams:

If philosophy is understood as a process of historical development without a specifiable goal, or as a deconstructing meta-discourse that parasitizes the naïve speculations of earlier ages, the classical Indian understanding of philosophy’s purpose might seem impoverished. As the handmaiden of religion, philosophy might not function as a transforming process, but as the rigid armor of dogma. However, the neglect of a critical philosophy in a soteriological context tends to result in the degeneration of religious and philosophical traditions into partisan insularities. This was a major concern for Buddhist philosophers. Philosophy imbued with the spirit of *moksa*¹⁴ is more likely to draw people together than drive them apart. (p. 104)

In these few pages, Petit makes some key distinctions. For instance, he notes that philosophy based on *aletheia* is similar to Bhaskar’s subtractive approach—“a method for removing ignorant misconceptions about the nature of things.

¹⁴ *Moksa or Moksha* (Sanskrit) means emancipation, liberation or release. In eschatological sense it connotes freedom from samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth. In epistemological and psychological sense, moks(h)a connotes freedom, self-realization and self-knowledge. *Moksa* carries the same meaning as my term *view* (see Roy, 2006)

Petit introduces the important difference between the verbs “looking for” and “seeing.” When the function of theoretical meta-discourse, is properly understood as a process of “looking for,” it is no surprise that the process is never-ending. As the familiar joke goes “why do I always find the thing I am looking for in the last place I look?” When the content of our philosophical discourse is abstract formulation, we are involved in the *activity of looking for* rather than in the *direct experience of seeing*: “When one is attempting to fathom the nature of things through the medium of abstractions, it is as though one were looking for something” (p. 105). It is in this sense of “seeing” that *gnosis* refers to a *direct perception* not a perspective.¹⁵ As “seeing,” Petit writes, “philosophy is conducive to gnostic vision.”

Guidelines

In attempting some kind of conclusion, I would like to propose some guidelines of a gnostic view of soteriological philosophy, employing Petit’s useful terminology.

First, from this view we see that epistemology is the domain of the human experience of “looking for.” This impulse of “looking for” drives the knowledge-building systems of human thought in science and philosophy. Epistemology refers to the plethora of outcomes, including theories and methodologies that result from this impulse. Because perspectives are shaped by “looking for” as distinguished from the perception of “seeing”, they too are part of the epistemological domain and are subject to persistent error, illusion and confusion and thus, persistently advance into higher and higher orders of complexity.

Secondly, the “looking for” impulse is intersubjectively maintained through philosophical and scientific discourse and methodology. This is the purpose of the hermeneutic circle—the collectively held responsibility of “looking for” shared in the spirit of *moksa*.

Thirdly, this collectively held responsibility requires interpretation, and interpretation builds what Petit calls “contingencies of culture and history.” This is the situation described as structures in Bhaskar’s “demi-reality.” These structures are “real” to the extent that they participate in the collectively-held project of “looking for;” yet they are not real to the extent that they limit, by abstraction and complexification, the experience of “seeing” as direct perception. When the activity of “looking for” gives way to the reductive and reifying “scientific” project of replacing the “looking for” with a false sense of “seeing that,” the realm of the actual takes us further into meta-discourse that “parasitizes the spirit of *moska*” and farther away from the processes of self-transformation.

Fourth: Petit writes: “When one sees something as opposed to looking for or at it, one participates profoundly in the seen¹⁶” and “Unless the experience of freedom in personal realization is integrated with philosophical discourse, however, it is difficult if not impossible to share that realization with others.” This is where the deconstructive sense of *aletheia* comes into

¹⁵ The reader should note whereas a “perspective” is either an epistemological term, an ontological term or both, depending on the philosophical meta-discourse being applied, a “direct perception” is neither an epistemological term, nor an ontological term, nor a relata between them.

¹⁶ See Appendix II

play as the proper methodology for theorizing which “conveys a destination”, or “orients others in the right direction.” If the “destination of looking for” is the “seeing,” then the destination in the “seeing” becomes an impulse to share this realization with others. Those theories that conclude or worse, preclude, the “looking for” by offering a set of conditioned propositions to “look at”, betray the soteriological impulse. For philosophical theories with soteriological intentions, the moral implications of this are profound. Only through a shared experience of “seeing” can the moral imperative be satisfied.

Together, these four prescribe the right view of a soteriological philosophy: 1) perspectival diversity and conventional knowledge are outcomes of “looking for” which 2) is an intersubjectively shared and hermeneutically maintained aspect of the collective human condition, which 3) is partially conditioned by error and confusion, and as such tends to parasitize the spirit of *moska* and therefore 4) the valid theory is one which a) deconstructs the error and confusion that arises, b) orients others toward knowing-as-direct perception, and c) sets the conditions for a shared experience of gnostic vision.¹⁷

We now have an answer to the first question: For integral theory, what drives the need for increasing complexity? Answer: The human project of “looking for.”

This in turn brings us to our second question. How is it that we are for most of us for most of our lives, “looking for” instead of “seeing?” For meta-Reality: “What gets in the way?”

Cultivating View

The capacity for direct perception is an innate faculty of all beings—in this sense, “direct perception” is similar to Whitehead’s notions of “prehension.” If we consider all “things” as *prehending beings*, directly perceiving each other, we enter into the view which has been called *pan-experientialism* – where reality is constituted by every “one” experiencing every “one.” As a theory, pan-experientialism describes the processural continuum comprised of the participation of all beings. And yet, we do not always experience reality this way. Unlike direct perception or direct participation, *view* entails relative degrees of “correctness” or “freedom.” The senses perceive “what is” directly. But experience is constituted by perception *and* context.¹⁸ Furthermore, the context or interpretation is limited by *view*, which metaphorically can be thought of as a “viewfinder.” The degrees of freedom in one’s *view* determines how much of the context enters into the experience. In this sense, *view* is a capacity for allowing in more and more of reality into one’s experience of it. Alternately, *view* describes the capacity for experiencing more and more of one’s *participation* with all others. When our immediate experience of reality includes a direct perception of our participation with all beings, we have realized the *correct view*.¹⁹

¹⁷ People who are familiar with my work will recognize that “collective insight practices” includes the deconstructive movement as well as orients us toward a direct perception, (he ah ha! moment) and a realization that is collectively shared.

¹⁸ We can say that perception and context = perspective.

¹⁹ I attempted to describe this *view* in my paper presented at the 2013 Integral Theory Conference:

To participate, means to enjoy movement and reciprocity within the generative ground of our universalized becoming and the foregrounding of our being. To participate means to act and to be

Let's go back to the story of the rope that is mistaken for a snake. The senses perceive "what is." If all of the reality enters in as context, then the person will experience the rope as a rope. If, however, the context is limited to a memory of a snake that once bit a dog, then the person is most likely to experience the rope as a snake. When the villagers hear her story, even though their senses perceive the words directly, if the context is limited to this story, then their experience will be one of limited participation, and they too will mistake the rope for a snake.

Our existential situation is such that neither our sensory faculties nor our capacity of view are fully developed at birth. We are born in the middle – with the sensory faculties of a child which begin to develop mostly inside the context of a ready-made adult world, partially conditioned by error, illusion and confusion. Because both direct perception and participation *as well as* context are shaping our experience, we begin to suffer from a kind of existential dissonance, and begin the long process of "looking for." A "good" theory orients us toward the direction of a correct *view*, where direct perception arises with the experience of an adequate participation with reality. When the correct view is cultivated to perfection, we enter into a state of complete freedom and full participation. If Integral Theory and meta-Reality are concerned with an adequate soteriological philosophy, it would be important for practitioners to examine their claims in the context of this notion of *view*.

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acted upon, to affect and effect, to mediate both spatial and temporal extension in infinite directions and dimensions. To participate means to be "in the soup", not somehow above, beneath, behind the action, through the veil of transcendence, assumption of objectivity or inference of subjectivity. To participate means to lose track of cause and effect, agent and object, knower and known, actor and script. To participate requires a pre-conceptual or post-dialectical orientation to reality as "a movement, a happening, a transformation ... as events that are constantly transformed." (Oliver & Gershman, 1989) To participate means, as Whitehead would have it, is to be in a relationship of feeling among a society of all other entities, human and nonhuman, biotic and a-biotic, within a nexus of shared history.

Appendix I

The diagram below illustrates the major philosophical streams originating in the pre-dialect “oceanic” era of the past and branching into three distinct dialectical philosophical streams where it situates Wilber in the perspectival (toward the hermeneutic and epistemological), and Bhaskar in the dialectical (toward the empirical and ontological). The third stream represents a transitional form between the soteriological philosophies inherited from Buddhist scholastics, and western process metaphysics evolving toward a true, post-dialectic “onto-logics.”²⁰

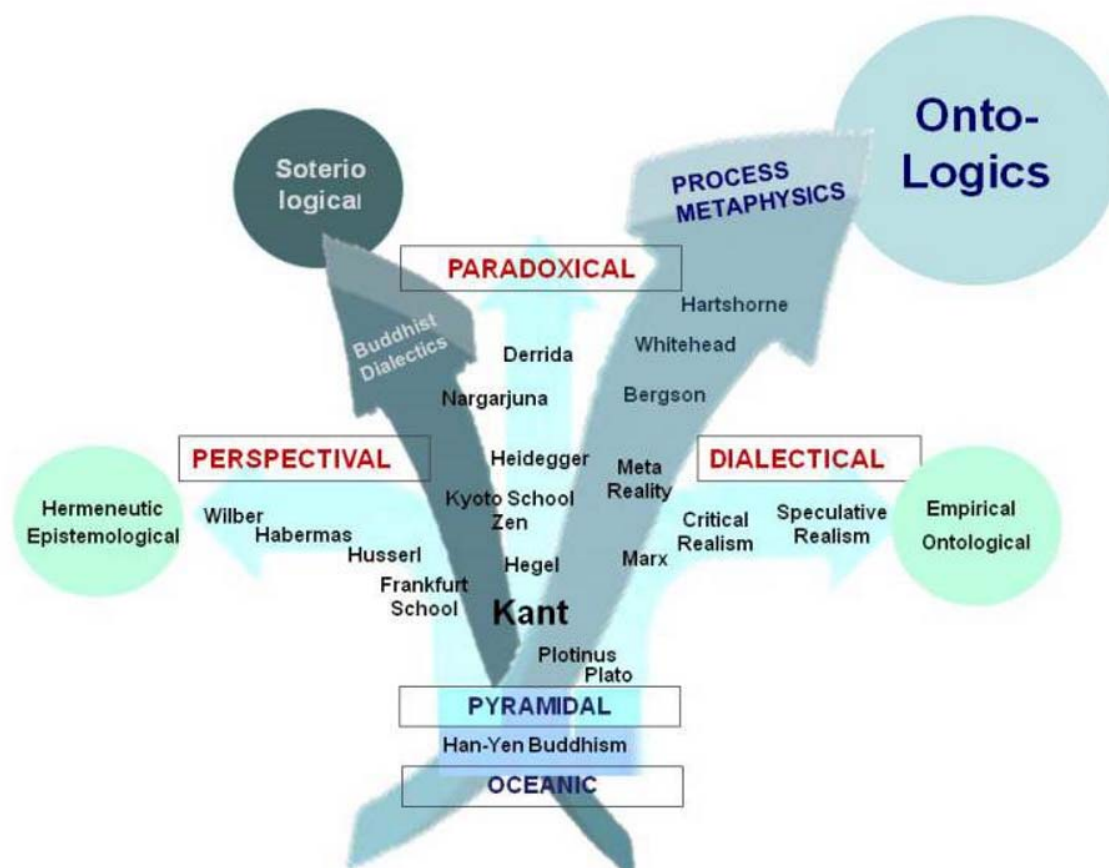


Figure 2. Philosophical Streams.

Appendix II

The phrase “direct perception” carries some ontological baggage for the dialectically primed mind, since the question in the background is always “direct perception of *what*” – which leads the dialectically constructed mind to posit an ontological reality that is being perceived. This leads to the false dualism of subjective agent as perceiver and objective (non-agentic) object as perceived. This is the same problem with the semiotic triangle. The term “participation” is more appropriate to a modern gnostic vision, in which all aspects of reality are actively “participating” with all others, such that the phrase “direct perception” actually refers to full participation of all

²⁰ See http://alderloreinsightcenter.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/roy_suny_aqal2210.pdf

reality in all reality. As such, “knowing” is a kind of participation, but we can and do participate without knowing, which can, from the view of “direct perception” be experienced as an obstruction, whereas from the view of participation, it is not. However, knowing as meta-discourse can parasitize *awareness of participation* by creating a false sense of somehow being “above the soup and out of the fray” as it were.²¹

²¹ For more on direct perception as participation and feel see
http://alderloreinsightcenter.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/roy_presenter-paper-itc-2013.pdf