

# What is Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality?

As part of this special issue we put out a call for definitions and short descriptions of Integral Postmetaphysical Spirituality. Below we share what our fishing line pulled out of the sea – four diverse interpretations of the subject – from Bruce Alderman, Layman Pascal, Edward Berge, and Joseph Farley. Murray's longer piece in this special issue offers a detailed description of IPS from yet another perspective.

## Bruce Alderman

INTEGRAL POSTMETAPHYSICAL SPIRITUALITY (IPS) does not yet fully exist. It is what Bruno Latour (2013) might call an *instauration* – something that is at once being uncovered and created, discovered and composed. It is a risk, an artist's gamble as she puts chisel to stone, and its final form is not yet decided. But given its internal tensions, it is likely it will never be so decided; it quivers most vitally right in that gap of in/decision, each shape it takes riven by difference and haloed by an unmasterable excess.

As *integral*, IPS invokes the One. But it must always do so in scare quotes; its "one" is the count-as-one, a consistent multiplicity, a oneness that is always two or more. This is not a watered down oneness; it is what the one has always been. Non/dual.

As *postmetaphysical*, IPS invokes invocation itself. It is ascetic in Nietzsche's or Sloterdijk's sense: its sorcery is *practice*; its magic, *participatory enactment*. It is not opposed to religious forms of belief or modes of speech, but it sees them also in enactive terms: as forms of participatory engagement, which can be generative (growth-promoting and integrative) or degenerative (leading to forms of demi-reality and soul-loss).

As *spirituality*, IPS invokes the sacred excess of spirit through four practices in particular: the quaternity of waking, growing, cleaning, and showing up. More generally, as we discuss in my essay for this issue, spirituality is the practice of building generative (en)closures which allow for the disclosure of deeper truths (through inquiry), and the cultivation of surplus coherence (through individual and collective action and modes of integration).

As a holistic orientation, IPS proceeds on both meta-metaphysical (post-metaphysical) and metaphysical levels simultaneously. Meta-metaphysically, IPS embraces metaphysical pluralism, viewing metaphysical systems as enactive operators which play a role in the enactment of particular, ontologically rich worldspaces. In this context, post-metaphysics, as Joel David Morrison (2007) well describes it, "is not ultimately a feature of the metaphysical system itself, but a cognitive or conceptual aperspectival stance which imposes an acategorical imperative – a meta-metaphysical and metacategorical framework – in which the absolute truth claims of any metaphysics are suspended in the relative world of justification, partly through the rational truth that all truth claims may be subject, endlessly, to further analysis" (p. 50).

Such skepticism, when it is included and cultivated as a spiritual virtue (or a "Practice of the Self," in David Michael Levin's (1989) sense), is in spirit a faithful vulnerability born of the acategorical imperative: a willingness to put our or others' metaphysical truths into question, which means (at times at least) to put them to the test. This is not an anti-metaphysical perspective. Metaphysical speculation is a generative and essential part of our philosophical, scientific, and spiritual efforts to interface meaningfully, effectively, and creatively with the world. Putting metaphysical truth claims into question under the acategorical imperative doesn't mean rejecting all perceived metaphysical claims out of hand (in doing so, we would very likely be leaving our own metaphysical operating framework absolutized and unquestioned), but being willing both to rationally question and inquire into, and to open-endedly (i.e., faithfully-critically) act on, metaphysical claims: to personally take our chances with them, even with gusto and abandon, while remaining willing to hold them up for ongoing scrutiny (whenever that is called for).

At the level of practice, an Integral postmetaphysical approach frames metaphysical systems and ontologies injunctively. However, this injunctive emphasis is not, or should not be read as, merely a requirement for 'empirical support.' Rather, to emphasize injunction is to acknowledge the performative and embodied nature of our claims. It is to acknowledge the intertwining or entanglement of epistemology, ontology, and methodology in actual occasions.

On a metaphysical level (in both inter-religious and Integral spiritual spheres), IPS employs multiple enactive and integrative frameworks, such as Wilber's pronounal "Three Faces of God (or Spirit)" practice. This metaphysical framework is capable of non-reductively accounting for and integrating a variety of the 'ultimates' and 'ends' described and pursued in the world's major religious traditions, as well as enacting new soteriological horizons within the traditions that adopt it. This approach is suggested by Integral Methodological Pluralism itself, the enactive, meta-paradigmatic "engine" of Integral Theory, but it avoids being "merely metaphysical," in the sense Wilber criticizes, through the injunctive framing called for by the post-metaphysical, acategorical imperative described above.

As a postmetaphysical approach, integral spirituality might be fruitfully compared to Richard Kearney's *anatheism*. In the wake of the triumph of atheism in secular culture, Kearney coins a new word, *anatheism*, in which he takes the *ana-* to mean 'after' in two distinct senses: the postmetaphysical project of seeking after God (again) after the death of God. The God we seek after God's demise is necessarily a stranger, Kearney argues, and this disposes us towards a theology of hospitality: we are called to host difference in our hearts, to open to otherness and surprise. And there is a sense, too, in which the postmetaphysics of IPS is an *ana-metaphysics*: after the post/modern efforts to wrestle free of metaphysics and spirituality, IPS represents a return to them anew, now as strange (and inviting) strangers: not as who we thought they were before, but nevertheless as valued guests, who may yet surprise and delight us still.

## References

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## Layman Pascal

THE DEFINITION OF ‘INTEGRAL POSTMETAPHYSICAL SPIRITUALITY’ is ultimately very simple. I mean that there is both a very simple and complex definition of this arcane topic – depending on your own level of interest.

The easy way is simply to realize that human spiritual growth does not depend on our beliefs. Meditation work will still develop your insides whether you think God is good, bad or nonexistent. The grand metaphysical ideas don’t totally matter. We are transformed by our practices rather than our conclusions about the Nature of the Reality. Of course some doddering old wags may call this *a participatory turn* within contemporary philosophy but there is also an ancient colloquial tradition on Earth of valuing actions over ideas.

This preference is also found in many of the “great saints” whom we suspect of embodying higher developmental stages of human psychological growth. They were often very cynical about worldviews, words & conventional spiritual concepts. They question our reasoning, our sense of self and all of our most basic perceptions about reality. The Tao that can be talked about is NOT the Eternal Tao. Such wisdom is both old and new. As we deepen our contact with Reality we continuously move beyond our previous notions about “real things”.

Friendly skepticism is our ally on the spiritual journey. It is profoundly useful to hold our beliefs lightly and to be critical of both ordinary & extraordinary ideas. The radiant vision of Christ can sublimely nourish you without requiring you to draw any particular conclusion about whether He “exists” or not. Yogic exercises are good for Hindus and non-Hindus alike. This should not be a surprise to people who were raised in a scientific world. We know that “theories” and “hypotheses” have been extremely successful. They are not *less* than certainty. They are MORE than certainty. More honest. More useful. Even more beautiful.

Integral philosophy frequently reminds us that a great spiritual teacher may be holy and transformative without necessarily being right about everything. Many different domains of validity exist. They do not contradict each other but neither should we get them mixed up. You don’t need everything to be totally and fantastically true in all possible ways. It just has to work. That’s the simple truth of postmetaphysical spirituality.

To describe the complex truth is obviously a little trickier. Let me relate – as well as I can recall – the incredibly clever and captivating answer I offered to Steve McIntosh who was sitting in the front row of a talk I gave several years ago in the American state of California. I said, at that time, that we all grow through layers of increasingly integrated complexity and depth. Each layer of our experience is like a whole world. It envelops, supercedes and critiques its previous world. Each of these layers has its own implicit presuppositions about What Exists. Because of an ancient joke

about Aristotle and a bookshelf (look it up) we call these assumptions the “metaphysics” of a world.

Yet we only think of them as metaphysics when we are moving beyond. We become retroactively *postmetaphysical* about our previous metaphysics. They appear in hindsight. Our earlier ontology starts to get teased apart. It wasn't all equally true. Some things will be kept (but understood in a new way) while others will be discarded.

For example, as worldcentric rational humanism dawns within us, we still think rocks exist. We have that in common with our previous worldview. But now we see these rocks as ‘ancient geological objects full of atoms’. We keep the rocks but we let go of our former conviction that all necessary objective truths are already contained in the blessed Quran. That older idea starts to look like a social bias or a weird form of authoritarian book-worship. We leave *that* God behind. But do we leave God behind? More spiritual members of an integral community may worry that postmetaphysics implies a strong materialist rejection of divinity, soul & purpose. Not necessarily. The so-called Green vision emerges with a postmetaphysical stance toward that very Orange “materialism” and “rationality”. Then an integral vision will try to include but transcend all of these different kinds of metaphysics. Nothing important is being lost.

Integral Post-Metaphysics does not diminish our spiritual experience but *amplifies and enriches* it. Our access to the deepest holiness that we can assimilate is powerfully increased as we learn to hold our ideas about reality in an “as if” position. Quotation marks do not belittle “reality” – they give it wings! Perhaps there is even a part of our soul that responds more authentically and completely to “God” than to GOD?

Approximation, complexity and balanced ambiguity are not the enemies of certainty. They are its oldest roots. When we look back through time with our postmetaphysical eyes, we may see that even our most basic ways of thinking about the world were a kind of unexamined metaphysics. Instead of certainty/uncertainty as a pair of opposites we may be faced with a strange un/certainty. The slash has migrated to the center of our understanding. It is the same paradoxical conjunction that we find in in/complete, same-difference & many-one. It is also all those lines that simultaneously link and separate the diverse truth regions on an integral map. These nondual “separator-connectors” are nuanced doorways leading to a numinous realm where our transrational intellect merges with our most sublime experiences.

And those are the bones of the complex definition of *integral postmetaphysical spirituality*.

## Edward Berge

‘INTEGRAL’ IS THE TERM GENERALLY USED to refer to Wilber's integral theory, or the integration of body, mind, soul and spirit in self, nature and culture. The idea is that there are increasing levels of progressive development within all those domains, and to explore how those domains interrelate. Metaphysics generally refers to the exploration of reality. Postmetaphysics then is a kind of metaphysics but without some of the assumptions and premises traditionally associated with that study. Those include the notion that humanity can accurately perceive reality as such either through some meditative state of consciousness, and/or through the notion of pure

Platonic forms via abstract, a priori reason. The postmetaphysical turn in philosophy instead grounds metaphysics in the empirical study of intersubjective cultural communication and the second generation cognitive science which sees the topic as embodied, enacted, embedded and extended in all domains.

How then does spirituality express postmetaphysically? First of all it is no longer a domain diametrically opposed to the material domain. Another hallmark of metaphysical thinking is this opposition, with the spiritual or absolute domain the source and cause of the material or relative domain. Postmetaphysical spirituality acknowledges the virtual realm, akin to the absolute realm, but in a very different relationship with the actual or material domain. The virtual domain is still generative of the actual, but its own genesis lies not in a metaphysical plane but within its relationship to the actual in a co-generative process.

It also has to do with the difference between the transcendent and the transcendental. The former assumes a metaphysical foundation for knowledge as described above. Transcendental deduction bypasses such a framing by speculating on what virtual preconditions must be supposed for knowledge to be possible. The virtual by this definition is multiple and immanent without any need of a transcendent, metaphysical underpinning and thus postmetaphysical in that sense.

The meta-awareness of meditative states is often contextualized as something that transcends the world of manifestation by directly perceiving the absolute. But Thompson and other neuroscientific researchers see such a state as an embodied, pre-personal base state of consciousness, a naturalist conception of the embodied mind. What is being accessed is a baseline attention that is fully embodied and thereby limited by that embodied constraint. Such a consciousness without an object doesn't lay claim to access to the reality of all, or even access to all of our personal cognitive unconscious or collective unconscious. It's just accessing that embodied part of our natural awareness available to us by virtue of having the body and brain we do with all its limitations. Furthermore, the above research makes clear that meta-awareness itself is not strictly an individual affair but rather involves internalized social cognition and interaction with the natural environment. Hence spiritually in this context is not only about a synte-gration within the domains of self, culture and nature but also between them.

## **Joseph Farley**

### **INTEGRAL POSTMETAPHYSICS FOR DUMMIES**

I wrote *Evolution As Metaphysics and Spiritual Violence* during the 2 or 3 year period when I participated regularly in the IPMS forum, on the defunct Zaadz/Gaia website and the forum on Ning. It was well received on the forum, and Frank Visser posted it on his Integral World website a few years later. I think back fondly to the many colorful characters that made up the group; several academics including a Sanskrit scholar, a French psychiatrist and a cowboy artist who lived in South America, among others. Like many of my fellow members, I had gone through appreciation and even infatuation with the work of Ken Wilber, only to hit a wall of questioning and disillusion.

I have no formal training in philosophy, although I am widely read in comparative religion and spirituality. When I was in my twenties I made a point of reading Gregory Bateson's works, *Steps To An Ecology Of Mind* and *Mind And Nature: A Necessary Unity*. It seemed to me that Bateson had a holistic way of thinking and seeing the world that I wanted earnestly to grasp. I can't say that I understood everything he wrote about, but I credit Bateson with teaching me important points on how to think. Bateson's meta-rational explorations proposed that processes of mind are integral to the biological world, and that there are logical, hierarchical categories of learning and communication. He emphasized the importance of context and paradox, that there are pathologies of communication, and that metaphor, art, religion and myth are crucial components of human culture.

The IPMS forum was my first real exposure to Postmodern thought, as well as other versions of Integral thought. I see Integral Post Metaphysics as Ken Wilber's attempt to integrate elements of Postmodernism into his grand synthesis, and I'm not sure it's completely successful. I was impressed by Gregory Desilet's essays that critique KW's take on Postmodernism that are posted on the Integral World website ([www.integralworld.net](http://www.integralworld.net)). I don't believe we have lived through the "Postmodern Turn" and are now in "Post-Postmodernism", as is popularly presented in Integral circles. Rather I think the last century has been one of accelerating hyper-modernism, where the exponential growth of technology disrupts social and economic systems, expedites the collision and cross fertilization of different cultures, threatens dire consequences to global climate and ecology, and frays our sense of self. I believe Postmodernism and Integral Theory are meta-rational attempts to understand and cope with the hyper-modern dilemma, and that both have problems and limitations.

What I learned from my participation in the forum was the simple methodology I employed in my essay. Inspect one's unexamined presuppositions in our necessary engagement with metaphysical concepts. Assess who controls the narrative and how that affects power dynamics. Clarify what a given narrative values and devalues developmentally, and the world view that it presents. I also learned that there is no neutral or unbiased philosophical stance. It confirmed that, as I had come to suspect, Ken Wilber's overarching Integral construction has its own set of metaphysical biases. I am gratified that other Integral systems are becoming more well known, such as the thought of Jean Gebser, (well promoted by Jeremy Johnson's online Nura Learning Network). I also appreciate that the recent work of post-evangelical writer and preacher Rob Bell appears to be influenced by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I love the fact that Gregory Bateson's legacy is being continued by the work of his daughter Nora Bateson.

The metaphysical interpretation of scientific theories such as evolution or quantum physics is not going away. It's what we do as human beings trying to figure out our place in the Cosmos. I hope that other Integral systems, in addition to the work of Ken Wilber, will arise to become increasingly influential, and that post-metaphysical critique will flourish as a discipline.