

Romancing the Ning

Layman Pascal¹ and Bruce Alderman²

The Ning Forum for *Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality* was characterized by a mixture of courageous high-level intellectual discourse, ethical irreverence, transhumanist aesthetics, socio-economic critique, playful fraternity, and a deep willingness to push all integral concepts toward their own points of rupture or inversion. It was, above all, very freeing and very stimulating and a lot of fun.

The souls involved in this scene were willing to roll the dice and make the effort to find out what kinds of vision-logic insights and philosophical consensus might emerge from an integral community guided by the desire to feel beyond the limiting power of attractive metaphors, simplified formulations, and conventional integralism.

What happens if you treat “integral” as conventional and then try to push your own understanding toward a post-conventional integralism? What do you find if you seek the clearing where divergent metatheorists converge, where the theory of practice replaces the theory of knowledge, where subtle energies and subtle beings are radically reconsidered? Where our most intuitively trusted interpretations of developmental psychology and the wise future of humanity

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are challenged in order to tease apart their essential principles from those which are naïvely treated as essential or taken as received integral wisdom?

The Ning version of the forum still exists even though it is now mostly serving as an archive, with much of the activity having migrated to the parallel Facebook group. Here are a few places on the Ning forum to start with if you want to explore beyond the discussions and essays presented in this issue:

1. Postmetaphysical Visions and Visionaries
2. Object-Oriented Ontology
3. ITC Paper Review
4. Spheres
5. Real and False Reason
6. Definitions of Postmetaphysics
7. Desire
8. Holarchy
9. The Christmas Wiki
10. Close Encounters
11. Horror in the Integral Suburbs
12. Structural Transformation
13. States vs Stages

1. Postmetaphysical Visions and Visionaries. This subforum was a place to consider the works and significance of thinkers who either offered their own variant of integral-level metatheory or seemed to add a much needed vitamin to the overall discussion. Many of the posts begin with, “*Well, I don’t know if this person is actually postmetaphysical but...*” and lead to as much controversy as consensus. Exactly what you would expect from a lively analytic community. Here you will find people like Bruno Latour, Otto Scharmer, Peter Sloterdijk, Mark Edwards, Raimon Panikkar, Slavoj Žižek, Gilles Deleuze, William James, and more. Anyone from Jean Gebser to Lady Gaga might be the inspiration for one’s own detection of an emerging structure of postmetaphysical spiritual philosophy in an integral context.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/categories/postmetaphysical-visions-and/listForCategory>

2. Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) was a frequent topic of investigation. Not only for its own virtues but as a symbol of a variety of doctrines which try to take the dignity of objects seriously and think beyond the naïve correlation between subject and object. The principle suggested by the Quadrants – of taking both interiors and exteriors seriously – is pushed further by trying to simultaneously affirm the pan-interiorist presence of subjectivity at all scales, while also giving objects a full being of their own whose presence never depends upon or is limited to what gets experienced by observers.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/object-oriented-ontology>

3. ITC Paper Review. Following the 2013 and 2015 Integral Theory Conferences, Bruce Alderman, Neelish Marik, and several other members of the Ning IPS forum offered reviews and hosted discussions of the stand-out or award-winning papers. Included among the discussions were reviews of papers by editors and contributors to this special issue of Integral Review: Tom Murray, Bruce Alderman, Layman Pascal, and Tim Winton.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/categories/itc-paper-review/listForCategory>

4. Spheres. The interest in novel, higher-order theorizing, religion-as-exercise, and the playful vitalism and profound critique of thought found in Nietzsche and the classical philosophers are among many reasons that Bruce's fondness for Sloterdijk became a major area of collective contemplation...

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/spheres>

5. The Real and False Reason thread explored the challenges George Lakoff's model of embodied cognition poses to popular developmental theories, particularly Michael Commons' model of hierarchical complexity. Lakoff considers Enlightenment reason to be false in that it is fully conscious, literal, disembodied, and fits the world directly. Real reason, according to Lakoff, is embodied, inseparable from emotion, and rooted in image schema and metaphor. This calls into question at least some of the premises upon which developmental models are built. This engaging and lengthy (31-page!) thread is primarily a one-person inquiry, as theurj (aka Edward Berge) followed out the implications of Lakoff's critique over many months of reflection. Included are a number of comments and responses from Michael Commons, Sara Ross, and Tom Murray from the Yahoo Adult Development forum.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/real-and-false-reason>

6. Definitions of Postmetaphysics. The attempt to clarify and refine – and thereby to further – the postmetaphysical inquiry led many forum participants to produce questions or plausible answers toward the definition of “integral postmetaphysical spirituality.” Many different concerns, tones, and ideas provide alternative pathways into the same basic investigation. Here are a few of them:

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/what-is-postmetaphysical>

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/ejaculation-broccoli-an-integral-definition-of-metaphysics>

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/what-is-post-metaphysical>

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/an-integral-postmetaphysical>

7. Desire. The IPS approach was critical-affirmative and embraced the integrative wholeness model in which all the various natural energies of life are included. The overt metaphysics of vitalism and the covert metaphysics of an “empty universe” may profitably hold each other in

check as we try to understand our reality, and ourselves, as intrinsically motivated, active, creative, and participatory beings. A refined and summary notion of desire in the full, multidimensional spectrum of its manifestations not only helps to re-situate advanced philosophy in real-world biology and ecology, but it also helps us understand the drives that politics and economics must be patterned to satisfy. In a world that is partially liberated from the superstitions of faith, science, and language, we need an energetic axis around which to organize ourselves – an axis that is resonant with our understanding of a dynamically enactive and scientifically holy universe.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/trusting-desire-zach-schlosser>

8. Holarchy. A penchant for encouraging and exploring alternative and mutating variants of integral theory definitely characterized the forum. Kevin Bowman’s fascinating work on Holarchical Field Theory, and especially its pertinence to economics, is one example.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/application-of-holarchical-field-theory-kevin-bowman>

9. The Christmas Wiki. Long before the current online integral glossaries existed, Layman Pascal put together a resource to combine his own concepts, his jocular articulations of integral concepts, and the various neologisms emerging from the Ning forum. This thread links to his “Christmas Wiki” and follows a discussion that spread in many threads about terminology, new concepts, and the hyperpersonal clarification of emergent vision-logic ideas.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/space-time-the-christmas-wiki>

10. Close Encounters. An attempt to explore, dissect, and re-validate subtle energies, subtle entities, visions, shamanism, and aliens form a shifting current across many Ning threads – working to first divest ourselves of the most obvious foolishness and metaphysical thinking, and then redefine the remaining valid experiences in ways that do not depend up the blunt, reified, and magical categories that still remain present even within modern and postmodern discourse. Many of us take seriously our own encounters with “entities” and are hyper-attuned to all experiments in which people are deepening, expanding, and revising their own interpretations of these phenomena. One such thread opens with a report by Bruce Alderman (Balder) on his intriguing Contact Expedition experiences with Dr. Steven Greer in the UK, and another invites critical reflection on Ken Wilber's Kosmic Addressing system for mystical experiences, as proposed in *Integral Spirituality*.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/report-from-the-field-close-encounters>

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/kosmic-addressing-of-mystical>

11. Horror in the Integral Suburbs. Many of the contributors found some personal resonance between “inhumanist” or “transhumanist” aesthetics and the attempt to push deeper into postformal reasoning and the metatheoretical frontier of evolutionary spirituality beyond first-tier conceptualizations. From Lady Gaga to H.P. Lovecraft, the integration of darkness and every kind of reversal of values provided a creative counterbalance to the perceived ‘shiny corporate positive

futurism' of many public integral projects. IPS strove to embrace the Satanic as much as the Saintly, the Ragged as much as the Smooth, the Obscene as much as the Empathic, the Ambiguous as much as the Clear, the Socialist as much as the Conscious Capitalist, the Pop Cultural as much as the Spiritual, and Sacred Materialism as much as the Transcendental Ascent – finding Nonduality diaphanously radiant in all directions.

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/horror-spirituality-and-the>

12. Structural Transformation. Freeing ourselves from as many metaphysical limitations as we can (which, of course, also means accepting the places where we cannot) goes beyond just the naive modern liberation from “populist group dogma.” The IPS forum was a place to grow beyond the metaphysical assumptions of grammar, perception, visionary experience and even self-experience. There is a profound hermeneutic strain of inquiry in this community and it not only calls basic experience into question but seeks the patterns that underlie those experiences. Just as we are not merely Capitalists because we understand the value of free markets neither are we Marxists because we understand the idea that “false consciousness” is generated in us by virtue of the external system (LR) in which we are embedded. The whole notion of ideology is a pertinent aspect of metaphysics for the thinker to investigate. And it is not merely Marx’s critique of socio-economics. It is also McLuhan’s critique of the forms of media. And Rifkin’s critique of the forms of thermodynamic energy production. All these (and more) habits which organize the material structure of society tend to create patterns of ideation that must be teased apart from the individual’s sense of self and the group’s feelings of belief in order to get at the authentic possibilities of human life. This is a recurrent concern of many prominent participants in the IPS forums and one example can be found in the discussion of *integral energy*:

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/integral-energy-uniting-multiple-perspectives-on-our>

13. States vs Stages. This question – both in terms of how we understand Wilber’s evolving positions and how we attempt to move beyond (or beside) them – moved like the wind through countless discussions. One of the most intellectually intensive was the following:

<http://integralpostmetaphysics.ning.com/forum/topics/states-stages-the-wc-lattice-and-the-fold>