

Theses on Any Future Philosophy of Integral Post-Metaphysical Spirituality

Michael Schwartz¹

The postulate of *integral post-metaphysical spirituality* (IPS) was introduced for the first time in a substantial formal publication by Ken Wilber in his 2006 volume *Integral Spirituality*. Among the most exciting and robust explorations spurred by this notion has been an online community, featuring editors of this special issue, the complexity and brilliance of their posts and exchanges defying easy summary or explication. Others have also taken up the theme, including Wilber's own return to the notion in his 2017 volume *The Religion of Tomorrow*, where he reframes IPS in a more cautious manner – less as a post-metaphysics *fait accompli* and more as a “minimalist metaphysics,” which does accord better with the positions he has been advancing for over a decade.

In the following I propound what a philosophy of IPS would best address, including its relation to a wider field of transformative and transfiguring practice, where the latter alters experience and therein pressures received views of what constitutes reality and the human place therein. These provocations are intended at once as: (1) bald, definitive, and dogmatic pronouncements, (2) open-ended invitations to ongoing discussion and mutual learning, and (3) expressions and formulations conscious of their inherent inadequacy as to the nature of the domain of inquiry.

I

What might be the role of a philosophy of IPS? In integral circles there is talk that the map is not the territory, while the actual walk often makes it seem that there is in essence the map. Philosophy – as centered in what theosophy calls the mental plane – is to be more like a humble helper, an underlaborer, for an IPS that itself is centered in transformative and transfiguring practice and the ongoing results of such practice – philosophy serving to clarify senses of possible “directions to travel” (proper to a map) without exhausting the “directions” that can be explored (again, like a map); providing an open-ended View as orienting dynamic.

To echo Wittgenstein – philosophy offers us a picture; one, however, that should *never* hold us captive.

¹ **Michael Schwartz**, Ph.D. Columbia University, is Professor in the Department of Art and Design at Augusta University, Augusta GA, where he teaches a sequence of transdisciplinary-based academic classes to students in studio art. Michael has curated and commented on over 50 online integral art galleries at Integral Life as well as published in the areas of art history, art criticism, art education, continental philosophy, comparative spirituality, critical social theory, integral theory, critical realism, and comparative metatheory – including co-editing and co-authoring the first professional academic volume on integral *as* philosophy (*Dancing with Sophia*, forthcoming). He is curator of the international art exhibition *In the Spirit of Wholeness: Integral Art and its Enchantment Aesthetic*.
MSCHWART@augusta.edu



II

Of the three terms that constitute the phrasing of IPS, it is that of “post-metaphysics” which presents the most nuanced challenge. There are many philosophical positions in modern and postmodern thought as to what metaphysics is – and many senses of what might count as being post-metaphysical. One powerful lineage of thought, inclusive of Heidegger, Derrida, and Sallis, sees “post-metaphysics” as an ongoing project of “overcoming,” “deconstructing,” and “twisting free” from the binding force of the metaphysical tradition, where it is difficult to discern in any given instance whether one has achieved some categorical break or not from metaphysics. We must add to this the rising impetus, grounded in critical assessment of both the insights and limitations of post-metaphysical projects, to move “beyond” post-metaphysics itself – without lapsing into pre-critical positions and assertions about the real. Any future philosophy of IPS must patiently suffer through this triple knot of (1) multiple senses of metaphysics, (2) post-metaphysics as an unfinished (and perhaps unfinishable) project, and (3) the conatus to move “beyond” the limits of post-metaphysics itself – honoring the problematics as internal to philosophy, and not to reduce without remainder the issues involved to cultural memes, social pathologies, and other metaphilosophical concerns.

III

In classic integral it is often stated that there is a circular relationship between the philosophical discourses of phenomenology and ontology, in the end the distinction between the two dissolving. More pointedly, many spiritual practitioners and teachers move seamlessly from phenomenology to ontology in their making pronouncements about the real. Phenomenology does not however automatically lead to a sufficient ontology; for as Bhaskar has shown, in the domain of nature the real is stratified and phenomenology on its own is inadequate to articulate the nature of nature as proper to scientific experimentation. Collapsing, equating, or not properly differentiating these two philosophical discourses readily flirts with the epistemic fallacy – that modes of human knowing determine and exhaust, rather than condition, what we can say about the real – and readily ends up in a view that is anthropic (anthropocentric + anthropometric), with humans as the pinnacle and measure of evolution. Even as phenomenology and ontology become more *entangled* as regards the noosphere of the human socio-cultural (where acts of interpretation are caught up in the interpretative nature of what is being interpreted), and even more so with regard to expanded states of being-consciousness (what Bhaskar calls the metaReal), entanglement is neither identity nor circularity. Said otherwise, *feeling* like God as the source of all that is does not mean that one *is* God.

IV

Considerations of: (1) communal access, (2) causality, (3) genealogical clarification and metaphilosophical explanation, along with (4) transcendental argumentation are therein essential to a philosophy of IPS. To give an example. A person sees the appearance of a luminous being of rainbow colors located in the corner of a room. This being is not of the order of physical perception, as the being appears even in the dark. Others in the room see/sense this being as well. Moreover, this group can conduct a discourse about the being – even interact with the being such that the being responds.

Furthermore, interaction with the being, or a spontaneous act by the being itself, has causal consequences – transforming a member of the group, or offering guidance on how to approach an ecological issue (which turns out to be quite fruitful). Where the absence of the communal encounter with the being suggests that such welcome changes and events would *not* have taken place; that the being is involved in some manner with causal powers, even if the precise generative mechanisms are not immediately clear.

What then is the ontological status of such a being? – autopoietically self-standing?; or perhaps a product of the collective resonance of brainwaves, the latter being sufficiently explanatory, hence the appearance of the being to the group as illusory artifact? This latter way of putting it, rather than a quirk, is what haunts thought today; that we are, by and large as a culture, inheritors of a “Cartesian ontology” (not to be reduced to Descartes) that posits certain regions of being, inclusive of mind, body, and at times some expansion of the sense of mind as Consciousness (which itself might be linked to pan-psyche notions of God), while being nervous about other ontological domains as having their own self-standing status.

The hegemony of this ontology in our culture engenders, on the one hand, regressions and slippages to pre-rational and non-philosophical assertions about non-Cartesian ontological domains in order to make sense of and legitimate experiences like the one presented above; and, on the other, animates and underwrites research which deploys methodologies grounded in this ontology in an effort to “prove” there are domains of being beyond this same ontology! Genealogical clarification of this ontological inheritance, and metaphilosophical accounts of what has shaped its trajectory, become crucial for overcoming its hauntings.

Foucault, in the last phase of work, discerned on his part what he called the “Cartesian moment” as a diremption between philosophy, as a discourse on being and truth, and spirituality, as a set of practices that transform human being so as to be able to access truth. For Foucault, spirituality in modernity yields to “method,” which now has less to do with the transformation of the self and more to do with an outward *techne*. Reformulated, self-work became much more restricted in philosophy to the mental plane (as in university training), marginalizing other modes of experience that a wide array of transformative practices had previously enabled. If development occurs, it is now more limited to the mental plane (which continues to reverberate in certain integral circles with its hyper focus on cognitive stage development). Radical transformation is no longer deemed to be a necessary precondition to enhance the self’s capacities to accede to the truth, in that in the main everyone already has access to the mental and bodily planes.

Any future philosophy of IPS must fold consideration of communal access, loci of causal powers, genealogical clarification, and metaphilosophical explanation into transcendental inquiry about what being must be like for such and such to be the case.

V

For all its stress on mental development, classic integral has theorized and practiced a less than mature dialectics, with the result that it generates an overly universalizing discourse which suppresses the singular.

It is said that there are deep structures which support a multitude of surface structures – surface structures as the particulars of the deep structural universal: the latter said to be what endures in evolution, hence what really matters and deserves our utmost attention. What is not entertained in any sustained manner is how the surface structures *differ* from one another – with the universal unable to account for these differences – therein disclosing the particular’s *singularity*.

The notion of types comes closest to any sense of singularity. Yet it is another mode of universal, often of a limited set (e.g., the nine positions of the enneagram), and itself is posited as an invariant through changing developmental waves. While deep structures, surface structures, and types are a most welcome and innovative constellation of concepts, an allergy to and insufficient engagement with postmodern thought has prevented classic integral from citing irreducible differences. “Second tier” must pass through postmodernism and adopt a mature dialectics that is able to engage what Bhaskar has called the concrete universal <-> concrete singular, where other philosophers (e.g., Deleuze, Desmond, Nishida) offer parallel resources for this maturation in thought.

VI

This overly universalizing tendency of classic integral (justified as “generalizations”) has deflected it from countenancing leading-edge practice fields that do not immediately confirm its picture of the real. Here we mention four such transformational communities: (1) that of the Finders Course founded by Jeffery A. Martin; (2) the Shamballa School of the Trans-Himalayan Lineage founded by Bruce Lyon (the book *Earth is Eden* explores the relation of this school’s views to those of classic integral); (3) VortexHealing founded by Ric Weinman; and (4) the Spiritual Unfoldment Network (S.U.N or SUN) founded by Irving Feurst. Each of these communities propound reality-schemes that to varying extents diverge in important ways from that of the classic integral View. In that these communities offer Views that are well-developed, nuanced, and grounded in profound practice, a philosophy of IPS needs to take them into consideration.

For example, Martin has conducted a more than decade-long research project into awakened states of consciousness, what he calls Persistent Non-Symbolic Experience (PNSE), mapping a wide spectrum of locations (in classic integral, called state-structures). There are four basic locations, progression of which is in the end about increasing well-being. There are additional locations which are far less common, where the spectrum divides after location four into transcending and incarnating paths. One can land initially at any number of locations, and one’s location can shift over time, in cases to earlier locations when there is a “preference” as such – hence locations are at once progressively stage-like and qualitative types.

Location two is non-dual, location three is a very subtle mode of duality (a kind of witnessing), and location four is an even deeper non-duality. This calls into question the classic integral map of witnessing leading to non-duality; where integral’s two-location model does not account for the numerous locations mapped by Martin. Any philosophy of IPS worthy of its name needs to fold Martin’s research results into its underlaboring.

VII

Turning for the moment to the SUN teachings, its trans-lineage approach to the religious traditions offers overall maps of the real while strongly retaining the specificity of the various religious lineages, in theory and in practice enacting a dialectical dance of universal and singular. This entails a fractal sense of the interconnecting of the various lineages, where over time, through practice, that fractality becomes a manner for the lineages to generate novel combinations and permutations proper to a plane of being. Like classic integral, SUN posits a hierarchical scheme of the real, regularly if not always drawing on theosophical models, a scheme however that sees the various planes as also interpenetrating one another, non-hierarchical orders as potent and irreducible folds proper to and transversing hierarchy. The SUN scheme is also profoundly non-anthropocentric, as it posits two main currents of Life – an evolutionary path that is focused, if non-exclusively, on ascent (the humanoid, inclusive of the human), and an involutory path, that is focused, if non-exclusively, on descent (the devic, inclusive of the angelic). As with the Trans-Himalayan lineage, which likewise draws upon theosophical models, the human is only one kind of sentient being in a vast reality of beings of all kinds in all sorts of domains who are co-evolving and co-involuting. While not presented in philosophical or meta-theoretical ways, the SUN teaching has a mature dialectic sense of universal, particular, and singular, a “trans-hierarchical” view of hierarchy and non-hierarchy generated through the interpenetration of hierarchical planes, and a non-anthropocentric positioning of the human within a boundless reality of evolving and involuting sentience.

VIII

A hallmark contribution of classic integral is its notion of perspectives, which extends to expanded state-structures via the injunctive notion of the “1-2-3 of Spirit.” That said, confusion reigns on the status of the 2nd person.

A typical formulation is that 2nd person is in the end a we – that I plus you, via shared values and resonances, generate a common we-ness. Obviously, we is the 1st person plural, and this formulation posits the 2nd person as in essence a kind of meta-Subject. Positing I-you as transcended and included (negated) by we-ness is another instance of marginalizing differences and singularities, here of perspectival networks.

Not only is I-you non-reducible to nor subsumed by we, you is also not Thou – rather, Thou is a special modality of the 2nd person. You is a normal shifter. Peter is in one moment an I and then, in the same circumstance, shifts to being a you; with the tacit sense all along that I and you are reversible, proper to the taking of the position of the other.

Thou is different in kind, the I-Thou relationship as irreversible and asymmetrical. I can never become Thou. Thou is *always* Other. Thou is not a being in withdrawal, in the Heideggerian sense, retaining an ontological surplus that might move from sub-sisting to ex-isting. It is not a potential to be transcended and embraced by a vast I AM, where the first person is the not-too-secreted ultimate perspective of the 1-2-3 of Spirit which moves to achieve ever greater “wholeness” and “unity” (as yet another impulse towards one-sided universalizing), or to be forgotten in the 0

perspective of pure-being-consciousness. Thou is the breaking into actuality of pure Otherness – always already intimate and non-separate – gifting *deep communing* and *pure merging*.

IX

Lyon, Weinman, and Feurst all claim that the teachings they are offering come not from themselves but from ascended sentient beings: named DK in the case of Lyon, Merlin in the case of Weinman, and TK in the case of Feurst. And in all three cases the founders of these schools are in significant locations of PNSE. What goes to the heart of these claims, whatever their validity, is a welcoming of Thou and an honoring of difference and singularity without compromising unity states of consciousness.

One result is that these three schools effectively alleviate contemporary widespread tendencies towards spiritual narcissism, self-inflation, and the syndrome of the beautiful soul (what Feurst calls “glamour”). They decenter humanity from a privileged place in reality, expand profoundly the sense of an enchanted reality beyond the human, honor high cognitive capacities while seeing the mental plane as a quite limited form of intelligence available to humanity, and offer robust and complex schemes of reality (in cases replete with mature dialectics) that go beyond simplistic views of hierarchy.

Any future philosophy of IPS needs to assess the uncommon reality-claims of these (and similar) teachings, all of which are grounded in repeatable practices; never losing touch that the map is not the territory.