

Integral Life Practice 1/5: Maps & Quadrants

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HOMILY ONE

How many of you take pleasure in refolding a road map, so it is exactly as it was when it was originally created? How many fold them back into more-or-less the same shape, or don't refold them at all? How many of you have ever *failed* to locate a town or a place on a map, because the map had too large or too small a scale?

When I went to the Traverse Area District Library, last week, to check out the book I used for this morning's story, I discovered that the main branch did not have a copy of it, but the East Bay branch did. The librarian was very helpful; she called ahead, to confirm they had it, and she asked them to hold it for me. Then she showed me where the East Bay branch is, on a map. Except, the first map she used was a Traverse City map. It was very detailed, with every street in town labeled. Alas, that much detail requires a lot of room, so the whole sheet of paper was filled with just Traverse City. Anything very far out of the city limits would not fit. The librarian quickly turned her map over, to a county map, which did not nearly have the same level of detail, and which therefore could fit a lot more on the same sized paper. It was then easy to see where the two libraries were, and how to get from one to the other.

Ken Wilber, and his colleagues at the Integral Institute, have put together a map of all human knowledge and experience. They had a similar problem, when constructing their map—if they put too much information on the map, it became too big and too cluttered, so it wasn't very useful. On the other hand, if they had too little information on their map, it wouldn't be helpful, either. The key insight was that there were five key elements that belonged on the map. We'll get to what those five elements are, in a moment. First I want to explore *why* Wilber was making a map in the first place.

How many of you have ever had a conversation with a professional philosopher, or at least a student majoring in philosophy? How many found the philosopher to be just a little bit odd? As a person with a degree in philosophy, I will confirm that most of us are a little weird. However, most of us don't study philosophy in order to be weird. We study philosophy because we believe it's the best way we can help the world.

When Rene' Descartes wrote "I think, therefore I am," he could hear the cannons fighting in the Thirty Years' War. He saw the effects of the violence, and the starvation and disease, and he thought if people could approach life more rationally, such horrors as war and famine would cease.

Likewise, Wittgenstein wrote in response to the first world war, and Karl Popper developed his philosophies to directly contradict the propaganda of the Nazis. Most philosophers are trying to determine how we humans can live more peaceful, more fulfilling, more joyful lives.

It is the same for Ken Wilber. He wants us all to live up to our full potential, as creative, compassionate, multifaceted human beings.

For the first time in human history, we have access to all the world's cultures. It's only been in the last few decades, certainly within the lifetime of most of us in this room, that we've been able to access all that information.

Beginning with the idea that virtually every scientist and every sage and every philosopher got *something* right in her or his research, Wilber tried to find patterns in all that knowledge, to help us use those patterns to better live our lives. He found five basic patterns, five simple elements to include in his map of reality. He refers to them as quadrants, lines, levels, states and types. Over the course of this year, we'll study each one of those in more detail, one sermon for each these elements, and explore whether or not they *can* help us to live better, more fulfilling lives.

Some of this may sound familiar; Mark Gustafson led an adult religious education class on this, several years ago. In fact, Mark has donated one of Wilber's books to our church library, so if any of this is interesting to you, you can do some research on your own.

Before we plunge into Quadrants, I'll provide a brief overview of the other four elements, so our maps have at least the beginnings of all five patterns.

How many of you have heard of the concept of "emotional intelligence"? That's the idea that people can be really perceptive about emotions—their own or others'—or they can be not perceive emotions very well, and this is a completely different ability than what we usually mean by "intelligence" which is more like cognitive ability.

Wilber's "lines" reflect the reality that most of us are really good at some things, and not-so-good at other things. Besides logical thinking and emotional perceptivity, Wilber lists musical ability; kinesthetic prowess, like sports or dance; and moral intelligence as examples of these lines of development. This explains how someone might be really good at music, but be unable to keep her checkbook balanced. It also explains how some really cruel people might also be highly logical thinkers—moral intelligence and logical intelligence are entirely different things.

Note that these are *not* reflections of worth; people who rank highly on any of these developmental lines do not have more inherent worth and dignity than people who rank lower. The lines merely show the many resources and abilities we have to make our lives more fulfilling.

Levels are like lines, only much more broad. Lines reflect very specific types of experience—dance, logical thinking, etc.—while levels are about how we approach life in general. For example, most children believe in magic for a time, and most children require very specific, very concrete rules. Many of us come to challenge those rules, and rebel against them, at some point; some of us eventually come to terms with these boundaries, and learn when it is important to follow them, and when it is better to bend the rules. We learn to accept ambiguity and grey areas.

Some researchers claim that we humans grow through three main levels of development; others divide our experience up into seven levels, or as many as twelve. It matters less how we divide them up, than the fact that there is empirical evidence that our human development follows these patterns and levels.

Again, people at higher stages are not worth more than people at lower stages. Rather, this idea of "levels" of development should help us to better understand our world and our fellow humans. If we are trying to engage somebody at a different level, we should do so with examples and proposals at their level.

"States" are states of consciousness—awake, asleep, deep sleep, dreaming. Meditation and other practices can produce glimpses into higher states of consciousness. States are only temporary, and they can be accessed at any time. Anybody can have a peak experience, of great joy and wisdom, but they will return to their usual level of development afterward. Levels are more permanent, and we go through them one by one; states are temporary and always available.

Finally, the fifth element of Wilber's integral vision is "types." These are categories of human experience, like male and female, or introvert or extravert, enneagram "2" or enneagram "5", or homosexual or hetero- or bi- or a-sexual. Our understanding of our world is enriched and improved when we take into account people of types other than our own.

If we make sure that our internal maps of reality include all five elements: quadrants, lines, levels, states and types, we remind ourselves, and give ourselves access to the full range of human resources, which makes it much more likely that we will find success and fulfillment in our journeys.

So may we be.

FIRST READING Jessica Goodfellow has a Master's degree in Social Science from the California Institute of Technology, and has worked as a university math teacher, financial analyst, English teacher, and editor. She is also a prize-winning poet. She grew up in Philadelphia, and now lives in Kobe, Japan, with her husband and two sons.

Her poem, *The Invention of Fractions* begins with an epigraph by Leopold Kronnecker: "God himself made the whole numbers: everything else is the work of man."

God created the whole numbers: the first born, the seventh seal, Ten Commandments etched in stone, the Twelve Tribes of Israel — Ten we've already lost — forty days and forty nights, Saul's ten thousand and David's ten thousand. 'Be of one heart and one mind' — the whole numbers, the counting numbers.

It took humankind to need less than this; to invent fractions, percentages, decimals. Only humankind could need the concepts of splintering and dividing, of things lost or broken, of settling for the part instead of the whole.

Only humankind could find the whole numbers, infinite as they are, to be wanting; though given a limitless supply, we still had no way to measure what we keep in our many-chambered hearts.

SECOND READING Ken Wilber was born in Oklahoma, in 1949. He has degrees in chemistry and biology, and practices Buddhist meditation. Except for a period of three years, when he cared for his dying wife, he has been working at integrating western science and eastern philosophy and all the rest of human experience for 35 years now.

This is from his 1996 book, *A Brief History of Everything*:

"I'll tell you what I think. I think the [mystics and] sages are the growing tip of the secret impulse of evolution. I think they are the leading edge of the self-transcending drive that always goes beyond what went before. I think they embody the very drive of the Kosmos toward greater depth and expanding consciousness...

And I think they point to the same depth in you, and in me, and in all of us. I think they are plugged into the All, and the Kosmos sings through their voices, and Spirit shines through their eyes.

I think they disclose the face of tomorrow, they open us to the heart of our own destiny, which is already right now in the timelessness of this very moment, and in that startling recognition the voice of the sage becomes your voice, the eyes of the sage become your eyes, you speak with the tongues of angels and are alight with the fire of a realization that never dawns nor ceases, you recognize your own true Face in the mirror of the Kosmos itself: your identity is indeed the All, and you are no longer part of that stream, you *are* that stream, with the All unfolding not around you but in you. The stars no longer shine out there, but in here. Supernovas come into being within your heart, and the sun shines inside your awareness. Because you transcend all, you embrace all. There is no final Whole here, only an endless process, and you are the opening or the clearing or the pure Emptiness in which the entire process unfolds— ceaselessly, miraculously, everlastingly, lightly.

The whole game is undone, this [drama] of evolution, and you are exactly where you were prior to the beginning of the whole show. With a sudden shock of the utterly obvious, you recognize your own Original Face, the face you had prior to the Big Bang, the face of utter Emptiness that smiles as all creation and sings as the entire Kosmos— and it is all undone in that primal glance, and all that is left is the smile, and the reflection of the moon on a quiet pond, late on a crystal clear night."

HOMILY TWO

"maps & quadrants" How many of you found the Wilber quotation, that I just finished, to be exciting and inspiring? How many found it poetic, but a little too New-Agey for your taste? How many think its mention of mystics and spirit and Kosmos is dangerously close to the religious noises uttered in any number of other churches this morning?

I have to admit, the concept that the universe is all one giant w-h-o-l-e whole, and its consciousness peers through my eyes, and supernovas come into being within my heart is a radically *big* notion.

And mystics and sages in virtually every culture, in virtually every time, have asserted its truth. I myself have been privileged to feel that Oneness. I have never written about it as poetically as Wilber, but I have experienced a union with the All, just as millions of others of our human cousins have—some of us here in this room.

And it isn't just the sages and mystics—scientists also suggest a universal unity. Quantum mechanics, with its wave/particle duality, and its Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, and recent developments in chaos

theory and complexity theory—none of these things proves that the universe is one, but they do definitively show that nothing is as concrete or as separate or as independent as we once thought.

And Wilber examines all of these data points, and reports these patterns, and encourages us to recognize and embrace our wholeness.

Or like Jessica Goodfellow wrote, in our first reading: “Only humankind could need the concepts of splintering and dividing, of things lost or broken, of settling for the part instead of the whole.”

Let us no longer settle for a *part*—let us, from this moment forward, imagine that our resources are deeper and broader, and our potential higher. Let us live life more fully with the impulse of evolution shining through us so brightly that others ask us how we do it, and how they might live with such energy and calm hope.

The integral map will help us to live like that, but thus far, we’ve only covered four of its five elements. The last one is a quadrant, like the one on the wall behind me.

Wilber noticed that most beings and situations have both an inner and an outer component, or both subjective and objective aspects. He also noticed that we have both individual and collective aspects. If you combine those two dichotomies—internal/external and individual/collective—you get four possibilities: internal individual, external individual, internal collective, and external collective. Those are depicted in these four quadrants.

The upper left is the internal individual aspect; which is our experience of our self and our consciousness. It is labeled “I” because it is our internal thoughts and feelings.

The lower left is the internal collective aspect of our experience—that is, our culture and worldview. It is labeled “WE” because it is the total gestalt of all the feelings and thoughts and fears and hopes of our collective.

The upper right is the external, or objective, aspect of our individuality. Whereas the upper left is internal, and therefore unknown except to ourselves, the upper right is external, and objective. This is the part of our individuality which is known and measurable by others. It is labeled “IT” because it can be objectified and verified.

The lower right is the external aspect of the collective. It is the measurable aspect of our collective, our social system and environment, and therefore it is labeled with the plural form, “ITS”

This is perhaps a little abstract, so let me give you a more concrete example.

If we were to talk about an integral vision of medicine, we would have to incorporate all four quadrants. Traditional western medical practice has focused on the upper right, the external individual: it addresses the physical organism, using physical interventions like medicines, surgery, etc. Recently, we are noticing that the upper left, the internal individual, is also important: a patient’s emotions and attitudes play a part in her health and wellbeing. Art therapy, and guided meditations might be upper-left interventions. The lower-left quadrant, the internal collective aspect, includes such intersubjective factors as how well the doctor and patient communicate, the attitudes of family and friends, and how they are conveyed to the patient, and the cultural acceptance or judgment placed on the particular illness. Finally, in the lower right, we find external collective concerns, such as the material, social and economic factors that are never counted as part of a disease, but nevertheless have a huge impact on health. You can have the positive mental attitude in the world, and access to medicine and the support of your family, but if your social system cannot deliver food to your village, or if your insurance company will not pay for your surgery, you are not going to thrive for very long.

So you see, all four quadrants are important—and necessary—to the total health of the system.

Many researchers and theorists focus on one of these quadrants, which can provide useful data, but it is insufficient to promote a full understanding of our human condition. Some people claim that reality is just a dream, that there is no objective reality. That would be focusing too much on the upper left, internal individual quadrant. Others, especially postmodernists, claim that all truth is culturally constructed, and there is no objective truth across all cultures. They are focusing on the lower left, internal collective.

I'm not saying that these ideas are totally wrong; they do contain important understandings. It is just that they are incomplete by themselves. Theories based only in one quadrant—or two or even three—are still only partial; we will only thrive if we use resources from all four quadrants.

So, systems theorists who focus only on the lower right quadrant would benefit from a larger, integral perspective, and people who claim that all human experience can be explained by physical and chemical processes also have incomplete understandings.

Some of my friends, for example, insist that all mystical experiences, such as that feeling of oneness, of union with everything, that Wilber wrote about in our second reading, are simply artifacts of our brains. It is merely a result of a particular set of neurons firing, nothing more. There is a scientist who can recreate these feelings, by placing an electronic helmet on your head, and electrically stimulating your brain in certain configurations. He can create a sense of deep peace, or make you feel like you are one with the universe with only a little electricity. I have one friend who triumphantly exclaims that this proves that all mystical experiences are false.

Except that we can use similar electrical stimulation of the brain to make us feel sad, or gleeful, or hungry. That doesn't mean that we have never experienced sadness or gladness or hunger, that these are all illusory artifacts of our brain. It means that our brain has circuits to feel and monitor these things because they do exist in our human experience.

We can't live in just one quadrant; we will do better if we use resources from all four.

Let me give you a couple more examples, as practice.

During my CPE—my clinical pastoral education, I spent a summer in a nursing home. I went to read and pray with a woman who had been in a coma for years. Because she was in a coma, we had no way of learning what, if anything, was in her upper left quadrant. We can project from our own experience, that she had feelings and beliefs about how she wanted to live, or die, but we could not access them. In the upper right, we could look at her pulse rate, and her oxygen intake, and we could examine the flat lines of her electro-encephalograph, that seemed to indicate that nothing was going on in her mind. In the lower left are her cultural beliefs: how she and her family and our U.S. culture in general feels about end-of-life issues: perhaps resisting it at all costs; perhaps accepting it as a natural end and coming to peace with it. And the lower right contains all the insurance companies and politicians who are part of the system that either make it easier or more difficult for her to achieve the kind of death she might have desired.

My upper-left experience of meditation is of counting breaths, and a feeling of calm and sometimes, deep awareness. An upper-right experience would show my pulse slowing, and my brain waves changing. A lower left glimpse shows how Becky supports me in my meditation, and my family doesn't really get it, but accepts it, and my colleagues who also have a sitting practice. The lower right includes a system that generally embraces active, rather than passive activities—and it has prisons that teach meditation, which shows reduced violence in the prison, and reduced recidivism in the released meditating prisoners.

Once upon a time, a little girl grew up in a strict Christian Scientist home. She was taught that medicine and science were not only bad, they were hostile to her way of life. When she grew ill, she was told it was her own fault, and she had no medical or scientific resources to change her lifestyle.

Not far from her, a little boy grew up in a home of old-school physicists who believed that nothing was real unless it could be quantified or explained with an equation. Altruism was simply a means by which species ensured their survival, and love was a figment for soft-headed dreamers. Religion was beneath contempt. He grew up knowing very little of love, and scorned those who would offer it to him.

Egotistic people charge through their lives, with little thought for those around them. Some people develop too much concern for others, and subsume their own personality as they work endlessly for others.

All of these folks could benefit from better balance; all of them could live happier lives, if they were given a map that better described their human world.

Well, you know how fairies and magical beings always have odd names, like Rumpelstiltskin—maybe a magical being like amaZONdotcom or HorlzonBooks might furnish such a map to these folks. And maybe it would work for us, too.

I invite you to take a moment; think of a problem you're facing or a decision you're weighing...Examine it from all four quadrants—are you considering both your own needs AND the needs of the appropriate collective? Are you ignoring or denying one of those aspects? How about feelings and facts—hard data are important, and sometimes a gut instinct is the right approach. Have you considered both sides of that equation?

It need not be a 50/50 balance, but we can search for input and inspiration from all four quadrants.

Finally, notice that each quadrant has its own virtue. In the lower left, among the interior lives of a collective, the cardinal virtue is goodness—treating each other well. In the two right quadrants, having to do with external measurement and verification, the cardinal virtue is truth. And in the upper left, concerned with the self and self-expression, the cardinal virtue is beauty. So the four quadrants yield three important virtues: goodness, and truth, and beauty. Let there be more truth, and more goodness and more beauty in our lives.

So may we be.