

Integral Life Practice: Types (5th in a 5-part series)

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HOMILY ONE “integral life practice”

How many of you have used one of those fancy new GPS systems, to get directions on how to drive somewhere? How many use “old technology,” actual paper maps? How many prefer the oldest technique, stopping and asking for directions?

Anna Bachman sent me an email this week, with a cartoon about Moses...something like “after 40 years of wandering in the desert, Moses’ wife secretly asks for directions.” We all have maps in our brains, detailing how we think the world works, to help us navigate our lives. Philosopher Ken Wilber is trying to improve our mental maps. He begins with the assumption that nobody is 100% wrong. Every philosopher, every scientist, every theologian must have understood *something* about our world correctly. Wilber then includes on his map all the places where there is significant agreement among the various experts.

Wilber's map shows that there are patterns and trends in our universe. It shows how the spirit of evolution acts in similar ways, over and over, from the subatomic level to the microscopic, and from the macroscopic all the way to the galactic. Several patterns do emerge, that help us understand how the universe has evolved thus far, and where it might be headed in the future.

There are five significant patterns, or five elements of Wilber’s “integral map.” These are quadrants, lines, levels, states and types. We’ll focus on types, in a few minutes; allow me to recap the others, first.

Quadrants are a crystallization of the insight that every event or thing or organism in the universe has both internal and external aspects, and both singular and plural aspects. Thus, everything can be examined from four viewpoints: the singular internal, singular external, plural internal and plural external.

For example, if I am painting at a “spirit in the bone” session, one of the embodied practices we engage on the first and third Tuesday evenings, we could look at my artistic endeavor from all four vantage points. The interior individual would be my own subjective experience: my thoughts and my feelings while I am painting. The exterior individual are the objective facts that pertain to me, like my heart rate and body temperature, or an EEG showing my brainwaves, and how they change as I create. The interior plural would be the feel of the group, how they relate to each other within their

shared cultural values. Finally, the exterior collective could include measurements of the temperature of the room, the wavelengths of the paint colors, and other objective facts about the whole-group phenomenon.

All four of these quadrants are valid and important; all four must be taken into consideration by any theory claiming to be complete.

If we wish to address the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Africa, for example, we must include the psychological and spiritual needs of the afflicted persons; their physical symptoms; their cultural context, how their society treats them; and their objective systems: the availability of food and medicine, and the infrastructure to deliver them. Any specific human may concentrate her or his efforts in one of those areas, but unless we are dealing with all four, our efforts are much less likely to succeed.

By keeping in mind all four quadrants in every decision, we are more likely to use all the resources we possess, and thus more likely to succeed in our endeavors.

The second element in Wilber's maps are "lines of development." This is the understanding that there are different tracks of development for different abilities. Moral understanding is different from intellectual intelligence, which is different from a sense of aesthetics which differs from bodily, kinesthetic, abilities like sports and dance, and so on. Being very good at one thing does **not** imply that we will be good at some other thing. This explains the existence of evil geniuses: such people are highly developed, intellectually, but not well-developed at all, in their moral understanding.

The concept of "stages", or "levels" comes from the insight that we all develop through stages in our lives. As children, we may believe in magic at first; then we demand concrete answers. As we age, those answers may appear too rigid or prove inadequate in dealing with a complex world, so we learn to deal with ambiguity and shades of grey. No one level is "better" than the others; it all depends upon how well they help us function in our particular circumstance. Philosophers often refer to these stages using the names of colors, to help reduce the tendency to judge some stages as inherently inferior or superior

The fourth element is "states," meaning "states of consciousness." These involve concepts like "awake," "asleep," "deep asleep" and "altered states" like you may experience from drugs or alcohol, or fasting, or meditating, or exercise. Every state is available to every human being, but how we interpret those states, especially altered states like peak experiences, depends upon our level of development.

The same kind of "peak experience" would be interpreted differently by different people.

An aboriginal tribesperson in Australia would understand the experience quite differently than a western scientist, or a fundamentalist Jew, or a liberal Christian mystic.

Finally, the fifth element of Wilber's map is "types," which we'll take up in detail, in a few minutes.

All of these elements are things which exist in our experience, which can help us, if we are more aware of them.

FIRST READING

The Rev. Ms. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley was born in 1949, in Philadelphia. After a career in public television, she followed her call to UU ministry. She served congregations in New York City and Tampa, Florida; she was a co-founder of the African American UU Ministers group; and she served as Adult Programs Director for our Unitarian Universalist Association. She passed away in January, 2007.

"If, recognizing the interdependence of all life, we strive to build community, the strength we gather will be our salvation.

If you are black and I am white, it will not matter.
If you are female and I am male, it will not matter.
If you are older and I am younger, it will not matter.
If you are progressive and I am conservative, it will not matter.
If you are straight and I am gay, it will not matter.
If you are Christian and I am Jewish, it will not matter.
If we join spirits as brothers and sisters,
the pain of our aloneness will be lessened,
and that does matter.

In this spirit, we build community and move toward restoration."

SECOND READING

Ogden Nash was born in 1902, in the small town of Rye, New York. Upon his death, in 1971, the New York Times called him the country's best-known humorous poet. This is slightly adapted from Nash's original.

Song To Be Sung By The Father Of Infant Female Children

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
Contrariwise, my blood runs cold
When little boys go by.
For little boys as little boys,
No special hate I carry,
But now and then they grow to men,
And when they do, they marry.
No matter how they tarry,
Eventually they marry.
And, swine among the pearls,
[Most] marry little girls.

Oh, somewhere, somewhere, an infant plays,
With parents who feed and clothe him.
Their lips are sticky with pride and praise,
But I have begun to loathe him.
Yes, I loathe with loathing shameless
This child who to me is nameless.
This bachelor child in his carriage
Gives never a thought to marriage,
But a person can hardly say knife
Before he will hunt him a wife.

I never see an infant (male),
A-sleeping in the sun,
Without I turn a trifle pale
And think is he the one?
Oh, first he'll want to crop his curls,
And then he'll want a pony,
And then he'll think of pretty girls,
And holy matrimony.
A cat without a mouse
Is he without a spouse.

Oh, somewhere he bubbles bubbles of milk,
And quietly sucks his thumbs.
His cheeks are roses painted on silk,
And his teeth are tucked in his gums.
But alas the teeth will begin to grow,

And the bubbles will cease to bubble;
Given a score of years or so,
The roses will turn to stubble.
He'll sell a bond, or he'll write a book,
And his eyes will get that acquisitive look,
And raging and ravenous for the kill,
He'll boldly ask for the hand of Jill.
This infant whose middle
Is diapered still
Will want to marry My daughter Jill.

...

A fig for embryo Lohengrins!
I'll open all his safety pins,
I'll pepper his powder, and salt his bottle,
And give him readings from Aristotle.
Sand for his spinach I'll gladly bring,
And Tabasco sauce for his teething ring.
Then perhaps he'll struggle through fire and water
To marry somebody else's daughter.

HOMILY TWO “types”

How many of you know whether you are primarily an introvert or an extravert? How many know your full four-letter Myers Briggs personality type? How many have no idea who Myers or Briggs were, much less what letter combinations like “INFP” or “ESTJ” mean?

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI, is a system that helps explain our psychological preferences. It includes the spectrum from extravert to introvert, and three other psychological-and-behavioral spectra, for a grand total of 16 major personality types.

Before we get too far into the jargon, let me give an example of how this typology can be useful. Becky knows a couple in Ohio who are really good parents to their children. One of the things that helps them be such good parents is that they took a Myers-Briggs parenting class when their children were young. The class helped them determine the MBTI “type” of each child, then suggested ways to best interact with each type. It’s really just a way of understanding and communicating.

The parents had already figured out some of the differences; they knew that some techniques that always worked for one child rarely or never worked for the other child. Before they took the Myers-Briggs class, they just knew their kids were different. After the class, they knew *how* they were different, and had tools to communicate more effectively. They could even predict how their children might respond to certain life events, and plan how to best help them accept, and learn and grow through the experience.

You see, in 1923, Katharine Cook Briggs read a book by the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, called *Psychological Types: the Psychology of Individuation*. Joined by her scientist husband, Lyman, and their daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, they began to observe people very closely, using the lens of psychological type.

By 1962, their work was published, although it was then only used as a research technique. In 1968, it was translated into Japanese, for use in business, matching workers to the jobs in which they would best flourish. Since then, thousands of researchers have worked to make their questionnaires as accurate as possible, and to expand the usefulness of their work—like offering MBTI parenting classes.

Jung’s core idea was that every moment that our minds are engaged, we are either taking in information or organizing that information, and drawing conclusions from it. Jung called the “taking in” kind of mental engagement “perceiving” and he called the “organizing & concluding” activity “judging.” He also noticed that most people were better—or at least, more comfortable—at doing one or the other of those mental processes. Therefore, judging/perceiving, or J and P, is one of the four gradients of the Myers Briggs typology.

The other three are introvert/extravert, shortened to I or E; and thinking or feeling, T or F; and finally, sensing or intuition, preferring facts or possibilities, abbreviated S or N. So an “INFP” is a person whose primary way of interacting with his world involves introversion, intuition, feeling and perceiving; and an “ESTJ” is a person who usually engages her world in an extraverted, sensing, thinking, judging fashion.

Obviously, all of these are technical terms, used differently in this system than we use them in conversation. As this is a sermon about typologies in general, not just the MBTI in specific, I won’t go into much more detail. You can check out Myers Briggs in any library, or type “MBTI” into any online search engine, and you will find a wealth of information.

The main thing to notice is that all these different personality types are not measures of moral worth. No matter how often we Js assert that order is a virtue, our fellow Ps will rightly insist that spontaneity is *also* a virtue. Both people classified as “J” and those classified as “P”—and all those who have aspects of both—have inherent worth and dignity. Like in our first reading, Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley might have included “if you are ‘J’ and I am ‘P,’ it will not matter”...

Except that it *does* matter; or at least, it can. Not when we are talking about absolute, moral worth, no. But if we are trying to figure out how best to communicate with someone, or how best to recharge our own batteries, then it most certainly matters. Extraverts gain energy from being among other people; introverts gain energy from solitude. Both types may be able to function in both environments, but when they get exhausted, extraverts should find some company and introverts should seek some privacy.

I reiterate, these typologies are not used to blame or demonize others; they are used to foster understanding and cooperation.

Another popular typology is the Enneagram. How many of you know what type you are, in the Enneagram system? I am a “Two,” the Helper.

The Enneagram, as you might guess from the name, divides people into nine categories. They are numbered, one through nine, and one version of the names is as follows: Perfectionists, Helpers, Achievers, Romantics, Experts, Loyalists, Enthusiasts, Bosses, Mediators.

This personality typology is generally attributed to Oscar Ichazo, a Bolivian, who claims he was inspired in 1954 to understand these nine basic patterns of thought and behavior. A Chilean psychiatrist, Claudio Naranjo, developed the system further, and a Jesuit priest, Robert Ochs, and his students popularized it. Nowadays, businesses use it to help their leaders communicate and lead better, and many seminaries include it, among other psychological tests, as part of their entrance requirements.

An interesting and useful innovation in the Enneagram is that each type has a “healthy” manifestation and an “unhealthy” manifestation. For example; when type Ones, the Perfectionists, are at their best, they can be highly ethical and reliable; at their worst, they might become judgmental and inflexible. Similarly, healthy Twos—Helpers—are loving and adaptable; unhealthy Twos may be martyr-like and manipulative.

Every type has both healthy and unhealthy aspects.

A unique feature of the Enneagram are the connections between types. Each type is connected to two of the other types. A type moves toward one of its connected types when they feel comfortable and secure; and they move toward another type when they are stressed.

For example, Number Threes, Achievers, are generally confident, optimistic and efficient. When they feel secure, Threes can move toward the positive aspects of Sixes, called Loyalists, and they may become more warm and caring and may get in touch with their own feelings. When very stressed, Threes may exhibit behaviors similar to unhealthy Nines, the Mediators. They may lose their confidence and become indecisive, even apathetic.

Knowing these things helps us cultivate our strengths and recognize when we are acting out of stress.

Which brings us, at last, to the classic typology: masculine and feminine. Note that I did not say “male” and “female.” Of course, the psychological and behavioral characteristics of gender are often connected with the biological categories of sex. Many people, even whole societies, attempt to limit gender roles to biological sex.

I will make no such limitation, but only speak about behaviors. I thought about using a different set of terms entirely, perhaps “yang” and “yin.” But I wanted the opportunity to make the distinction between cultural gender and biological sex.

Also, please note that by speaking only about behaviors, and not trying to define things strictly by sex, we include in the conversation the millions of people born with characteristics of both sexes, and those people who identify as trans-sexual.

Like the Enneagram types, our masculine and feminine types have both healthy and unhealthy aspects. Ken Wilber writes,

“If the healthy masculine principle tends toward autonomy, strength, independence, and freedom, when that principle becomes unhealthy or pathological, all of those positive virtues either over- or under-fire. There is not just autonomy, but alienation; not just strength, but domination; not just independence but morbid fear of relationship and commitment; not just a drive toward freedom, but a drive to destroy. The unhealthy masculine principle does not transcend in freedom,

but dominates in fear.”

Again, this is not saying that all-or-only males are like this; it is describing how the masculine principle, which lives to greater or lesser extent in every person, manifests. Similarly, the feminine exists in all of us.

Wilber writes,

“If the healthy feminine principle tends toward flowing, relationship, care and compassion, the unhealthy feminine flounders in each of those. Instead of being in relationship, [it is becoming] lost in relationship. Instead of a healthy self in communion with others, [the self is lost] altogether, dominated by the relationships...Not a connection, but a fusion; not a flow state, but a panic state...The unhealthy feminine principle does not find fullness in connection, but chaos in fusion.”

The joke I shared earlier, about Moses’ wife finally asking for directions, plays off the common stereotype of men not asking for directions. Our second reading, the Ogden Nash poem, includes an assumption that men are lustful, acquisitive, raging, and ravenous. Obviously, some men do exhibit these behaviors, and worse, as do some women and some intersex people—and they would all be demonstrating unhealthy masculine aspects.

All people have moral worth; our behaviors, however, may be more or less healthy.

Finally, let us conclude with “types” of religious experience. How many of you have ever said something like, “well, it’s all the same god,” or “all the same source,” or “it’s the same spirit of life pulsing in all of us”? I have. And we are right, to some extent. Ultimately, if you are theist and I am humanist, it will not matter. But in the ways we try to communicate, in the ways we try to get along and co-create a peaceful world, it very much matters.

Mike Hogue is the Assistant Professor for Theology at Meadville Lombard Theological School, one of our two Unitarian Universalist seminaries. In the fall of 2006, Doctor Hogue wrote,

“liberal religious tolerance has flattened out into a blanket assumption that all religious traditions are functionally equivalent...in this way, our so-called ‘tolerance’ of religious difference liquidates the vitality of particular religious traditions. Thus tolerance becomes destructive. It fuels religious syncretism, a reductive marketplace approach...that appropriates [religions] as mere lifestyle accessories...This commodifies

religion...[and is] complicit with a colonial-consumerist ideology that in many of its other manifestations liberal religionists are wont to reject... The functional homogenization of religious particularities reflects a violent colonization of distinctive cultural and religious traditions.”

In other words, by treating all religions as basically the same, and by ignoring or dismissing their differences, Hogue says we are colonizing and stripmining other spiritual traditions.

Extraverts are different from introverts. Type Three Achievers are different from Type Nine Mediators. Men are different from women. We all have the same inherent worth and dignity, and our differences are important and essential.

Religions are in many ways alike—they are all paths up the same mountain, but those paths are quite different, and each one requires and teaches something unique.

Next year, we will spend a good bit of time exploring who exactly we are, and how we are the same as, and quite different from, other religious/spiritual/awakened people.

So may we be.