



# Integral Politics

## A SPIRITUAL THIRD WAY<sup>1</sup>

Gregory Wilpert

In this time of ideological upheaval, when the old ideologies of left and right, of socialism, liberalism, and conservatism, no longer capture the political imagination as they once did, new political visions are required. Some have tried to formulate a “third way” between social democracy and conservatism. Others have proposed a more spiritually-oriented approach to transcend left and right. In what follows, I will present another vision, Integral Politics, based on Integral Theory.

### What Is a Third Way?

Historically, third ways have usually cropped up when people found the existing two dominant political ideologies lacking. In the nineteenth century, socialism originally emerged as a third way between conservatism and classical liberalism (also known as free market capitalism). Later, in the twentieth century, social democracy developed as a third way between socialism and conservatism/free market capitalism. In this time of “exhausted utopian energies,”<sup>2</sup> where classical, nation-state based social democracy no longer appears to function in the context of a globalized society, it is no surprise that a number of politicians and theorists, such as the Democratic Party’s Democratic Leadership Council and Tony Blair’s New Labor party, have proposed a third way between social democratic and neo-liberal programs themselves. But rather than truly transcending the existing belief systems, too often the new program becomes the ideological center between the two dominant ideologies. Such a centrist third way is actually a compromise rather than a new political theory that overcomes the old ideologies by providing lasting answers to unresolved social problems.



A true third way for the twenty-first century should transcend beyond the preceding ideologies. Integral Politics offers this possibility. By mapping the relationship of all major existing ideologies to each other and by clearly presenting a new approach to politics, one that integrates the best of each *and* transcends their shortcomings, Integral Politics presents a true alternative to politics as usual.

## The Integral Third Way

Ken Wilber, particularly in his recent writings, has presented a comprehensive map of the Kosmos and its evolution that lends itself to the mapping of political belief systems.<sup>3</sup> To summarize briefly, Wilber argues that our ways of making sense of the world are merely the perspectives we take on the world. These perspectives can be organized in a way that helps us develop a more comprehensive or encompassing view. According to Wilber, there are at least two dimensions according to which we can organize perspectives. First, we can either look at the world from an interior perspective or from an exterior perspective. Second, we can either look at the world from an individual point of view or from a collective point of view. Put together, we end up with a two-by-two matrix of four main perspectives: subjective, objective, intersubjective, and interobjective. These four perspectives can also be summarized as “I,” “It,” “We,” and “Its” respectively.

In a third dimension, the phenomena seen from each of these perspectives evolves, in a stage-like fashion, where each later stage includes and transcends the previous stage, so that (from the “It” perspective), atoms evolve into molecules, which evolve into cells, which evolve into multi-cellular beings, and so on. The following figure diagrams the evolution of each of the four main perspectives.

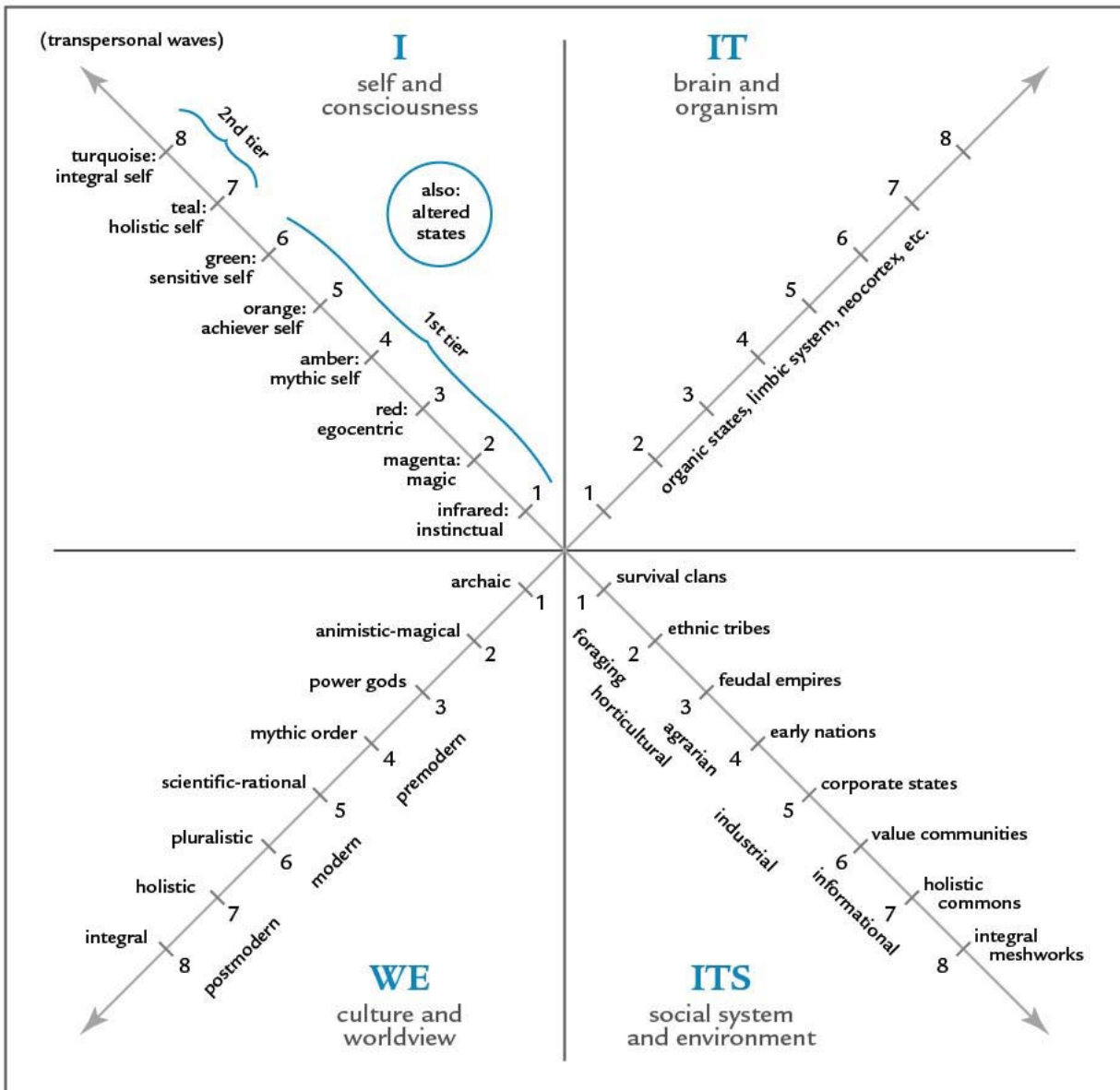


Figure 1. Evolution in the Four Quadrants

The resulting conceptual map depicts four quadrants that correspond to the classical ways of conceptualizing the world in both Eastern and Western philosophy. In the West, ever since ancient Greek philosophy, and especially since Immanuel Kant, the realm of philosophy has been divided into the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. In the East, Buddhism has a similar conception in the form of the Buddha (subjective knowing), the Dharma (objective truth), and



the Sangha (intersubjective morals). Objective truth has been historically related to science, whose methodologies tend to research phenomena in the Upper-Right and Lower-Right aspects of any occasion. The subjective knowing from within an individual has historically surfaced in art, whose methodologies tend to express the interior subjective states of individuals. And taking an intersubjective point of view has historically elucidated moral truth and ethics that arise within the shared space of a given culture (Lower Left).

As sociologists since Max Weber have pointed out, the key achievement of modern society was the differentiation of these three spheres from one another. The key disaster of modern society was the further *dissociation* of these three spheres from one another. The initial separation allowed each sphere to develop according to its own logic, rather than being subordinated to religion, as was the case during the Middle Ages and before, when the Church determined what was true, what was right, and what was beautiful. The subordination of these realms to church doctrine made the further development of each realm very difficult. With the onset of modernity, the three realms of art, science, and morality were finally able to develop in accordance with the truths of each of their realms. This differentiation became so extreme that it has become a form of dissociation; each sphere became completely unrelated to the other and the sphere of objective truth, or science, has taken precedence over all other spheres. The Integral vision tries to overcome this fragmentation of modern society, not by re-imposing a new church doctrine or the dominance of another sphere instead of science, but by recognizing first the autonomy of each sphere and second that each sphere is intimately related to the other. The Integral vision reintegrates the True, the Good, and the Beautiful in an unforced and holistic embrace.

We can apply this conception of the universe to political belief systems, mapped out on a matrix much like the one above (figure 1). On one axis of the matrix we can map the degree to which a political ideology believes that interior or exterior factors shape the individual or society. For example, conservatives tend to believe that interior forces shape us; we've all heard their



argument that it is the values and lifestyle of the individual that leads to poverty. Liberals, on the other hand, tend to believe that exterior forces shape us, that poverty, for example, is the result of unjust political or economic forces. On the second axis we can map the degree to which an ideology emphasizes the role of the individual versus the role of the collective. To use some extreme ideologies as examples, fascism typically focuses on the collective and the interior, in the sense that it is concerned with the interior motivations of people, their values or culture, and with the collective orderliness of society. Libertarianism also views the individual's values as being the key forces for the individual's success or failure in life, but is primarily concerned with the individual. Leftist ideologies, such as anarchism on the one hand and state socialism on the other hand, view the primary causative forces as being exterior, usually in the form of the economy or the government. Anarchism focuses on the individual, generally opposing collective forces such as the state, and state socialism focuses on the collective. These examples are taken from the more extreme forms of political ideology, but this model also applies to the more moderate forms, such as "new left," "old left," "new right," and "old right." One can diagram the result of this analysis as in figure 2 below.

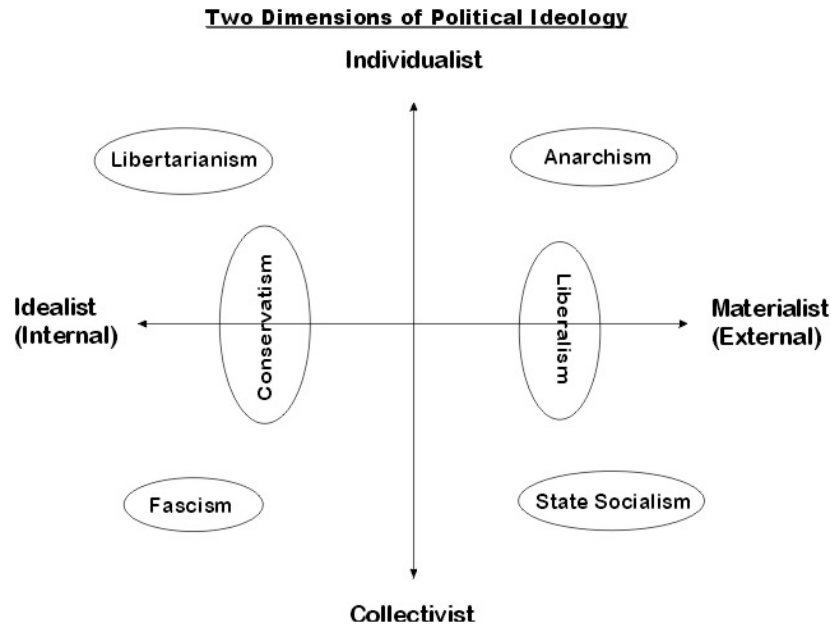


Figure 2. Two Dimensions of Political Ideology

However, the above figure shows only two out of four dimensions of politics. The first dimension is the extent to which an ideology focuses on the individual or on the collective. The second dimension is the extent to which an ideology focuses on exterior or interior causation.

The third dimension of political ideology is of key importance for Integral Politics: its degree of inclusion/embrace. Every belief system exists in progressively deeper contexts. While some ideas or arguments take physical need as their only context, others emphasize emotional truths, traditional/ethnocentric truths, or, at the next level, universalistic truths. In other words, while fascistic ideologies rely on arguments that reference ethnocentric truths, liberal ideologies rely on arguments that reference rational/universal truths. This distinction of truths is hierarchical, going from physical to emotional to traditional to rational, each step transcending and embracing its predecessor, all the way to the soul and spirit. It is possible to have a politics that makes reference to this highest level of soul and spiritual truths/contexts. Integral Politics recognizes this nested hierarchy of increasingly deeper and wider contexts.



Finally, the fourth dimension of politics, according to the Integral vision, is the type and direction of change that is desired (just as movement or time in the realm of physics is sometimes considered the fourth dimension). Some ideologies argue that social change should occur in a revolutionary manner, others in a reformist manner, and yet others argue that there should be no change at all, or even a regression. The AQAL model makes a distinction between *translation*, which is change within any given level or context, and *transformation*, which is transcendence to a new and higher level/context. This roughly corresponds to the distinction between reform and revolution. Furthermore, some ideologies argue that change should move to a higher level, while others argue that we need to return to an earlier level. For example, some radical ecologists argue that society should return to a social organization based on hunter-gatherer tribes, while socialists typically argue that society should find a new form of organization that transcends the current one and has never existed before. Integral Politics argues that all four of these dimensions must be considered when developing political analyses and policies. Integral Politics thus provides a “third way” in the sense that it transcends and integrates the existing belief systems in all dimensions.

## Integral Politics and Spirituality

As a post-rational form of politics that lies beyond ordinary rationality, the practice of Integral Politics requires a spiritual orientation. The use of the term spirituality presupposes a distinction between religion and spirituality. For our purposes, religion is a specific set of beliefs and practices oriented toward a realm beyond the ordinary; spirituality is an openness toward the non-ordinary, toward the miracle of life and nature, toward the supra-rational. Integral Politics is related to spirituality because it requires intuition from its practitioners, a capacity to see things holistically, and openness to realms beyond the merely rational. One can become more attuned to Integral Politics the same way one becomes attuned to the spiritual—through contemplative



practices such as meditation. Integral Politics does not merely add spirituality to politics. Instead, it finds a place for spirituality in politics and a place for politics in spirituality.

Spirituality plays a role in Integral Politics in that it embraces the multiplicity of existence and simultaneously seeks to support mankind's quest for unity with Spirit. Historically, Western monotheistic religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, have been what Nietzsche called "Apollonian." That is, they have tried to push toward the direction of God and the embrace of the One, toward Spirit. Basically, they have moved humans in the direction of ascent. The sad result, however, has too often been a rejection of or dissociation from what came before, of the earlier levels, such as the earth, the body, the sensual, and the emotive. To reverse this process, Nietzsche advocated a different type of attitude, one he called "Dionysian," which would bring people back in touch with their basic desires and their bodies. He advocated a descent back down, a renewed embrace of the many, instead of a striving toward the one.

Integral Politics, recognizing the full spectrum of consciousness, from body to emotion to mind to soul to spirit, does not view ascent and descent as an either/or option, but as both/and. Pure ascent too easily leads to a dissociation from the prior levels of being. Pure descent too easily leads to regression. Instead, what is needed is an ascent to higher levels of being that simultaneously and consciously reintegrates the levels that went before. In political practice this means that while we seek higher and more appropriate forms of social organization, probably in the form of a better global polity and global economy, we also need to re-embrace and reintegrate community, individuals, and the earth.

## **The Principles of Integral Politics**

Based on the foregoing, one can outline some core principles of Integral Politics. None of these are meant as hard rules, but rather as mutually agreed-upon guidelines for what Integral Politics ought to encompass.





**1. Integral Vision:** Integral Politics is based on a vision that is capable of integrating opposites and holding them as nondual. Applying this to the four-dimensional map outlined earlier, this means that one needs to realize that political reality, like all reality, involves individual and collective, interior and exterior, less and more complex levels of development, the embrace of the many and the striving for the one. Every effort to create a greater unity, whether on a regional or global level, must simultaneously include a reintegration of what went before, of the national, the communal, the individual, and the earth. Ken Wilber calls this approach AQAL, or “all quadrants, all levels”.

Recently, mainstream third way politics, such as those proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens and the Clinton/Gore Democratic Leadership Council, have suggested that we can realize that an individual’s rights must accompany responsibility for the collectivity. But that is just one way to integrate one of the many dichotomies. The key lies in finding forms of social organization that simultaneously preserve and promote individual rights and collective goods. We need a society in which, to quote Marx, “the full development of the individual is a condition for the full development of all.”

Left politics typically assumes that we are primarily shaped by exterior factors and right politics assumes we are shaped by interior factors. Integral Politics recognizes and respects the interiors of each individual and of society just as much as we recognize the exterior factors that play a tremendous role in people’s lives.

**2. Integral Morality:** Added to the “all-quadrants, all-levels” vision is an Integral morality, which Wilber calls the “Basic Moral Intuition.” It seeks to preserve and promote the deepest development for the greatest number of beings. In practice, since we cannot willfully rearrange the interiors of individuals or societies (though we can coax these via education), Integral Politics would take interiors into account mainly by creating the objective (exterior) conditions that would allow a maximum of interior development for individuals and society.



**3. Translation and then Transformation:** The Integral perspective identifies when progress should be incremental, that is, within any given level of development, and when it should be qualitative, from one level to the next. Transformation (revolution), the move from one level to the next, is only advisable once the options for action on any given level are exhausted and society and its members are ready to move to the next level. If the conditions for transformation are not given, then more translation (reform) within the current level is necessary. Integral Politics recognizes the appropriateness of both reform and revolution, but that each has its place and time, depending on the circumstances and the stage of social development. Integral Politics generally seeks to move society ahead to the next higher level, but only when and if it is ready.

**4. Pathologies of Development:** As a critical theory, Integral Politics recognizes when a particular institution or social arrangement has become pathological and is either blocking further development or is actually operating counter to the basic moral intuition. For example, poverty acts as a hindrance to individual and social development because poverty limits an individual's access to the resources needed for development (such as adequate medical care, education, food, shelter, etc.). Also, when one group or individual is oppressing another group or individual, this makes the full development of the oppressed impossible or at least very difficult. But just as there can be external blockages to or pathologies of development, there can also be internal ones. For example, a culture that denies the existence of development and believes that it represents ultimate wisdom, would reject any transformative or spiritual practices that attempt to carry that culture to a new level of awareness. Here, of course, education policy figures very strongly because we need to find ways of ensuring that the less fortunate have an opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

## **An Application of Integral Politics: Globalization**

Globalization is perhaps simultaneously both the most complex and the most important issue of our time. It is thus worthwhile to hear what Integral Politics would say about it. An important



feature of all development is that each movement to a new level represents greater inclusiveness. That is, when atoms combine to form molecules, they include both the features of atoms and add the new features or characteristics of molecules. This continues down the line to cells and multi-cellular organisms. The same is true for individual subjective development (the Upper-Left quadrant), where physical sensations are incorporated in emotions, which are incorporated in the sense of group belongingness, which is incorporated in the process of reasoning. Particularly relevant to the concept of globalization are the collective quadrants, where the units of social development expand from clans, to tribes, to nations, to regions, and finally to the globe, each level more encompassing than the previous.

However, within each of the aforementioned quadrants there are several developmental lines. This means that the dynamic of increasing inclusiveness applies not just to the four quadrants, but to different social lines of development, such as economic, legal, moral, and political. In other words, increasing global inclusiveness is a natural consequence of human development. The issue for our time is discerning the speed at which each line is moving toward a global embrace and whether this particular form of globalization is healthy or pathological.

Examining today's world, we can see that the contemporary manifestation of globalization does not represent a balanced globalization along all possible dimensions or lines of human experience. Today, only some aspects of human development are globalized, while others are excluded. Specifically, economic and some cultural lines tend toward the global, while the moral and political dimensions remain largely stuck at the national level (with the European Union potentially representing a notable exception, but one with its own pathologies). Integral Politics would classify this imbalance as a form of pathology because the different lines of development are dissociated from one another in the sense that the neo-liberal economic project denies any validity to the development of a global polity.



Not only that, the economic globalization that has been occurring over the past thirty to forty years is leading to ever increasing economic polarization between the different peoples of the world. For example, according to World Bank data, in 1960 the income ratio between the world's wealthiest 20 percent and the world's poorest 20 percent was 30:1; today this ratio is about 75:1, with no sign of slowing down. This economic polarization represents dissociation within the economic line of development, where wealthy groups become ever richer while the poor grow poorer or at least stagnate economically. The difficulty with these dissociations, both within the economic line and between the economic and the political lines, is that they present serious social justice issues and create blockages for further development. The massive amount of poverty in today's world makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for the poor to achieve their fullest potential. Also, the dissociation between economic and political globalization means that economic processes are divorced from political ones, and thus devoid of democratic oversight, meaning that powerful economic actors can do as they please, while the less powerful suffer the consequences.

## **Toward a New Exterior Logic: Global Neo-Keynesianism (An Integral Political Economy)**

If we take the principles of Integral Politics seriously, we must strive to *preserve and promote the deepest development for the greatest number of beings*. In practice, this means that we need to find ways to balance economic and political development through a globalized polity, so that future economic processes do not lead to even greater economic polarization. Historically, this particular imbalance is nothing new, as economic integration has frequently advanced more rapidly than political integration. In the following I roughly outline a progression of economy-polity relations that provides an idea as to what the next stage of our politico-economic organization might be.



With the emergence of capitalism and the explanation of its functioning that Adam Smith first provided, one can say that there was a phase in which the economy was primarily national and the polity was not supposed to intervene much in the economy. The polity was thus practically non-existent as far as the economy was concerned (except to enforce contracts perhaps). This was the phase of classical liberalism, of the basically unregulated national economy, which began in Western Europe around 1800 and lasted until the 1930s (most economies were, of course, only an approximation of this description—in reality all economies were mixed, with the balance tending to favor the market). This phase ended as a result of its own instability, as exemplified by the Great Depression. The next phase was classical Keynesianism, which, in accordance with the principles outlined by Maynard Keynes, gave a significant role to the national polity in guiding the national economy (along with some limited international controls, which made national controls possible). This phase lasted until the early 1970s, which is when Keynesianism collapsed due to its inability to manage the contradictions between the demands of the business sector and the general population. The practical result was the increasing indebtedness of the Western welfare states (and also eventually a debt crisis for the Third World). The increase in world trade began to create increasing pressure to bring about a new system of politico-economic management, as companies chose the most favorable locations for investment, whether those were within or outside of the polity which regulated them. Thus, the late 1970s thus represent the beginning of a global regime of economic neo-liberalism that was accompanied by the persistence of national politics and the ideology of neo-liberalism, as represented by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. This is basically the phase and type of globalization we are still experiencing.

The next phase will in all likelihood be a catching-up of the polity to the same global level at which the economy is already operating. In other words, because international neo-liberalism is unsustainable, due to the increasing polarization and environmental destruction it produces, we can expect to see a new phase in the near future, that of global neo-Keynesianism, when the



polity becomes global too and can (re-)regulate the global economy. An example of this process is the European Union, which is currently introducing a stronger regional (Europe-wide) polity, precisely so that it can better deal with its region-wide economic, social, and ecological problems.

Many prominent economists have already floated proposals for creating a global neo-Keynesian political economy, such as former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, Harvard development economist Jeffrey Sachs, economic Nobel laureate James Tobin, and global financier George Soros. Their proposals range from introducing a global tax on currency speculation (the Tobin Tax) to the creation of a global central bank to international capital controls. The primary objective of these proposals is generally to dismantle the current regime of “beggar thy neighbor” in which countries compete to offer the best investment opportunities for free-floating capital by dismantling all national restrictions or controls on investment (ranging from environmental to labor to human rights regulations). Most importantly, global neo-Keynesian controls can also contribute to a reversal of global economic polarization.

We should be under no illusions, however, that global neo-Keynesianism is an end-point in our politico-economic development. It too will sooner or later suffer from similar internal contradictions that national Keynesianism suffered, and we, as a global society, will then have to look for a new systemic logic. However, until then, global neo-Keynesianism is the most likely alternative.

### **Toward a New Cultural Logic**

A key element of Integral Politics is the attention it pays to the intersubjective, cultural side of things (Lower-Left quadrant). My discussion of globalization thus far has been about finding a new systemic or external logic; that is, I focused on a discussion of the exterior, interobjective, social side of things (Lower-Right quadrant). The insight of Integral Politics is that solutions that



focus exclusively on the exterior (the social-systemic) will be deficient if they are not accompanied by a focus on the interior (the cultural). In other words, global neo-Keynesianism, as a type of integral political-economy, needs an Integral culture if it is to move from a mere translation to a transformation of our society. Governments and their populations will be unwilling to implement global neo-Keynesianism if they do not also feel a certain amount of solidarity and compassion for the world beyond their national borders. The peoples of the world must be willing to think in terms of humanity, rather than in terms of their own nation, more than ever before.

This expansion of human sympathy to cover the globe, however, is only one part of what integral culture means. Another part implies the ability and willingness to integrate individual and collective, interior and exterior, ascent and descent. Integrating individual and collective, in terms of globalization, means that the benefits many receive from global trade, culture, and interaction cannot impinge upon the integrity of each and every individual on the planet. For example, this would mean that we need to actively protect the rights of indigenous cultures, of minorities, and of those granted less structural power in general. At the same time, the rights that individuals have cannot be divorced from their responsibility to society and to the environment. Integrating interior and exterior in the global context means that the move to a new global systemic logic has to be accompanied by a new cultural logic.

Finally, integrating ascent and descent means that while we develop a new global consciousness and a new global political-economy—in other words, new higher integrations—we also must take care of what went before, of our community and our natural ecology. A global neo-Keynesianism needs to be accompanied by a return to the local (not local tribalism, but a cosmopolitan one). We need to do this because we are human and have limited human scales of reference, such as the local community and the local environment. These human scales become more important precisely because the global is also becoming more important.





The local becomes more important in the age of globalization not just because of its more human scale, but also in the name of democracy and social justice. As power leaves the national level and becomes a global matter, it also becomes more removed and more abstracted from everyday experience and everyday individual concerns. One way to reinvest the individual with power and responsibility is by returning power to the local community. Practical examples for such a process can include greater local self-sufficiency in the sphere of production (more local trade), the introduction of local currencies (which have many economic and ecological benefits), and greater autonomy in decision-making, particularly as far as the expenditure of state revenues is concerned. The expansion and empowerment of democracy at the local level must, of course, be accompanied by a democratization of power at all levels, from local to global.

Some might say that globalization cannot be combined with a call for localization. This, however, is not necessarily true. We could honor both by globalizing such things as solidarity, communication, and the production of products that can only be produced in limited locations (e.g., tropical fruit, rare medicines, sophisticated technology), while localizing the production of basic goods (e.g., staple foods, basic household goods, simple electronics), which form our connection to the earth and to our community. Ultimately, Integral Politics means integrating oppositions that were previously considered mutually exclusive.

While the Integral Politics outlined here does not constitute a concrete political platform, it is possible to generate concrete policies out of these principles. Integral Politics can help move politics beyond the typical left-right stalemate and present a true “third way,” one that brings politics to a new level and finds not merely compromises, but solutions that emerge from a higher understanding, from the unforced unification of opposites. Integral Politics can also answer our basic human desire for Spirit by recognizing the validity of spirituality and by giving spirituality an important role in formulating a politics for the third millennium.





### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article appeared in *Tikkun*, July-August 2001, pp. 44-49

<sup>2</sup> Habermas, "The crisis of the welfare state and the exhaustion of utopian energies," 1989

<sup>3</sup> Consult Wilber, *A theory of everything: An integral vision for business, politics, science, and spirituality*, 2001; *Sex, ecology, spirituality: The spirit of evolution*, 1995; *A brief history of everything*, 2000



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# The Dimensions of Political Ideology and Integral Politics<sup>1</sup>

Gregory Wilpert

In this article I propose that there are four dimensions of political ideology and that they can be organized according to the four quadrants of Integral Theory. As we will see, these four dimensions explain how Integral Politics makes sense of the political realm.

## Introduction

Politicians and political theorists continually talk about the need to find a “third way,” a politics that transcends the boundaries of conventional politics and ideologies. Unfortunately, most of these attempts, such as those devised by Anthony Giddens, Gerhard Schröder, or Bill Clinton’s Democratic Leadership Council, fall short of the mark, primarily because they lack a clear idea of what it means to transcend the boundaries of conventional politics. Instead, most “third way” approaches end up as compromises between the political left and right, rather than transcending the dichotomy. We need a clear understanding of how existing political belief systems relate to each other before we can propose a new approach that transcends its predecessors.

In the following, I sketch how one might map political ideology. On the basis of this map, I point to the direction in which Integral Politics would lead. This map of political ideologies is based on the ideas of the philosopher Ken Wilber and agrees to a large extent with his analysis, though with some important differences.<sup>2</sup> Another similar approach is one developed by Lawrence Chickering.<sup>3</sup>

I identify four dimensions of political ideology, in which all major ideologies can be situated. Of course, no belief system, no matter how consistent, will fit perfectly within this logical schema.



This analysis merely intends to show how political ideologies relate to each other. On the basis of this map one might conceive of an Integral Politics—one that respects the truth content, however partial, in all ideologies.

### **First Dimension: Causation (Interior vs. Exterior)**

The first dimension Wilber calls “causation.” That is, one can categorize ideologies according to whether they argue that an individual’s or a society’s condition is primarily caused by interior or exterior factors. Some ideologies emphasize that individuals and societies are the way they are because of their interior values or culture. For example, they might argue that a social group is poor because they promote a culture of poverty and dependency, rather than of individual self-initiative. Other ideologies emphasize exterior factors, and claim that society’s economic system is the main causal factor in determining an individual’s or group’s condition. For example, some ideologies argue that exploitation and oppression cause poverty.

Generally, conservative ideologies tend toward a belief in interior causation; a person is shaped primarily by factors such as morals, personality, belief system, or culture. Progressive or leftist ideologies, on the other hand, tend to believe that it is exterior factors, such as socioeconomic standing or access to power that shape a person’s condition. Here poverty would be resolved through efforts toward reorganizing exterior factors, such as income redistribution in the form of welfare or social programs for the poor. Conservatism or ideologies of the right, believe that economic poverty results from poor interior values, something that is best solved by better parenting and better education.

### **Second Dimension: Individual vs. Collective**

The second dimension is whether the ideology places a greater value on the individual or on the collective. Some ideologies believe that the individual is more important, while others believe



that the collective is more valuable. The result is that some ideologies will have more of an individualistic approach to political issues, while others will have a more collectivistic approach.

Already we can use these first two dimensions to help us understand how major political ideologies relate to each other. For example, both the progressive and conservative camps outlined in the first dimension are divided in their ranks within the second dimension. Among progressives there are tensions between those who favor individual integrity and freedom and those who grant primacy to the collective. The progressives who emphasize the individual have been known ever since the late 1960's as the "new left," while the progressives who emphasize the collective have come to be known as the "old left." That is, the new left (exterior causation and individual emphasis) tends to emphasize individual freedoms, as in, for example, the legalization of drugs, but also believes in improving the exterior conditions of the individual, but via minimal use of the state, such as through cooperatives rather than large-scale welfare programs. The old left, on the other hand, emphasizes collectivist state-oriented solutions. (Please note: the third dimension of discursive structure, which will be discussed below, also plays an important role in defining the difference between "old" and "new" left.)

Similarly, conservatism is also divided between an old right and new right, where the new right emphasizes individualism and interior causation, in the form of a minimal state and free-market. That is, according to the new right, individuals should be permitted to do as they please, free from state interference, but their success is believed to depend largely on how well they adapt values that are congruent with the free market. These are often the conservatives who are thought of as libertarians or neo-liberals. The old right, while generally also pro-free market, places a strong emphasis on the state or on other institutions, such as the Church, as an enforcer of the right values, by banning pornography or drugs, for example.



### **Third Dimension: Level of Development or Discursive Structure**

Next, we must consider the cognitive and moral levels reflected in any ideological belief system, applying the concepts of developmental psychology to political ideologies.<sup>4</sup> Some ideologies view the world from the perspective of an egocentric level, others from a conformist or sociocentric level, and yet others from a universalistic or worldcentric level—yet others go beyond these, as we will see. These levels or structures have a directionality in that they develop from egocentric, to sociocentric, to worldcentric or universalistic, to pluralistic, and then Kosmocentric.

Insofar as ideologies are belief systems that are shared with others, we are talking about discursive structures, rather than individual psychological structures. The third dimension of ideology thus represents its discursive structure.

Nationalistic ideologies, for example, talk about the world from an ethno- or sociocentric perspective, where the ethnic or national in-group is privileged over everyone else. Ideologies that emerged with the European enlightenment, such as classic liberalism and socialism generally reflect a worldcentric perspective, while conservatism generally tends to focus more on the sociocentric level, especially when it draws on religious dogma, as does the ideology of social-Christianity.

Ideologies that are based on earlier cognitive and moral levels or discursive structures tend to be relatively undifferentiated with respect to the dimensions of causation and their relative valuation of individual/collective. For example, ideologies that operate from an egocentric (or earlier) level tend not to distinguish interior vs. exterior causation. Nor do they favor either the individual or the collective in the way that ethnocentric or worldcentric ideologies will. The reason for this is quite simple: lower level belief systems are less systematic and consistent because they are prerational. Rationality, with its systematic analysis and elimination of inconsistencies and interior contradictions, is ultimately what makes ideologies emphasize one side of the



dimensional continua. Prerational ideologies, based on survival instinct or egocentric desires, are incapable of articulating a situation in terms of such clear dichotomies as exterior vs. interior causation, or individualism vs. collectivism.

However, as the rational systematization of belief systems develops—that is, as an ideology moves towards the sociocentric and worldcentric levels—inconsistencies in what had previously been an adequate ideology arise. Incompatibilities between interior causation and exterior causation and between individualism and collectivism become evident, and ideologies end up differentiating between these continua.

Higher level ideologies, such as the multicentric/postmodern and Kosmocentric/integral, will tend to integrate the exterior/interior and individual/collective differentiations of the first two dimensions. Thus, for example, the Green or ecological ideologies begin an integration of exterior/interior causation, leading to a situation where members of Green parties will often feel that libertarian and anarchist ecologists have more in common with each other than with non-ecological versions of libertarianism or anarchism. This explains why ecological parties are more likely to have members who come from a diversity of backgrounds and a range of perspectives on the issues of exterior/interior causation and individual/collective. At the Kosmocentric level, in its most developed form, the differentiation between exterior and interior and between individual and collective is completely integrated, making for an ideology that can no longer be characterized as emphasizing one or the other of these differentiations within each dimension.

## **Fourth Dimension: Change**

Some ideologies argue for progressive transformative change, others prefer regression, and some prefer no change at all. Some prefer to see rapid or even revolutionary change, while others prefer modest reform. This is the dimension of ideologies that we usually associate most with the differences between conservatism and progressivism. For example, it is generally assumed,



almost per definition, that conservatives are those who do not want social change to move toward new forms and values but would rather maintain existing forms, or even return to previously established social forms and values. Progressives, on the other hand, would like new forms of social organization and values emerge.

Another useful way of distinguishing ideologies in relation to change is to consider what Wilber calls “transformative” and “translative” change. Transformative ideologies seek to move society or individuals from one level of development to another, while translative ideologies seek to maintain society or individuals at their current level. In effect, this corresponds to the distinction between reformist and revolutionary ideologies—at least, among those ideologies that are progressive rather than conservative or regressive.

A further twist to this dimension of ideology lies in the proposals for how change is to come about. This distinction also applies primarily to transformative ideologies, but could apply to others. Some argue that change ought to come about via detailed proposals for how to do things better. This approach has frequently resulted in the criticism that such planned change will almost inevitably lead towards authoritarian disaster because one is planning what people should or should not do. This is particularly the criticism that has traditionally been leveled against Marxism (although inappropriately, as Marx never laid out what communism should look like) and Leninism (appropriately because the Soviet system did try to force everyone to accept its vision of the good society). The alternative to planned change is change via critique. That is, instead of proposing how things should be done, this perspective argues that it is better to say how things should not be done or how they are being done poorly. The task of finding a better way of doing things is supposed to evolve more or less out of the specific circumstances themselves and is merely guided by critique.<sup>5</sup>

The negative or critical approach to social change has a very strong case. It is no coincidence that so many of the prescriptive models did indeed end up in totalitarian social constructions, despite





the best intentions of their founders. However, recently there has been a backlash against the purely negative or critical approach to social change, especially now that there are practically no prominent prescriptive models of how to organize society. The result of pure critique without vision has been cynicism, a certainty that everything humans have to offer is somehow flawed, that humans are basically evil, and that there is nothing anyone can do about it. As a result, it has now become very important to balance both the negative and affirmative approaches to social change. One might call this approach “critical positivism” or “critical dialectics.”

## Major Ideologies

Let us now examine a few of the major ideologies and see how these fit into the four-dimensional model outlined thus far. In their pure forms, in so far as these exist, most of the ideologies presented here reflect a worldcentric moral level. However, variations exist and adherents of an otherwise worldcentric ideology can reduce it to sociocentric dogma. Others, such as fascism, tend towards sociocentrism in terms of whom they attract or appeal to, but also have variants in the form of their rational presentation.

### Socialism

In its more radical form (i.e., one that wants rapid social change towards new and previously non-existent forms of social organization), the materialist outlook takes the form of socialism, which argues that all major injustices in society are caused by the social system, which, in most societies is capitalist. As a result, all radical materialist perspectives are basically anti-capitalist and are usually socialist insofar as they do not propose for society to go back to a pre-capitalist type of economic system (which several ideologies do argue). Just as with the distinctions made above between old left and new left, one can also distinguish between two forms of socialism, depending on whether they emphasize the collective or the individual.



### Anarcho-Socialism

An individual materialist outlook tends towards anarchism (or anarcho-socialism), in that anarchism, in its anti-capitalist forms, views the individual as the primary unit of analysis, whose integrity needs to be respected. Proponents of anarchism tend to view the state as an oppressive form of collective organization. Anarcho-socialists also reject the market and capitalism because they argue that these place individuals in competition with one another in ways that end up increasing material inequality between people. Inequality, according to anarcho-socialists (and socialists in general), is the result of exterior forces that are beyond the control of the individual who suffers from the inequality.

### State-Socialism

A radical or revolutionary collectivist-materialist outlook would be state socialism because of its anti-capitalist (exterior causation) and materialist orientation, as well as its support of collective organization in the form of the state. It thus believes that the state, rather than the individual, should be the actor that rectifies any social problems in society. Thus, every time this type of ideology is placed in a situation where it must decide between the freedoms of the individual and what it perceives as the ideal organization of society, it opts against individual freedom.

### U.S. Liberalism/Social Democracy

U.S. Liberalism, which is closely related to European social democracy, represents a non-radical or reformist—rather than revolutionary or transformative—perspective that comes from a belief in exterior causation. As stated earlier, liberalism/social democracy distinguishes between those who emphasize the individual (the “new left”) and those who emphasize the collective (the “old left”).

### Libertarianism (Often Identified with Liberalism in Europe)

The idealist perspective typically accepts capitalism as the most adequate economic system. Instead of blaming the economy as the cause of social problems, this perspective instead blames



individual and societal values and culture. Thus, an individualist, interior causation outlook is the hallmark of the typically anti-statist, anti-collectivist, libertarian ideology. Libertarianism sees social problems as the result of an individual's values and effort rather than the product of market forces or capitalism (exterior causes to which this perspective is largely blind). Libertarians thus see capitalism, with its emphasis on the individual, as being the best economic system for the expression of individual freedom.

### Fascism

As a radical-regressive ideology, fascism seeks to turn back human development to an earlier phase in which certain castes ruled over other lower castes. It is, therefore, unlike the above named ideologies, deeply embedded in a sociocentric perspective or level. Additionally, by emphasizing the collective and the values or culture of the collective, it is a radical-regressive interior causation and collectivist ideology.

### Conservatism/Social Christianity

As a general rule, conservatives seek to maintain the status quo or to slightly roll back social development because they feel that society has taken a wrong direction. Given the context of well established capitalist and Christian societies in most developed countries, conservatives tend to favor existing social (capitalist) relations and argue that problems arise mainly due to (mistakenly) changing values.

However, some proponents of conservatism see capitalism—as a belief system—to be problematic because it can promote individualism and greed, which are values that collectivist-oriented conservatives reject. This is a position that Pope John Paul II took, for example. The collectivist aspect of this ideology implies that the state or some other organized form of the collective, such as the Church, has a priority in maintaining the cultural order.



## Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism

Neo-liberalism represents an attempt to resurrect classical economic liberalism, where the individual is of primary importance over the secondary “materialist vs. idealist” outlook. Neo-liberalism is quite pro-capitalist, and, in its individualist orientation, it is close to libertarianism but slightly different. In contrast to libertarianism, it tends to posit economic success or failure in both idealist (favoring individual values) and materialist (systemic functioning) terms. Similarly, neo-conservatism tries to take conservatism to its (sociocentric) roots in its emphasis on the collective, an emphasis that is equally concerned with material and ideal causation. Many neo-conservative intellectuals were originally Marxists and never completely lost the part of their analysis that saw the economic system as problematic. Their switch to conservatism meant placing more emphasis on cultural (interior) factors than did the Marxists. Another aspect of this collectivist orientation of neo-conservatives and social Christians is their pro-state orientation.

## Greens/Ecologism

As suggested earlier, this movement’s ideology defines itself more on the basis of its cognitive and moral level than on the basis of where it falls on the individual/collective, exterior/interior continua, primarily because it is beginning to re-integrate these differentiations. Psychologically speaking, its discourse is located at a multicentric level of morality, which recognizes the different perspectives of different people’s meaning-making and believes that everyone should be treated more or less equally, as long as each person respects the rights of the others to be treated equally. The movements for political correctness and postmodernism could be said to be at this level of cognitive and moral development, too.

While Green ideologies tend to share this multicentric perspective, their adherents come from many different areas of the dimensions of ideology. The German green movement, for example, is divided between libertarian greens who support capitalism and individual liberty, anarcho-greens who oppose capitalism as well as the state, eco-socialists who oppose capitalism but



support statist policies, and the eco-conservatives who believe that a correct cultural value system is needed.

### **Diagram of the Dimensions of Political Ideology**

Given the foregoing, one can create the following four-dimensional diagram of political ideologies. As noted earlier, the highest and lowest levels are not fully differentiated in the dimensions of causation or unit of analysis. Since there are no systematically thought-out ideologies for the highest and the lowest levels, it makes more sense to point to exemplars of these belief systems.



### Four Dimensions of Integral Politics

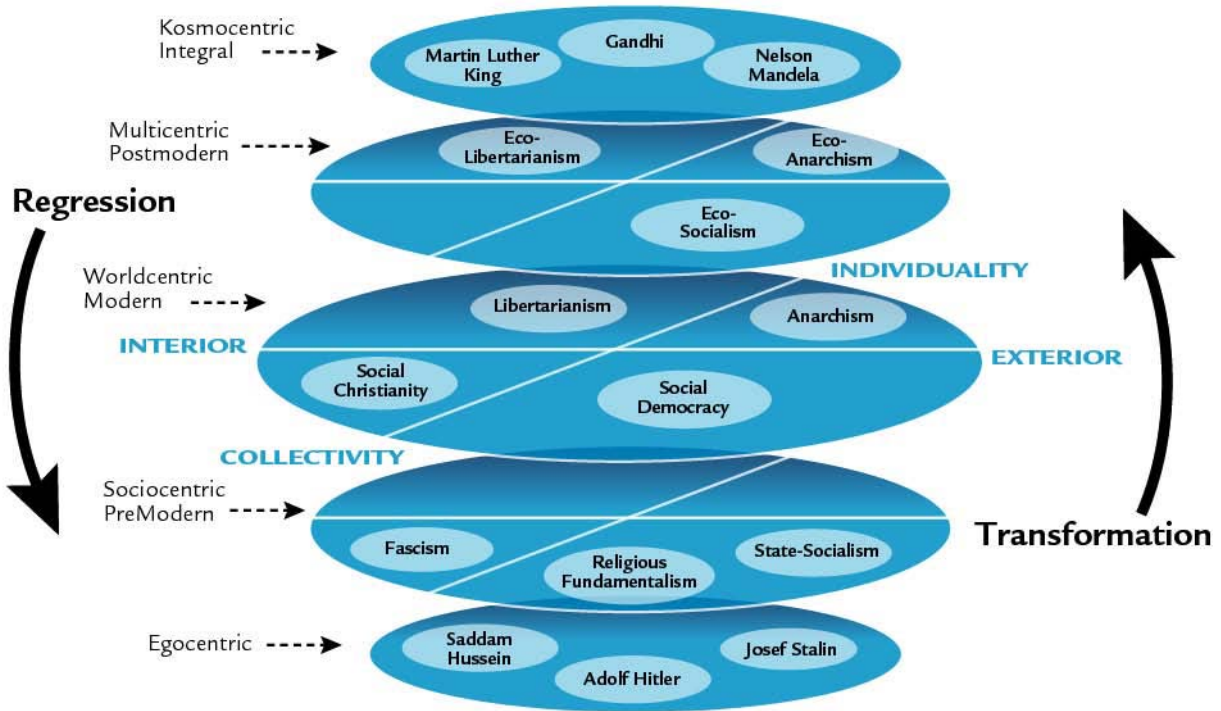


Figure 1. Four Dimensions of Integral Politics

### Content

Ideological content, rather than form, is the unique specificity of ideologies that cannot be reduced to the previous four dimensions. That is, a belief, an idea, a perspective, a moral commitment, has aspects to it that are unique and that cannot be categorized the way the other four dimensions' aspects are categorizable. For example, anti-semitism is a racist or ethnocentric belief that was part of the Nazi ideology, an ideology one can classify as having a collectivist orientation, an interior explanation for causation, and that took an ethnocentric form. However, the fact that this ideology identified Jews as its particular target is the result of a unique historical constellation and has nothing to do with the ideology's location in the framework outlined here. The content of political ideologies is just as important as its formal structure when trying to make sense of the role ideologies play in our politics.



## Integral Politics

Integral Politics integrates and includes all of these dimensions (or as Wilber phrases it, “all-quadrants and all-levels,” or AQAL). This means, in practical terms, first recognizing that causation is both interior and exterior: both our cultural value system and our social institutions shape our condition. It also means that our analysis needs to honor both the collective and the individual: human life is not possible without the collective nor without the autonomous individual. Lastly, it acknowledges that fulfilling our human potential means exhausting each level of development and then moving on to the next, while preserving what had come before—to *transcend and include*.

Clearly, this outline is much too general for a practical political program. One cannot develop practical politics out of logical abstractions but only in relation to a concrete social and historical analysis. Still, this outline hopes to serve as a map of where to turn for a more articulated Integral Politics.



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of an article that first appeared on [www.integralworld.net](http://www.integralworld.net) in November, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Wilber, *Sex, ecology, spirituality: The spirit of evolution*, 1995; *The marriage of sense and soul: Integrating science and religion*, 1998; *A brief history of everything*, 2000a; *The collected works of Ken Wilber* (Vol. 8), 2000b

<sup>3</sup> Chickering, *Beyond left and right: Breaking the political stalemate*, 1993

<sup>4</sup> See the work of such developmentalists as Piaget, Loevinger, and Kohlberg.

<sup>5</sup> A main representative of the negative or critical approach to social change is Theodore Adorno (and Jacques Derrida, to a certain extent). Adorno argues that planned social change (he would refer to it as “positivistic”) ends up in totalitarianism and instead counter-proposes a “negative dialectics” that finds progressive social change through negation rather than affirmation.





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